

Very Impressive.....

Written by Mike Kelly

Saturday, 14 September 2013 10:27

Ever since he took over as football coach at Watauga High last spring, Ryan Habich has been talking about the importance of a balanced attack. But WHS (3-0),

which is off to its best start since 2006, had its problems establishing a running game. The Pioneers had all of 87 yards rushing (and a 1.3-yard average per carry) going into Friday night's match up against Avery. But that all change in an instant against the Vikings. The Pioneers ran for a season-best 266 yards, and quarterback Aaron Dobbins made his return as he threw for 220 yards. In turn, WHS demolished Avery 57-36 in a non-conference game at MacDonald Stadium in Newland, N.C.

"I've been saying it all along, football is a team game," Habich said. "The offense carried us in our first game (a 34-12 win against Alexander Central), and our defense backed us against Ashe County (a 13-7 win in overtime). Tonight, the offense got into a rhythm early, and everything just clicked."

Cameron Baker set the tone by returning the opening kick-off 96 yards for a touchdown and a 7-0 lead before many of the fans had even settled into their seats. And from that point on, WHS was in total control.

"First time I've ever taken a kick-off return back for a touchdown, actually," Baker said. "Before the game, I was just trying to be focused, and it just so happened, the front line did a good job blocking. Everyone blocked on the play, and I just ran it back."

"That's Cam Baker," Habich said. "He made a big play to start the game, and it sparked us. Our kids won this game tonight. They blocked, they ran the ball hard, they hit the holes. It was a deserving win for all the hard work they put in at practice last week during our bye week. We had three hard practices, and we came prepared to play tonight."

T.J. Poulos and Zach Williams fueled the running game as they both cracked the century mark. Poulos ran for 129 yards and scored twice; Williams had 102 yards and scored on a pair of one-yard runs. Poulos was a huge weapon as he racked up 250 yards offensively.

His best play of the night came in the final minute of the third quarter. Poulos caught a pass near the Avery 40-yard-line, slipped away from a would-be tackler, and scampered in on a 59-yard TD catch and run. That basically put the contest on ice as the Pioneers built a commanding 50-28 lead.

"Coach always talks about (yards after the catch)," Poulos said. "I just made the catch, I turned it up field and I got some keys blocks. We really wanted to get our running game going tonight, so we really worked hard at it in practice during the bye week. We went real hard for three days, and we got a lot done. (Avery) had some very good linebackers, but our line did a great job opening up the holes, and the rest was up to us."

It was also WHS' best offensive effort since 2007. The Pioneers erupted for 55-point against Central Cabarrus in the second round of the state playoffs that season. Eric Breitenstein scored a school record six TDs in that game.

But on Friday, the Pioneers methodically put on a clinic against the Vikings (2-2) as they marched the ball up-and-down the field. WHS scored on six of its first seven possessions. The Pioneers led 21-7 after the opening quarter, 36-14 at halftime, and we never seriously challenged by the Vikings.

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Dobbins, who was a game-time decision, played his first game in two weeks. He suffered a concussion during the second quarter of WHS' season opener against Alexander Central (on August 23). But he showed no ill affects from his two-week layoff.

"It was hard standing on the sidelines and watching my team struggle (against Ashe County), Dobbins said. "It just felt good tonight to get back on the field. It really hurt not being able to play. We didn't throw it much tonight, but we threw it when we had to. Otherwise, we just gave it to T.J. and Zach, and our running game was huge for us tonight."

"We're so use to having Aaron out there on the field," Baker said. "We just feed off him. He's got a great heart. It's nice to be 3-0, but we have to stay humble."

Dobbins was 7-11 on the night with three TD passes. Baker caught two passes for 80 yards, including a 59-yard scoring toss in the second quarter that gave WHS it's 22-point halftime lead. "And it actually wasn't the route I was suppose to run," Baker said. "I was suppose to run a post, but the (defensive back) bought the run fake and broke in, so I broke for the sideline and we did what we do best."

Tre Jackson paced the Vikings with 94 rushing yards and four TD; Daniel Childress ran for 134 yards and a score. The Vikings had 411 yards offensively, which included 373 on the ground. But the Vikings couldn't keep up with WHS' high-octane attack.

WHS returns home to play Wilkes Central Friday night. It will be the final non-conference game of the season, and the first meeting between the schools since 2006. Coverage begins at 6:30 p.m., on AM 1450, WATA, and GoBlueridge.net.

NOTES: The Pioneers won their first game in Newland since 2009....The Pioneers lead the all-time series 32-13-1....But the Pioneers own a 10-8 advantage in the series since 1996....Avery coach Darrell Brewer is 4-6 lifetime against the Pioneers....The Pioneers have scored 104 points in their first three games, an average of 35-points an outing....Friday night's game broke the series' record for most points in a game by both teams combined. WHS and Avery scored a combined total of 93 points Friday night. That broke the old mark of 73 points in 2011. Avery won that game, 46-27. Ironically, the game was played at MacDonald Stadium....Friday night's win was WHS' most lopsided win in this series since a 35-12 win against the Vikings in 2009 in Newland. The Pioneers belted Avery 34-13 at the old Jack Groce Stadium in 2006.

Scoring Summary

Score by Quarters 1 2 3 4 Total

Watauga Pioneers 21 15 14 7 - 57

Avery Vikings 7 7 14 8 - 36

1st

11:46 WHS - Cameron Baker 96 yd kickoff return (Stephen Shirley kick) 7 - 0

07:17 WHS - Hunter Isaacs 19 yd pass from Aaron Dobbins (Stephen Shirley kick), 10-75 3:39
14 - 0

04:54 ACHS - Tre Jackson 5 yd run (Tre Jackson kick), 4-17 0:53 14 - 7

01:23 WHS - Zach Williams 2 yd run (Stephen Shirley kick), 9-77 3:24 21 - 7

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2nd

11:20 ACHS - Tre Jackson 1 yd run (Tre Jackson kick), 6-60 1:50 21 - 14

08:28 WHS - Zach Williams 1 yd run (Stephen Shirley kick), 8-80 2:52 28 - 14

03:22 WHS - Cameron Baker 59 yd pass from Aaron Dobbins (Justin Greer rush), 2-67 0:58 36 - 14

3rd

11:18 ACHS - Tre Jackson 41 yd run (Tre Jackson kick failed), 2-46 0:42 36 - 20

09:40 WHS - TJ Poulos 59 yd pass from Aaron Dobbins (Stephen Shirley kick), 4-80 1:38 43 - 20

04:17 ACHS - Daniel Childres 6 yd run (Daniel Childres rush), 10-74 5:14 43 - 28

01:08 WHS - TJ Poulos 5 yd run (Stephen Shirley kick), 7-80 3:09 50 - 28

4th

07:12 ACHS - Tre Jackson 3 yd run (Austin Phillips rush), 12-72 5:12 50 - 36

02:03 WHS - TJ Poulos 12 yd run (Stephen Shirley kick), 9-49 5:05 57 - 36

Team Statistics

FIRST DOWNS: WHS 23, AVERY 22

RUSHING YARDS: WHS 266, AVERY 373

PASSING YARDS: WHS 220, AVERY 38

TOTAL YARDS: WHS 486, AVERY 411

FUMBLES/LOST: WHS 1-1, AVERY 0-0

TURNOVERS: WHS 1, AVERY 1

PENALTY YARDS: WHS 5-41, AVERY 4-53

POSSESSION TIME: WHS 22:04, AVERY 25:56

THIRD DOWN CONVERSIONS: WHS 4-6, AVERY 6-12

FOURTH DOWN CONVERSIONS: WHS 1-2, AVERY 1-3

Individual Statistics

RUSHING:

WHS: POULOS 14-129-2TD, WILLIAMS 22-102-2TD

AVERY: JACKSON 12-94-4TD, CHILDRESS CHILDRESS 23-134-TD

PASSING:

WHS: DOBBINS 7-11-3TD-220

AVERY: JACKSON 3-12-1-94

RECEIVING:

WHS: POULOS 4-121-TD, BAKER 2-80-TD

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AVERY: PHILLIPS 1-18

Photo Courtesy: T.J. Poulos, Rob Moore