

We're No.1 !!!

Written by Mike Kelly

Saturday, 09 November 2013 11:07

The Watauga High football team has exceeded expectations this season. And the Pioneers took it to the limit Friday night as they rallied from a 14-0 deficit and knocked off South Caldwell 22-21 at Spartans Stadium in Sawmills, N.C.

The win gives WHS (8-3 overall; 4-3 Northwestern 3A/4A Conference) the No.1 seed among the Class 4A schools in the NW3A/4A Conference and home-field advantage in the opening round of the state playoffs, which begin next Friday night, November 15.

"That's what we've been practicing for all week," said WHS tight end Hunter Isaacs, who had two huge receptions on WHS' game-winning drive. "We wanted that number one seed, and a home game in the first round of the state playoffs. I knew we were going to score on that last drive. I love it, love it."

Quarterback Aaron Dobbins, like he did three weeks ago (October 20) at Patton, engineered the game-winning drive as he marched the Pioneers 92-yard in eight plays. Facing fourth-and-six at the Spartans' (5-6; 3-4) 36-yard line, Dobbins hooked up with Isaacs on an 11-yard pass play and a first down at the 25.

Those two hooked up again on the very next play and Isaacs carried the ball down to the two. That set the stage for Zach Williams, who punched it in with 59-second left, making it 21-20. T.J. Poulos ran in the two-point conversion that put the Pioneers on top to stay.

"We've been practicing that two-point play all week," Poulos said. "They were crashing down a lot when we were on the goal line before, so we decided to run it outside. A nice hole opened up, thanks to our blocking. All the linemen made a great block on that play."

The Pioneers also broke a three-game losing streak against the Spartans, and they picked up only their third win at Spartans Stadium since 1997. But the play of the game occurred on South Caldwell's next-to-last possession.

Riley Cook picked off Dobbins at his eight-yard-line, WHS' third turnover of the game. And it looked like the Spartans were marching towards a game-clinching score.

South had the ball on WHS' 31, facing second-and-two. Adam Watson broke a run off the left side that would have given the Spartans a first down near the WHS 22. But the play was nullified by a holding call. That penalty basically killed off the drive.

Facing a second-and-12 at the Pioneers' 42-yard-line, the Spartans mustered only three yards on their next two plays and were forced to punt, setting up WHS' game-winning drive with 3:47 left.

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"Tonight's game reminded me so much of Patton," said WHS coach Ryan Habich. "We were down, but the kids didn't get discouraged. They stayed within the team concept and found a way to win. And we did it against a good football team on the road. They're well coached. It's a big win for our program and our school."

"We knew it was going to be a pretty special night," Dobbins said. "We knew we could do something big. When we got the ball back, we said, 'we've got to make something happen.' Just like the Patton game, coach said, 'big-time players make big-time plays.' We used some different formations on that last drive and we found Hunter on those pass plays. He ran some good routes and he found a little seam."

Isaacs caught three passes for 84 yards; Poulos had ten catches for 66 yards and he ran for 59-yards on seven carries. Williams had 16 carries for 118 yards. WHS had 182 yards rushing in Friday night's game.

But the big statistic on this night was time of possession. The Pioneers more than doubled the Spartans by holding the ball for 34-minutes, 21-seconds. WHS hogged the ball for more than 21 minutes in the second half. The Spartans only had it for a little more than six minutes.

"We had some plays we felt we could run on them," Habich said. "We got Hunter open down the middle and (Dobbins) made a great throw (on the catch that led to the winning score). We made big plays. And to win football games against good teams, you've got to make those plays, those clutch plays. We missed a few opportunities against Freedom and Hibriten, but tonight we made the plays we had to make, especially on fourth down."

The Pioneers were 3-4 on fourth down Friday night, 3-3 in the second half. And the biggest play came on Dobbins' fourth-down toss to Isaacs on WHS' game-winning drive.

Dobbins was 18-30 for 189 yards. He was also picked off twice, and the Pioneers turned the ball over three times. The Spartans scored on two of those miscues.

A Williams fumble in the second quarter handed South Caldwell a short field at the WHS 46, and the Spartans jumped on the opportunity. Leading 7-0, quarterback Trevar Soles, who was 4-13 for 146 yards with two TD passes, marched his team into the end zone in just four plays. A 34-yard scoring strike to Nick Matthews gave South Caldwell a 14-0 lead with 6:59 left in the first half.

The Pioneers finally got on the board with 4:07 left in the second quarter. WHS marched 66 yards in six plays. Dobbins hit Poulos on a 30-yard scoring pass to close out the drive. Poulos caught the ball at the Spartans 20-yard-line, eluded two would-be defenders, and scampered into the end zone, making it 14-6 at halftime.

The Pioneers flexed their muscles to start the second half as they took the opening kick-off and drove 80 yards in ten plays to tie game. Dobbins capped it off on a one-yard run; Justin Greer ran in the two-point conversion, making it 14-14. The time-consuming drive took 4:27 off the clock.

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But the Spartans regained the lead, thanks to a WHS turnover. A Gavin Reed interception gave the Spartans a first down at the WHS 49. They scored three plays later on a three-yard run by Reed for a 21-14 lead. A 39-yard pass play from Soles to Matthews gave the Spartans a first down at the three.

"I got burned deep a couple of times tonight," said Michael Ebaugh, who was assigned to cover Matthews. "But I learned my lesson and didn't let anyone get deep on me, especially on their last possession. We wanted that clock to hit zero on their last possession. We haven't played real well the last two weeks. We played some of our best football in the second half tonight. We came out with a lot of energy."

The Spartans marched the ball to their 45 on their final drive. A false start penalty pushed the ball back to the 40. The Pioneers stiffened from there. They knocked down Soles desperation pass as time expired.

"We're a team that never quits," Isaacs said. "We knew they liked running the ball. They shoved it down our throats practically all night. But we forced them to throw it on that last possession. That's something they don't like to do. We knew they were going to go deep, so we kept everything in front of us and got it done."

WHS is in the state playoffs for the third year in a row and for the seventh time in eight years. The state playoff pairings will be announced later today. The Pioneers will have at least a home game in the opening round next Friday night. It's WHS' second home game in the state playoffs in the last three years.

NOTES: The Pioneers picked up their first win against the Spartans since 2009....It was their first win at South Caldwell since 2007....South Caldwell leads the all-time series, 21-16....The last time WHS wiped out a 14-0 deficit and won at South Caldwell was in 1999. Quarterback Marshall Thomas capped off WHS' rally as he scored on a quarterback sneak in overtime for a 20-17 win.

WATAUGA 22, SOUTH CALDWELL 21

	1	2	3	4	TOTAL
WATAUGA	0	6	8	8	22
SOUTH CALDWELL	7	7	7	0	21

SCORING SUMMARY:

1ST

2:46 SC - SOLES 42-YARD PASS TO REED (MATTHEWS' KICK), 7-76 (2:50), 0-7

2ND

6:59 SC - SOLES 34-YARD PASS TO MATTHEWS (MATTHEWS' KICK), 4-46 (2:00), 0-14

4:07 WHS - DOBBINS 30-YARD PASS TO POULOS (KICKED BLOCKED), 6-66 (2:46), 6-14

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3RD

7:24 WHS - DOBBINS 1-YARD RUN (GREER RUN), 10-80 (4:27), 14-14

3:06 SC - REED 3-YARD RUN (MATTHEWS' KICK), 3-49 (1:13), 14-21

4TH

0:59 WHS - WILLIAMS 2-YARD RUN (POULOS RUN), 8-92 (2:38), 22-21

TEAM STATISTICS:

FIRST DOWNS: WHS 17, SCHS 15

RUSHING YARDS: WHS 182, SCHS 171

PASSING YARDS: WHS 189, SCHS 146

TOTAL YARDS: WHS 371, SCHS 317

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

PASSING: WHS 18-30-2I, SCHS 4-13-I

TURNOVERS: WHS 3, SCHS 1

PENALTY YARDS: WHS 3-10, SCHS 5-30

TIME OF POSSESSION: WHS 34:21, SCHS 17:39

3RD DOWN CONVERSIONS: WHS 5-13, SCHS 3-9

4TH DOWN CONVERSIONS: WHS 3-4, SCHS 1-2

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS:

RUSHING:

WHS - WILLIAMS 16-118-TD, POULOS 7-59

SCHS - REED 13-69-TD, SIDES 5-45

PASSING:

WHS - DOBBINS 18-30-2I-TD-189

SCHS - SOLES 4-13-I-2TD-146

RECEIVING:

WHS - POULOS 10-66-TD, ISAACS 3-84, BAKER 2-27

SCHS - MATTHEWS 3-99-TD, REED 1-47-TD

Photo Courtesy: Jake Watson grabs Gavin Reed of South Caldwell, WHS Athletics