

Pioneers Clip Eagles In Season Opener

Written by Mike Kelly

Wednesday, 27 November 2013 07:33

The Watauga High boy's basketball team opened its season in style. The Pioneers (1-0) knocked off Wilkes Central 60-51 in the season opener for both teams in Moravian Falls, N.C.

WHS, led by a strong perimeter game, took control late in the second quarter. An 11-0 run turned a 21-17 deficit into a 28-21 lead. And WHS followed that up with a nine-point run to start second half, building a 12-point advantage at 39-27. It's only the second time the Pioneers have beaten the Eagles (0-1) on the road in the last seven years.

"We didn't shoot the ball well early on, but we picked things up in the second quarter," said WHS coach Rob Sanders. "We finally put it all together to start the second half. We played solid defense and we shot the ball real well. But no lead is really safe on this floor. It's a tough place to play. (Wilkes Central) has a lot of energy in this building. They've always got that one run in them. It's a tough season opener against a quality opponent, but it's a nice win to start the season. I'm proud of the effort."

WHS buried ten threes on Tuesday night. Trevor Eggers and Utah Jones paced WHS' long-range attack with three trifectas apiece. Jay Harrill, who got off to a slow start, jump-started WHS' 11-point run just before halftime. He buried two threes during that stretch.

He followed that up by pouring in four more points to start the second half. The Pioneers outscored Wilkes Central 20-8 in the third quarter.

"Basketball is a game of runs," Harrill said. "We didn't want them running up and down the floor on us. So we talked about rebounding better in the second half. We just took control and built a nice lead. It's tough playing here. It's a small gym and it can get loud. We got a little sloppy at the end, but we hung on and got the win."

"Runs begin and end controlling the boards," Sanders said. "This is a very athletic team and we had to control the boards. And Jay had a great game. We told him he doesn't have to do it all by himself. Don't put too much pressure on himself. But when the time is necessary, he has the confidence to drain the big shot, and he's so unselfish, and he gets the other guys involved."

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Harrill led WHS with 16 points; Eggers finished with 12 points; Jones had nine. The Pioneers led by as many as 16 points on two occasions in the second half.

The Eagles made a late run, but never got any closer than seven points with less than 30 seconds to play.

"We might have gotten a little fatigued near the end of the game," Sanders said. "We just got our football players back, and they only practiced with us a week. They're not in basketball shape just yet, but I thought they all played well."

WHS' biggest problem Tuesday night was battling foul trouble. Point guards Eli Gailes and T.J. Poulos got into serious foul trouble late in the second half with four fouls apiece. Harrill and Cam Baker, who finished with eight points, each had three fouls apiece.

"And that's what we really stressed coming in here," Sanders said. "We're not real deep this season. We're only carrying 11 guys. We have at least a nine man rotation, but we can't afford to get our point guards in foul trouble like we did tonight. We need Eli and T.J. on the floor running things."

Devon Bailey paced the Eagles with 18 points in the loss. Michael Howell finished with 11 points.

"This is the best shooting team we've had in a while," Sanders said. "We have several options on this team with the people we have. It's only the first game. I loved the attitude and the energy, but we've got to get a litte stiffer on defense to close things out."

The WHS boys will play their home opener at Lentz-Eggers Gym next Tuesday night, December 3, against Avery.

NOTES: The junior varsity boys defeated Wilkes Central 66-37. Zach Valet led WHS with eight points; Caleb Bryson had ten points; Holden Russell and Levi Wilcox both had eight points....Ryder Jones was in the house Tuesday night. Jones, who played baseball for the Pioneers last spring, was taken by the San Francisco Giants in the second round of the Major League Baseball Amateur Draft last June. He played for the Arizona League Giants last summer. He's going to start the season, according to Jones, with the Augusta Greenjackets, the Giants Class A affiliate in the South Atlantic League, next spring.

WATAUGA 60, WILKES CENTRAL 51

SCORE BY PERIODS 1 2 3 4 TOTAL

WATAUGA 11 19 20 10 - 60

WILKES CENTRAL 11 16 8 16 - 51

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WHS: HARRILL 16, EGGERS 12, GAILES 3, DOBBINS 4, JONES 9, BAKER 8, LAMBERT 8.
FG: 12, 3FG: 10, FT: 6-8.

WILKES CENTRAL: BAILEY 18, HOWELL 15, OSBORNE 11, COLBERT 2, NUNN 2, VASLET
3. FG: 15, 3FG: 2, FT: 15-19.