

Pioneers Outlast Cougars In Double OT

Written by Mike Kelly

Thursday, 05 December 2013 09:51

The Watauga High boy's basketball team is off to its best start in four years. The Pioneers (3-0) rallied from a four-point, fourth-quarter deficit and defeated Alexander Central 61-58 in double overtime Wednesday night at Cougars Gymnasium in Taylorsville, N.C.

Jay Harrill, who paced WHS with a game-high 16 points, sealed the issue with two free throws with one second left in the second OT period. But it was Matt Lambert's trifecta in the second OT session that broke Alexander Central's (2-2) back.

Lambert's three from the left corner tied the game at 53-53. It offset Rhett Miller's three that gave the Cougars a short-lived, three-point advantage, and it turned the game in WHS' favor.

"That shot really hurt," said Alexander Central coach Ed Wills. "We hit a three and took the lead, and that gave us a chance to create some space between us. If they don't score, then we've got a chance to go up by two possessions. But their big guy hits the three and ties the game, and it allowed them to stay in contention."

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Utah Jones came up with a steal moments later and scored on a layup to put the Pioneers on top to stay. Trailing 59-55, the Cougars got within one on a conventional three-point play by Zach Starnes with 1.8 second left. But Harrill, who was fouled on the inbounds pass, buried his two free throw attempts to end it.

"I was a little upset that they put a full second back on the clock," said WHS coach Rob Sanders. "Jay was fouled with two-tenths of a second left. That's when the official blew his whistle. I questioned it, but Jay put his hand on my shoulder and said, 'don't worry coach, I'll make these free throws.' That shows what kind of team this is. They don't get rattled. They're very poised."

The Pioneers were 17-26 at the foul line, including seven of eight in the second overtime. The Pioneers are now shooting 67% (37-55) from the line through the first three games of the season.

"And keep in mind, we've maybe had seven full practices as a team since the season officially started," Sanders said. "We've got a lot of options on this team. This is a very good shooting team; even our big people can shoot it from the outside. That makes it tough on a defense to guard us. On Matt's three, I just knew it was going in when it left his hands."

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But the Cougars, who are known for their half-court style, frustrated WHS through the first three quarters of the game, holding WHS to a mear 26 points. In the process, the Cougars opened up their biggest lead at 30-24 on a trey by Ethan Bowman with 57 seconds left in the period.

"And that's who we are," Wills said. "We were real concerned about their outside shooting, especially from the three-point line. I thought, for the most part, we did a good job keeping them in check. But they went through a stretch in the fourth quarter that allowed them to tie it up and to eventually take the lead."

WHS, which hit three trifectas in the final stanza, rallied to take a 47-43 lead with 51 seconds left to play. But the Cougars came charging back, thanks to Deion Wall, who hit a layup with 29 seconds left, and Davis Miller, who hit two free throws following a steal. That tied things up and forced overtime.

"At halftime, I told our guys that they had us right where they wanted us," Sanders said. "We only scored 20 points in the first half. Their zone defense really frustrated us. They're committed to it, and they do a great job executing it. Their goal was to keep this game in the 40s, and we helped them out by standing around and watching that zone. Our guys don't see a defense like that very often.

"We weren't attacking. But we finally picked things up in the fourth quarter, and we did it in a hostile building, where we haven't had much success."

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The Pioneers picked up their third win in Taylorsville since 2008-09, but their second in a row on that floor. WHS had three players in double figures. Cameron Baker, who blocked a potential game-winning shot at the end of regulation time, finished with 12 points and nine rebounds. Aaron Dobbins, who had his most productive game of the season, finished with ten points before he fouled out with 2:30 left in the first overtime period.

Defensively, the Pioneers forced 24 turnovers. And those miscues offset an excellent shooting night for the Cougars. Alexander Central shot 61% from the floor and 71% from the three-point line.

"It was a great game," Wills said. "Both teams really went after each other. It's a game neither team should have lost. It's real disappointing when you come up on the short end in a game like this."

Ty Ireland, who fouled out with 51 seconds left in regulation time, led the Cougars with 14 points. Wall had 12, Starnes finished with ten points.

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The Pioneers return home to play Ashe County Friday night. Coverage begins at 6:05 p.m. on AM 1450, WATA and GoBlueridge.net.

WATAUGA 61, ALEXANDER CENTRAL 58

SCORE BY PERIODS 1 2 3 4 10T 20T TOTAL

WATAUGA 9 11 6 21 3 11 - 61

ALEXANDER CENTRAL 3 14 13 17 3 8 - 58

WHS: HARRILL 16, EGGERS 5, GAILES 4, POULOS 2, DOBBINS 10, JONES 7, BAKER 12

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(9 REBOUNDS), LAMBERT 5. FG: 19-49, 3FG: 6-20, FT: 17-26, 21 REBOUNDS, 9 ASSISTS, 12 TURNOVERS.

ACHS: WALL 12 (6 REBOUNDS), GANT 5 (3 STEALS), R. MILLER 4, IRELAND 14, BOWMAN 9, STARNES 10 (6 REBOUNDS, 4 ASSISTS), D. MILLER 4. FG: 21-34, 3FG: 5-7, FT: 11-20. 26 REBOUNDS, 13 ASSISTS, 24 TURNOVERS.

COUGARS WIN FIFTH STRAIGHT AGAINST WHS

The Watuaga High girl's basketball team deserves at least an "A" for effort. The Pioneers (0-3), who remain winless on the year, lost their third consecutive game, 54-43, against Alexander Central in Taylorsville Wednesday night.

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The Cougars (4-0) led all the way. Alexander Central led by as many as 11 points in the first half, but the Cougars couldn't put the Pioneers away. WHS kept chipping away and got within four late in the first half before the Cougars took a 24-17 lead into the locker room at halftime.

"We talk all the time about dedication, hard work and effort," said WHS coach Klay Anderson. "Every team needs to do that to be successful. It's not going to be your night every night, but it's the effort that counts. I thought we gave a very good effort tonight against a very good team."

Savanna Wood paced the Pioneers with 17 points, including four trifectas. Clare Harris, coming off her poorest effort at the varsity level the night before against Avery, finished with 13 points, which also included three threes.

"And those might be the biggest 13 points of the season, so far," Anderson said. "Our achilles heel right now is finding a third scorer every night. When we do that, we'll be all right. Clare had a big night tonight. She was five of nine from the field and three of four on threes. I'll take that."

But the Cougars had just too much firepower inside. Led by Madi Suddreath and Mary Ritchie, the Cougars started pulling away late in the third quarter. A bucket by Suddreath gave the Cougars a 34-21 lead. The lead eventually grew to 14 points at 40-26, but a 7-1 run by the Pioneers narrowed the gap to eight points at 41-33 early in the fourth quarter.

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But Alexander Central built its lead back to ten points on a conventional three-point play by Suddreath with 3:58 left in the game; a bucket by Kelise Rhyne with 1:37 to play gave the Cougars their biggest advantage at 15 points.

"With Marie and Madi, they're a load inside," Anderson said. "And two really terrific players. But I'm proud of what we did. Our goal coming in was to force Alexander Central to make a bunch of twos, not threes. They didn't make a three all night (0-6). Last year, they buried a bunch of threes in the first half and the game was over. We just have to put every aspect of our game together every night. We're getting better."

Suddreath finished with a game-high 21 points and 10 rebounds; Ritchie finished with 11 points; Rhyne poured in 12 points. The Cougars have beaten WHS five consecutive times.

ALEXANDER CENTRAL 54, WATAUGA 43

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SCORE BY PERIODS 1 2 3 4 TOTAL

WATAUGA 3 14 9 17 - 43

ALEXANDER CENTRAL 10 14 16 14 - 54

WHS: WOOD 17, HARRIS 13, LOFLIN 7 (4 ASSISTS), McNEILL 4 (5 REBOUNDS), JONES 2, FG: 16-42, 3FG: 7-14, FT: 4-6. 20 REBOUNDS, 9 ASSISTS, 17 TURNOVERS.

ACHS: RITCHIE 11, SUDDREATH 21 (10 REBOUNDS), RHYNE 12, WIKE 6 (5 ASSISTS), BARR 2, HARRIS 2. FG: 20-43, 3FG: 0-6, FT: 14-22. 22 REBOUNDS, 10 ASSISTS, 11 TURNOVERS.

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NORTHWESTERN 3A/4A

WEDNESDAY'S GAMES

GIRLS:

ALEXANDER CENTRAL 54, WATAUGA 43

BANDYS 82, FRED T. FOARD 8

BOYS:

WATAUGA 61, ALEXANDER CENTRAL 58 (2 OT)

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BANDYS 58, FRED T. FOARD 54

FRIDAY'S GAMES

(BOYS AND GIRLS)

ASHE COUNTY @ WATAUGA

ALEXANDER CENTRAL @ SOUTH CALDWELL

PATTON @ MOUNTAIN HERITAGE

BUNKER HILL @ ST. STEPHENS

HIBRITEN @ WEST CALDWELL

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FREEDOM @ EAST BURKE

STATESVILLE @ HICKORY

WEST LINCOLN @ FRED T. FOARD