

Finally.....

Written by Mike Kelly

Tuesday, 10 December 2013 09:16

Well it took a while, but it was worth the wait. The Avery High boy's basketball team ended nearly ten years of frustration Monday night by knocking off Watauga

57-53 in a non-conference game at The Octagon in Newland, N.C.

The win snapped a 19-game losing streak that began in the 2004-05 season. It's also the first time the Vikings (4-3), who snapped a two-game slide, have beaten Rob Sanders since he took over as head coach of the Pioneers. The vikings also handed WHS (4-1) its first loss of the year.

"I honestly had no knowledge of the losing streak," said Avery coach Scott Polsgrove. "But that's a good thing. I want our team to be tougher down the stretch, especially against a good team. We haven't done that this season against the better teams on our schedule. Tonight, we finally showed some toughness and attitude to close things out."

Chance Watson paced the Vikings with 17 points. He ignited an 12-3 run to close out the first half as the Vikings rallied from a 20-12 deficit to take a 24-23 lead with 20 seconds left in the second quarter. Watson scored seven points in that run. A last second three by Jay Harrill from the far corner handed WHS a two-point lead at the break.

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And that outburst ignited the Vikings, and set the stage for their second-rally.

"And that's what you expect from you seniors," Polsgrove said. "Watson is an inside, outside guy. I just want him to be a little more aggressive underneath. He's long and he's pretty strong. He also has a pretty good reach. He can be tough to defend inside. Tonight, he caught the hot hand and brought us back."

The Vikings took charge in the third quarter and turned the tables on WHS. Trailing 37-29, the Vikings came charging back with an 8-0 run to tie the game. And the Vikings finally jumped on top with 4:06 left on a pair of free throws by Jeffrey Puckett.

Leading 47-46, the Vikings took control. They capped things off with an eight-point run that gave them a 53-46 left to play. Watson climaxed the burst with a steal and a bucket that gave Avery its largest lead of the game.

"We turned the ball over too many times against a very good team," said Sanders, who is 19-1

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lifetinme against Avery. "Like I said before the game (on his pre-game show that aired on AM 1450, WATA and GoBlueridge.net), Avery is five to ten points better on his floor. We preached it all night. We needed three stops to pull away from these guys down the stretch. But we couldn't make those stops and they hit a big three. Give Avery a lot of credit. They hit the big shots when they needed them, and we didn't."

"Our goal was to limit their three-point shooting," Polsgrove said. "They really hurt us with those threes in our last meeting (on December 3 at Lentz-Eggers Gym). Tonight, we didn't guard the three all that well. Our defense was much better in the second half, and it slowed the game down. That really played in our favor."

The Pioneers made six threes on the night, but only two in the second half. And the Pioneers, who seemed to score at will in the first half, we're brought to a halt in the second half. WHS was caught standing around, leaving the bulk of their offensive scoring to Cameron Baker, who finished with a game-high 22 points, 17 in the second half.

"Cam is starting to come alive," Sanders said. "And that's good for us because we're starting to get a little stagnant with our other scorers. And that's dangerous. When you come out and start shooting good early, you stop moving and you start standing around. We're expecting other people to hit their shots. Avery did a good job coming out and making sure our shooters were covered up. They took away one of our biggest threats."

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Luke Wotell tossed in 15 points for the Vikings. His two free throws with 26.4 seconds left matched Avery's biggest lead at seven points, 57-50. Avery was 16-19 at the free throw line on the night, 12-13 in the second half.

The Pioneers never got any closer than the final score. Harrill poured in 12 for WHS.

"This is a difficult week," Sanders said. "It's tough going through a week like this and to expect good results like we did last week. We've played well, but people are making adjustments against us, and they've figured out where our scoring is coming from. They're taking that away from us."

NOTES: Art Williamson was the last Avery coach to beat WHS. He beat them three times in the 2003-04 season.....It's also WHS' first loss in Newland since 2003-04.....The WHS junior varsity girls lost to Avery, 41-39. Karson Hamrick led WHS with 13 points; Sydney Farthing had seven points; Olivia Reese had five.....The WHS JV boys defeated Avery 51-35 Monday night. Caleb Bryson led the Pioneers with 18 points.

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AVERY 57, WATAUGA 53

SCORE BY PERIODS 1 2 3 4 TOTAL

WATAUGA 13 13 15 12 - 53

AVERY 8 16 17 18 - 57

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WHS: HARRILL 12, EGGERS 7, GAILES 2, JONES 5, BAKER 22, LAMBERT 5. FG: 11, 3FG: 6, FT: 13-16.

AVERY: WATSON 17, C.PITTMAN 3, POLSGROVE 4, STEWART 4, JACKSON 5, PUCKETT 4, CROWE 2, PHILLIPS 3, WOTELL 15. FG: 13, 3FG: 5, FT: 16-19.

AVERY GIRLS 42, WHS 35

The Watuaga High girl's basketball team suffered its fifth consecutive loss Monday night. Avery bested WHS 42-35 at The Octagon in Newland, N.C.

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It's the first time the Vikings (5-2) have swept WHS since the 2008-09 season. The Pioneers (0-5) haven't won in Newland since 2007-08 (they've lost six in a row on that floor), Klay Anderson's first year as head coach at WHS.

"We played harder than we did Friday night (in a 33-29 loss against Ashe County)," Anderson said. "And at times, we played a little more intelligent. We just couldn't keep (Avery) off the boards. (Kylie Polsgrove) hurt us the most. She's a terrific athlete, and she made some big shots for them that kept us at bay."

Polsgrove, who came off the bench, finished with a game-high 17 points. Leading 36-31, Polsgrove hit a layup for a seven-point lead; she made a free throw with 1:33 left to give Avery a 39-31 advantage. Clare Harris scored, making it 39-33, but WHS never got any closer.

"We've got to keep improving day by day, and we've got to stay the course," Anderson said. "If we do that, in the long run, we'll be ok. We got some signs of life tonight from Brooklyn Carroll and Kaelin McNeill. We did a good job attack the boards and rebounding the basketball. We were fighting, scraping and clawing. We got into some foul trouble with Tori (Derrick, who fouled out with 1:33 to play) and Ryan (Loflin). But I like what we did tonight."

Harris led WHS with ten points. Carroll finished with seven points; McNeill and Loflin each

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finished with six points apiece. Lauren Burelson had 11 for the Vikings.

The Pioneers were also without their best player, Savanna Wood, who missed her second straight game with a badly sprained ankle. She was injured at practice last Thursday.

"And you could feel the air sucked right out of the building when the girls found out she wouldn't play the next day (against Ashe County last Friday)." Anderson said. "But things like that happen in sports every day. We have to work around it. This gives someone on our team the chance to step up and take over."

WHS returns home to play Alexander Central tonight. Coverage of the boy's and girl's double-header begins at 6:05 p.m. against on AM 1450, WATA and GoBlueridge.net.

AVERY 42, WHS 35

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SCORE BY PERIODS 1 2 3 4 TOTAL

WATAUGA 11 6 6 12 - 35

AVERY 12 8 11 11 - 42

WHS: DERRICK 4, HARRIS 10, CARROLL 7, LOFLIN 6, McNEILL 6, FOUTZ 2. FG: 12, 3FG: 2, FT: 5-7.

AVERY: POLSGROVE 17, RIGDON 2, HEATON 6, L. BURELSON 11, RAMSEY 6. FG: 14, 3FG: 3, FT: 5-8.

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NORTHWESTERN 3A/4A CONFERENCE

MONDAY'S GAMES

GIRLS:

AVERY 42, WATAUGA 35

SOUTH CALDWELL 78, LAWNSDALE-BURNS 42

BOYS:

AVERY 57, WATAUGA 53

LAWNSDALE-BURNS 59, SOUTH CALDWELL 41

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Photo Courtesy: Clare Harris (right), Bill Sheffield