

Pioneers Beat Spartans Again!

Written by Mike Kelly

Wednesday, 19 February 2014 09:47

The Watauga High girls' basketball team knocked off South Caldwell 61-53 Tuesday night in the opening-round of the Northwestern 3A/4A Conference tournament in Sawmills, N.C.

The win moves WHS (9-16) into the conference semifinals Thursday night against Freedom, a team that beat WHS twice during the regular season. The Patriots (17-7) defeated Hibriten 68-41 Tuesday night.

Ryan Loflin led three players in double figures with 19 points and seven rebounds. Savanna Wood had 18 points and four steals; Clare Harris poured in 12. Tori Derrick had seven points and nine rebounds.

The Pioneers also posted their second win against South Caldwell (16-9) in as many days. They beat the Spartans on Senior Night at Lentz-Eggers Gym Monday night. WHS has also won four of the last five meetings between the schools, and the Pioneers have won two straight on the road against the Spartans (before that, the Pioneers hadn't won at South since 1996-97).

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WHS didn't waste any time setting the tone against South Caldwell Tuesday night. After the Spartans took an early 4-1 lead, the Pioneers went on a ten-point run to take an 11-4 lead with 4:23 left in the opening stanza. And the Pioneers were in total control from that point on.

Making matters worse for South Caldwell, two of its best players, Anna Lee Bollinger and Mikayla Everhart, got into early foul trouble.

"That psychological impact we talked about (on the WHS pre-game show) was a huge difference early," said WHS coach Klay Anderson. "I thought that South had such revenge on their minds, they came out and played out of control. They got into serious foul trouble early and never recovered. I am so proud of my girls. I'm almost speechless. There was nothing fancy about this win. It was just a case of heart, desire, and effort on our part. There was a sense of urgency to get a job done."

"We got three players into foul trouble and we never got into the flow of things," said South Caldwell coach Jeff Parham. "And defensively, we played great defense all year long, but the past two nights, we didn't do a very good job. We just didn't play well, but that doesn't discredit what Watauga did. To put it plain and simple, they beat our butts the past two nights. They played great defense, outhustled us to every loose ball, and they did a great job keeping us off the boards."

On the other hand, the Pioneers, like they did Monday night, controlled the boards. They had 14

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second-chance points. And it was that gritty toughness that allowed WHS to stave off a South Caldwell comeback in the second half.

The Spartans, who trailed by as many as 16 points in the first half, cut the lead to four points on two occasion in the fourth quarter, the last time at 53-49 with 1:51 left to play.

But The Pioneers, who only missed four free throws Tuesday night (they're 39-47 at the foul line in their last two games), were 22-26 at the charity stripe. They were 8-10 down the stretch. A pair of free throws by Loflin with 38.5 seconds left gave WHS a 56-49 lead and the Spartans never got any closer than five.

"From the first day of official practice and from then on, we always end practice the same way," Anderson said. "We call it, 'how we win'. Every girl gets two free throws. If they make both, we don't run. If they miss one, we run the floor once, or if they miss them both, we run the floor twice. Our goal is to shoot 80 percent at the foul line, and we did that the last two games. It's the first time we've done that all year. And that's how you win games. We've been practicing four months for this moment, and it's paying off.

"But South made their run, and my girls punched back. It seemed like every time I looked at the scoreboard in the second half, they kept getting a point closer to us. This is a great win, and it's so nice to see a team grow during the season, and to peak at the right time."

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Courtney Wood led the Spartans with 25 points in the loss. Bollinger finished with ten points; Caleigh Raby had 12. Everhart, who fouled out with 8.9 seconds left, finished with four points. The Spartans also struggled at the foul line. They shot 62% from the foul line.

"I don't know what's going to happen against Freedom Thursday night," Anderson said. "But I know they were preparing to play South Caldwell. No one wants to play an underdog that's peaking at the right time. The kids have bought into what we're doing, and the results are starting to show. Don't get me wrong, South Caldwell is an excellent team, but we just made more plays tonight. That was the difference. And that's what we have to do against Freedom. We played them tough in our last meeting. It's an exciting time for our program."

In their last meeting on January 31 at LE Gym, the Patriots broke the game open in the fourth quarter. Leading 42-33, the Patriots outscored WHS 16-9 in the final stanza.

"We just went into a scoring drought, and it cost us the game," Anderson said. "But we've been getting at least three players in double figures the last two week now. And if you do that, you're going to win. Our girls are very committed right now. We're scoring 50-60 points a game. And that's huge for a team that was struggling to score 40 points early in the year. It's a great time of the year. And like I told the girls before tonight's game, 'we're the best eight win team in the state and no No.1 team wants to see us in the state playoffs next week.' Now, we're the best nine-win team in the state."

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The WHS boys advanced as well. They knocked off Patton 86-60 Tuesday night at LE Gym, and like the girls, they will play Freedom in the semifinals Thursday night. The girls play at 5:30 p.m.; the boys play at 7 p.m. Coverage begins at 5:05 p.m. on Classic Hits 100.7 FM and GoBlueridge.net.

NOTES: In South Caldwell's only win against WHS back on January 21, Savanna Wood suffered a concussion late in the first quarter, left the game and didn't retrain. Harris did not play. She was on the shelf with a fractured wrist

WATAUGA 61, SOUTH CALDWELL 53

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SCORE BY PERIODS 1 2 3 4 TOTAL

WATAUGA HIGH 18 12 12 19 - 61

SOUTH CALDWELL 9 10 17 17 - 53

WHS: WOOD 18 (4 STEALS, 3 ASSISTS), DERRICK 7 (9 REBOUNDS), HARRIS 12, CARROLL 2, LOFLIN 19 (7 REBOUNDS), McNEILL 3 (6 REBOUNDS). FG: 15, 3FG: 3, FT: 22-26.

SCHS: LOCKHART 2, BOLLINGER 10, RABY 12, WOOD 25, EVERHART 4. FG: 15, 3FG: 1, 20-32.

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WATAUGA BOYS 86, PATTON 60

The Watauga High boys' basketball team ripped Patton 86-60 in the opening-round of the Northwestern 3A/4A Conference tournament Tuesday night at Lentz-Eggers Gym.

Watauga (17-8), the No. 4 seed in the tournament, takes on top-seeded Freedom Thursday night at 7 p.m., in the semifinals down in Morganton, N.C. The Pioneers beat Freedom 75-65 in Boone on January 31, but lost to the Patriots 82-71 on January 8 after coming back from a 23-point deficit to within four points in the second half.

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Watauga, which has won its last two games by a combined 71 points, buried 11 3-point baskets, including six by Jay Harrill, against the fifth-seeded Panthers (13-11), who they swept during the regular season.

"I was very nervous. I'm not going to lie to you," Pioneers coach Rob Sanders said. "I know that Patton is a solid basketball team and to beat somebody three times is very difficult."

Harrill led all scorers with 32 points. Cam Baker scored 16 points and grabbed 10 rebounds; Aaron Dobbins scored 12 points and pulled down nine boards. Michael Ebaugh came off the bench to add seven points. All but one of the Pioneers who played scored at least two points.

"At the beginning of the season, we all wrote down goals and one of the goals was to win the conference tournament," Dobbins said. "Throughout the regular season we showed we didn't play as well as we wanted to, so coach Sanders said to go out there and show everybody we can beat everybody in the state. We can win this thing, so everybody's really excited to go out there and play,"

The Pioneers also benefitted from Patton's poor defensive showing. The Pioneers, especially Harrill, got a lot of open looks against the Panthers Tuesday night. And the numbers don't lie. The Pioneers were 33-of-55 (60 percent) from the field, including 19-of-29 (66 percent) in the

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first half. The Pioneers also outrebounded Patton 40-24 for the game.

"It's like I told our guys after the game last night -- we are a dangerous team when we're clicking on all cylinders, Sanders said. "We seem to be doing that at the right time, so hopefully we can keep it going."

Rafael Horton led the Panthers in scoring with 15 points. Ethan Roper and Dax Bostain each scored 12, while Jeron Morris had 11.

The Panthers struggled with their shooting from the field by making 21-of-54 (38 percent) from the field the entire game.

Watauga stayed on pace for a 100-point game until the fourth quarter, when Sanders started substituting frequently, and the Pioneers stopped aggressively attacking the basket.

"We didn't want to have any quick possessions," Sanders said. "We wanted to work the basketball around and to make sure we were taking quality time off the clock. On the defense we wanted to make them work and shorten the game as much as possible."

The Pioneers led 75-47 going into the fourth quarter, but the game was out of reach for the Panthers by halftime. Watauga led 50-28 by halftime, but that could have been worse had Patton not scored the final basket of the half, and Watauga not missed a layup just before the

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buzzer.

Patton led early, 3-0, after Morris drained a 3-pointer to start the game. Patton forged an 11-11 tie before the Pioneers caught fire and closed out the first quarter with a 9-2 run to take a 20-13 lead.

The Pioneers pulled away from there with brutal efficiency. Watauga went on a 17-6 run in the second quarter to take a 37-19 lead. The Pioneers were 6-of-9 from the field during that stretch, and they scored on 7-of-8 possessions.

Patton started to pick up its offense later in the quarter by scoring on 4-of-6 possessions, including a 3-pointer from Bostain. But the Pioneers answered by scoring on six straight possessions, including 3-point shots from Baker and Harrill, and took their 22-point lead into halftime.

W

atauga took its largest lead, 70-41, in the third quarter on a 8-2 run capped by a Dobbins steal, who got the ball to T.J. Poulos who found Harrill for a layup.

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WATAUGA 86, PATTON 60

SCORE BY PERIODS 1 2 3 4 TOTAL

PATTON HIGH 13 15 19 13 - 60

WATAUGA HIGH 20 30 25 11 - 86

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PHS: BOSTIAN 12, McELVEN 2, ROPER 12, MORRIS 11, ERVIN 5, HAMER 2, ESPINOZA 1, HORTON 15. FG: 18, 3FG: 3, FT: 15-21.

WHS: HARRILL 32, EGGERS 3, GAILES 2, ANDREWS 3, POULOS 2, DOBBINS 12 (9 REBOUNDS), JONES 3, EBAUGH 7, Baker 16 (10 REBOUNDS), LAMBERT 6. FG: 22, 3FG: 11, FT: 9-12.

NORTHWESTERN 3A-4A

TUESDAY'S GAMES

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GIRLS

No. 1 Hickory 74, No. 8 Fred T. Foard 28

No. 5 Patton 72, No. 4 St. Stephens 56

No. 2 Freedom 68, No. 7 Hibriten 41

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No. 6 Watauga 61, No. 3 S. Caldwell 53

BOYS

No. 1 Freedom 82, No. 8 S. Caldwell 35

No. 4 Watauga 86, No. 5 Patton 60

No. 2 Hickory 60, No. 7 Hibriten 54

No. 3 Fred T. Foard 65, No. 6 St. Stephens 47

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THURSDAY'S GAMES

(at Freedom)

GIRLS

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No. 1 Hickory (22-0) vs. No. 5 Patton (12-12), semifinal, 4 p.m.

No. 2 Freedom (17-7) vs. No. 6 Watauga (9-16), semifinal, 5:30 p.m.

BOYS

No. 1 Freedom (23-1) vs. No. 4 Watauga (17-8),, semifinal, 7 p.m.

No. 2 Hickory (12-10) vs. No. 3 Fred T. Foard (15-9), semifinal, 8:30 p.m.

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FRIDAY'S GAMES

(at Freedom)

GIRLS

Semifinal winners, championship, 6:30 p.m.

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BOYS

Semifinal winners, championship, 8 p.m.

Photo Courtesy: Aaron Dobbins, WHS Athletics

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