

## **Patriots Derail Pioneers, 85-73**

Written by Mike Kelly  
Friday, 21 February 2014 09:35

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The Watauga High boys' basketball team saw its four-game winning streak come to an end Thursday night.

Freedom (24-1), the No.1 seed in the Northwestern 3A/4A Conference Tournament, avenged its only loss of the season by knocking off WHS 85-73 in the semifinal round in a game you heard on Classic Hits 100.7 FM and GoBlueridge.net. The win avenged an 85-75 loss at Watauga (17-9) on January 31. The Patriots were undefeated and ranked No.1 in the state in Class 3A at the time.

The loss also denied WHS its first win at Freedom since 2007.

"You know when you beat a team that's undefeated that you're going to get their best shot the next time around," said WHS coach Rob Sanders. "The difference in this game, we didn't do a good job handling their pressure, and our point guards got in foul trouble. (Chris Bridges) shot the lights out. We wanted them to be jump shooters. Well, we did that for the most part, but (Bridges) just had the hot hand all night. He was on fire."

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Bridges finished with a game-high 22 points, including four trifectas. His two free throws with 42.9 seconds left, gave the Patriots an 80-73 lead and basically put the contest out of reach.

Jeron Hemphill and Khris Gardin of the Patriots each had 16 points apiece.

The win moves Freedom into tonight's championship game against Fred T. Foard. The Tigers defeated Hickory 70-58 in Thursday night's second semifinal game.

"We did what we wanted on defense," Sanders said. "But we didn't do a very good job rebounding the basketball, especially in the second half. But (Bridges) was the difference tonight. It seemed like every time we got the game within five, six points, he buried a big three and kept it out of reach."

The Patriots, who led 36-33 at halftime, started pulling away in the second half. Freedom built a nine-point advantage after three. A stick back and a three ball by Austin Butler aided the cause and gave Freedom a 56-47 lead. The Patriots stretched their lead to 11 points from there at 65-54 with 7:02 left in game.

But the Pioneers, thanks to T.J. Poulos who had eight points and seven assists, Cameron Baker, who finished with a team-high 19 points, including six threes, and Jay Harrill, who had 14

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points, but was held to just one three in Thursday night's affair, came charging back and cut the lead to five on Harrill's three pointer with 45.8 seconds left.

But the Patriots iced the game away from there by making seven free throws down the stretch. The Patriots were 25-34 at the line Thursday night.

"We made too many costly turnovers," Sanders said. "We didn't do a good job against their pressure. We knew their pressure was going to give us problems, but we didn't expect to make 16 turnovers in the first half. We knew what to expect, we just didn't handle it well. And getting our point guards in early foul trouble didn't help."

Poulos and Eli Gailes, who fouled out with 21.7 seconds left, each had three fouls apiece in the first half. Gailes picked up his fourth foul early in the third quarter. Poulos fouled out with 42.9 seconds left to play. Utah Jones, who had four assists, ran the point to close out the first half and to start the third quarter.

"It was the only choice we had," Sanders said. "Then two of our post players got in foul trouble, and we're forced to go small without a point guard on the floor. We really dodged a bullet in the first half keeping things close, but it caught up to us in the second half. On top of that, they hit their shots tonight and we didn't."

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WHS trailed early, but rallied to take its first lead of the game at 19-18 on a bucket by Aaron Dobbins late in the first quarter. Dobbins finished with 14 points and nine boards. The Pioneers jumped on top again early in the second quarter at 24-23 on a layup by Harrill.

But with the Pioneers leading 28-26, the Patriots, thanks to Bridges, ran off five consecutive points to take the lead for good.

"Our guys are disappointed," Sanders said. "They really wanted to come back here (tonight) for the championship game. But there's still a lot of basketball left to play. The state playoffs start Monday, and for our seniors, it's time to play with an urgency. Seniors know that when you start the state playoffs, the end is near. We just have to regroup and be ready to go."

The Pioneers, who haven't played in the conference championship game since 2007 (when they lost to McDowell in the old NW4A finals in Marion), are a No.1 seed and will open the state playoffs at home Monday night. The state playoff pairings will be announced on Saturday and will be listed on GoBlueridge.net.

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### **FREEDOM 85, WATAUGA 73**

#### **SCORE BY PERIODS 1 2 3 4 TOTAL**

WATUAGA HIGH 22 11 21 19 - 73

FREEDOM HIGH 23 13 27 22 - 85

**WHS:** HARRILL 14 (6 REBOUNDS), POULOS 8 (7 ASSISTS), DOBBINS 14 (9 REBOUNDS), JONES 3 (4 ASSISTS), EBAUGH 3, BAKER 19 (6 REBOUNDS), LAMBERT 12 (5

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REBOUNDS, 3 ASSISTS). FG: 20, 3FG: 7, FT: 12-19.

**FHS:** J.HEMPHILL 16, BUTLER 10, T. HEMPHILL 3, GARDIN 16, WILSON 6, LOGAN 9, BRIDGES 22, MOORE 3. FG: 18, 3FG: 8, FT: 25-34.

**FREEDOM GIRLS 50, WATAUGA 39**

The Watauga High girls' basketball team saw its Cinderella run put on hold at least for now. The Pioneers (9-17), who were aiming their sights on an upset, nearly pulled it off, but came up short in the end.

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The Patriots (18-7), the No.2 seed, staved off a huge comeback by the Pioneers and defeated WHS 50-39 Thursday night in the semifinal round of the Northwestern 3A/4A Conference Tournament in a game you heard on Classic Hits 100.7 FM and GoBlueridge.net. The Pioneers were looking for their first win at Freedom since 1999.

The win moves Freedom into tonight's championship game against Hickory. The Red Tornadoes defeated Patton 70-32 in Thursday's first semifinal game.

"We were flat when the game started," said WHS coach Klay Anderson. "But we regained our composure, started taking our time, and we eventually established our tempo. It was a great effort. I am so proud of this team. We played with a lot of heart and desire, but we just ran out of gas in the fourth quarter."

WHS fell behind by as many as 14 points in the first half. Freedom led 19-5 after one, and was up 23-9 early in the second quarter before the WHS girls started chipping away at the lead. They methodically cut the lead to six points at 23-17 on a bucket by Ryan Loflin with 2:58 left before halftime. Loflin finished with a team-high 11 points.

"They got us early by going inside to (Krissy) Surratt and to (Amy) Rhoney," Anderson said. "But we finally sealed off the lane and forced them to play on the perimeter. They weren't

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comfortable with that, and they started rushing their shots. And that worked in our favor. It was a good defensive stand, and it allowed us to work ourselves back into the game."

That stingy defensive effort held the Patriots to just three points in the third quarter. In turn, the Pioneers cut the lead to one at 31-30 on a bucket by Loflin with 41 seconds left in the period; WHS eventually took the lead on a three ball by Clare Harris to end the quarter.

The Pioneers maintained that lead until Ariyanna Williams caught fire and rallied her team. She tied the game at 36-36 on a pair of free throws with a little less than seven minutes left in the game. A bucket by Surratt with 6:10 to go put the Patriots on top to stay.

Williams, who finished with a game-high 15 points, scored 13 of those points in the second half, ten in the fourth quarter. Freedom only scored 22 points in the second half. Surratt finished with ten; Rhoney had eight points (all of those in the first half).

"Great players step up in games like this," Anderson said. "I'm sure (Freedom coach) Amber (Fox) challenged (Williams) at halftime. She carried her team when it mattered most, in the fourth quarter."



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Surratt aided Freedom's cause as she scored six of her points in the fourth quarter. Her layup with 30.2 seconds left gave the Patriots a 47-37 lead and put the game out of reach. Amaryah Corpening of the Patriots finished with nine points, but she only scored two points in the second half---on a pair of free throws with less than 30 seconds to play.

Savanna Wood and Harris finished with nine points apiece for WHS; Kaelin McNeill had five. Wood gave WHS its final lead at 36-34 with 7:02 left in the third quarter.

"It's disappointing, of course," Anderson said. "But there's still a lot of basketball left to play. The state playoffs begin Monday, and no matter who we play, or where we play, I have a lot of confidence in this team right now."

The Pioneers haven't played in the conference championship game since 2011 (their only appearance in school history). The state playoff pairings come out Saturday and will be posted on GoBlueridge.net.

The WHS girls are a No.2 seed among the Class 4A schools in the NW3A/4A Conference and will open the state playoffs on the road.

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**FREEDOM 50, WATAUGA 39**

### **SCORE BY PERIODS 1 2 3 4 TOTAL**

WATAUGA HIGH 5 15 13 6 - 39

FREEDOM HIGH 19 9 3 19 - 50

**WHS:** WOOD 9, DERRICK 2, HARRIS 9, CARROLL 3, LOFLIN 11, McNEILL 5. FG: 8, 3FG: 7, 2-7.

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**FHS:** CORPENING 9, WILLIAMS 15, PEARSON 4, YOMOUTI 3, MATHIS 1, SURRETT 10, RHONEY 8. FG: 12, 3FG: 4, FT: 14-18.

## **NORTHWESTERN 3A-4A TOURNAMENT**

### **TUESDAY'S RESULTS**

#### **GIRLS**

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

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

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No. 2 Freedom 68, No. 7 Hibriten 41

**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

## **THURSDAY'S SEMIFINAL GAMES**

**(at Freedom)**

## **GIRLS**

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No. 1 Hickory 70, No. 5 Patton 32

**No. 2 Freedom 50, No. 6 Watauga 39**

## **BOYS**

**No. 1 Freedom 85, No. 4 Watauga 73**

No. 3 Fred T. Foard 70, No. 2 Hickory 58

## **FRIDAY'S CHAMPIONSHIP GAMES**

**(at Freedom)**

## **GIRLS**

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No. 1 Hickory (23-0) vs. No. 2 Freedom (18-7), championship, 6:30 p.m.

## **BOYS**

No. 1 Freedom (24-1) vs, No. 3 Fred T. Foard (16-9), championship, 8 p.m.

**Photo Courtesy: Cameron Baker, Mark Branch**

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