

Pioneers Rally Past Cougars

Written by Mike Kelly

Tuesday, 25 February 2014 08:43

One thing's for sure, when the Watauga High boys' basketball team and Alexander Central hook up, it's never been boring.

And that was the case Monday night as the Pioneers knocked off Alexander Central 57-55 in overtime at Lentz-Eggers Gym in the opening-round of the North Carolina High School Athletic Association Class 4A state playoffs. Aaron Dobbins' fade away jumper from the foul line with 14.2 seconds left in overtime gave the Pioneers a 55-54 lead and put them on top to stay.

Deion Wall of the Cougars forced overtime as he hit a bank shot from 30 feet away as time expired, tying the game at 45 apiece.

"How fitting for Watauga and Alexander Central to go to overtime in the playoffs," said WHS coach Rob Sanders. "I would like to see the statistics of how many overtime games we've had with them. We had a foul to give on that last play coming out of the time out. But Eli (Gailles) was afraid he might foul (Wall) on that last play and give him three shots. And the guy threw it up and it went it. A typical Watauga, Alexander Central game. But everybody stepped up big tonight. We knew that zone was going to give us problems. We hadn't seen it since December and it had us on our heels for the majority of the game."

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It's the second overtime game between WHS and Alexander Central this season. The Pioneers went to double overtime and beat the Cougars 61-58 on December 4 in Taylorsville. Monday's win moves WHS (18-9) into a second-round playoff game at home against McDowell Wednesday night at 7 p.m. The Titans (13-10) defeated Jamestown-Ragsdale 111-104 Monday night in Marion.

WHS staged a fourth-quarter rally that wiped out a five-point Alexander Central (14-12) lead. Trailing 42-38 with 4:16 left in regulation time, the Pioneers scored six consecutive points to go up, 44-42. Dobbins, who finished with 13 points, got things going as he banked one in. Jay Harrill, who led WHS with a game-high 22 points, tied the game with a foul-line jumper with 3:16 to go, and Cameron Baker, who finished with 16 points, put the WHS on top just moments later.

"They went to a box-in-one against Jay when he starting hitting shots early," Sanders said. "But the guy fought through it and got himself open in the fourth quarter. He buried some big shots for us in the clutch. And what about Dobbins. He stepped up big again. He hits a big shot that ignited our fourth-quarter run, and that bucket he nailed in overtime. It was just a team effort."

"We lost the momentum in overtime," said Alexander Central coach Ed Wills. "We were fortunate to hit that shot to tie the game and force overtime. That gave us a boost, but then we missed an assignment to start the overtime period, and they hit a huge shot to put them back on top."

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Harrill buried one from the short corner to give the Pioneers a 47-45 lead to start the overtime period. The teams battled through a couple of ties before WHS seemed to take charge by opening up a four-point lead with 1:11 left. A bucket by Gales gave WHS what seemed to be a comfortable 53-49 advantage.

But the Cougars, who lost their best player, junior Ty Ireland, to a knee injury back in Decemgber, answered as Wall nailed a three ball from the near corner, cutting the lead to one. And following a steal by Davis Miller on WHS' ensuing possession, Zack Starnes hit a layup to put the Cougars back on top, 54-53, with 22 seconds to go.

"It was very frustrating because (Starnes) wasn't having to work very hard to score," Sanders said. "And he wasn't working very hard to get position. We weren't working hard enough against their back screens. The cutter was coming through wide open for an easy layup. We got caught watching too much. That's just poor defense. They took advantage of our defensive breakdowns and our lack of communication. They scored way too many easy baskets."

Starnes and Wall paced the Cougars with 14 points apiece. Ethan Simmons had ten points.

"We missed at least eight layups tonight," Wills said. "You can't miss layups, especially against a good team. We allowed them to stick around, and they made some big plays when it counted

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most. We just weren't tough enough to pull it out."

"Our seniors, especially Cam, saw the writing on the wall," Sanders said. "Survive and advance means a lot more to the seniors. You lose, and your done, and your career is over. Cam certainly didn't want this to be his last game. He was very determined that his career as a Pioneer was not going to end tonight. And when they went up by five, he was going to do whatever it took to win this game. And he found a way.

"We knew tonight's game was going to be a battle. They gave us their best shot. The biggest thing about getting past that first round is that anything can happen from now on. And playing at home is a huge advantage."

Coverage of Wednesday night's game against McDowell begins at 6:40 p.m. on AM 1450, WATA and GoBlueridge.net.

NOTES: The Pioneers are 2-1 in overtime games this season....WHS has won five straight against Alexander Central, dating back to last year.....The Cougars haven't won in Boone since 2011-12.

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WATAUGA 57, ALEXANDER CENTRAL 55 (OT)

SCORE BY PERIODS 1 2 3 4 1OT TOTAL

ALEXANDER CENTRAL 12 15 13 5 10 - 55

WATAUGA HIGH 14 9 12 10 12 - 57

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ALEXANDER CENTRAL: WALL 14, GANT 5, R.MILLER 2, SIMMONS 10, WATTS 3, STARNES 14, D.MILLER 5, LINGLE 2. FG: 16, 3FG: 6, FT: 5-10.

WHS: HARRILL 22, GAILES 4, DOBBINS 13, BAKER 16, LAMBERT 2. FG: 16, 3FG: 5, 10-14.

McDOWELL GIRLS 67, WATAUGA 44

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The Watauga High girls' basketball team was eliminated in the opening round of the NCHSAA Class 4A State Playoff Monday night in Marion, N.C.

The Pioneers (9-18) gave McDowell (23-0), the No.1 seed in the West and the third-ranked team in the state in Class 4A, all it could handle in the first half. The Pioneers only trailed by five at halftime, 35-30, before the Titans broke the game open in the second half and won going away, 67-44.

A 21-5 blitz in the third quarter gave McDowell a 56-35 lead. The Pioneers only scored 14 points in the second half. Savanna Wood, playing in her final game for the Pioneers, had 15 points and five rebounds in the loss; Clare Harris finished with nine points and Kaelin McNeill, playing her final game for WHS, finished with eight points. Senior Tori Derrick had four points, six rebounds and four assists.

MONDAY NIGHT'S GAMES

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NORTHWESTERN 3A/4A CONFERENCE

CLASS 4A

GIRLS:

McDOWELL 67, WATAUGA 44

SOUTH CALDWELL 69, SOUTHEAST GUILFORD 66

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CLASS 3A

HICKORY 80, WEST HENDERSON 35

FREEDOM 70, NORTH BUNCOMBE 58

SOUTHWESTERN RANDOLPH 70, PATTON 66

CREST 68, ST. STEPHENS 40

CLASS 2A

MONROE-PARKWOOD 62, ASHE COUNTY 28

CLASS 1A

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ELKIN 56, AVERY 49

BOYS:

CLASS 4A

No.8 WATAUGA 57, No. 25 ALEXANDER CENTRAL 55 (OT)

GREENSBORO-PAGE 77, SOUTH CALDWELL 34

CLASS 3A

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NORTH FORSYTH 98, PATTON 88

GASTONIA-ASHBROOK 52, ST. STEPHENS 51

FREEDOM 93, WEST ROWAN 64

HICKORY 50, FRED T. FOARD 47

CLASS 1A

AVERY 77, MURPHY 38

WEDNESDAY'S GAMES

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NW3A/4A

GIRLS:

CLASS 3A

No.17 HICKORY RIDGE (15-10) @ No.1 HICKORY (25-0)

No.12 FREEDOM (19-8) @ No.5 LEDFORD (22-5)

CLASS 4A

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No.9 MOUNT TABOR (21-6) @ No.8 SOUTH CALDWELL (17-9)

BOYS:

CLASS 4A

No.9 McDOWELL (13-10) @ No.8 WATAUGA (18-9)

CLASS 3A

No.14 HICKORY (13-11) @ No.3 FREEDOM (26-1)

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CLASS 1A

No.7 CHEROKEE (16-10) @ No.2 AVERY (23-4)

Photo Courtesy: Jay Harrill, Mark Branch

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