

Pirates Eliminate Pioneers

Written by Mike Kelly
Saturday, 01 March 2014 09:53

Any thoughts the Watauga High boys' basketball team had about pulling off a huge upset were squashed immediately on Friday night. Greensboro-Page (27-2), the No.1 seed in the West, blasted WHS 102-64 in Greensboro, N.C., in the North Carolina High School Athletic Association Class 4A sectional championship game. The Pirates will play West Charlotte in the Western Regional semifinals Thursday night at the Greensboro Coliseum. West Charlotte advanced by knocking off Mount Tabor 70-43 Friday night.

It was WHS' worst loss since 1996-97, when Freedom beat the Pioneers 102-47 (current Freedom coach Casey Rogers was a junior on that team). The Pirates didn't waste any time putting WHS (19-10) out of its misery. After the Pioneers grabbed a 2-0 lead just a few seconds into the game on a foul-line jumper by Cameron Baker, the Pirates kicked it into overdrive. A 7-0 run gave the Pirates a 12-4 lead and they kept pulling away from there.

A nine-point run to close out the first quarter made it, 30-13. Jeremy Harris' layup with 46 seconds left in the opening stanza gave the Pirate their 17-point cushion.

"We usually play some zone, too," said Greensboro-Page coach James Abell. "I didn't want their shooters to get comfortable from the start. We knew what they were going to do, and we knew we could attack it. Just looking at the points they've given up told me that they like to get up and down the floor, just like we do. So we focused on making defensive stops and pushing it up the floor."

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The lead grew to 32 points by halftime. A bucket by Diondre Overton with 51 seconds left in the first half made it 52-20.

"They surprised us a little bit," Baker said. "We were expecting them to play more of an inside game, but they're a real good team. We watched some film on them. We tried to come up with a game plan, but they shot the ball real well from the outside, and they finished when they got the ball inside. Give them credit, they're just a great team."

The Pirates led by as many as 37 points in the third quarter; the lead grew to 42 points in the fourth quarter with a 1:43 left to play.

"I've talked about losing and getting beat all year," said WHS coach Rob Sanders. "And tonight, we just got beat. Let's be honest, that's one heck of a basketball team. They're the real deal. They're one of the biggest high school teams I've ever seen. They've got the whole package. We tried our best, but they're just the better team."

Anthony Eaves led a balanced attack for the Pirates with 24 points. The Pirates had four players in double figures. Ty Graves finished with 18 points, Harris had 19, and Jalen Seegars had 12. The Pirates also made 14 threes.

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Graves and Eaves teamed up by making ten of those threes (Eaves had six). A three ball by Eaves made it 73-36 in the third quarter.

The loss denied WHS' its first trip to regionals since 1971.

"It was rough," Baker said. "You've just got to keep playing. They're not going to shrink, or slow down anytime soon. We had a good season. We came a long way. Nobody expected us to make it this far. I'm proud of this team, the coaches, the players. It was a good season."

The Pioneers had their most productive season since 1997-98, when they were 20-8. Ironically, like this year's team, that '97-98 squad produced a .500 record (they were 5-5) in league play in the old Northwestern 4A Conference (they had to beat Shelby-Crest in a play-in game that season to make the state playoffs). It was also the first time WHS has coughed up 100 points or more in a game since 2005-06, when A.C. Reynolds cracked the century mark against the Pioneers that season.

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Matt Lambert led WHS with 16 points. Jay Harrill finished with 14 points; Baker, in his final season with the Pioneers, finished with seven points. Harrill, who like Baker ended his WHS career Friday night, also made four three pointers to become the school's all-time leader in that category with 78 in his career. He surpassed Elson Cornette (1991-94), who held the record with 77.

"That was my goal," Harrill said. "I shot 600 shots everyday. Five-hundred three pointers and a hundred free throws. My goal was to finish in the top five in the state in threes (he was second), so I accomplished that goal. But it's hard to be happy about it right now."

"This team set a lot of records this season," Sanders said. "I got a little emotional at the end of the third quarter (with WHS trailing, 75-43). I just told our guys, 'this game is over.' I'm proud of these guys. We had a special team this year, and they did a lot of special things. Our guys can hold their heads high. We came in here and gave it everything we had. We just got beat by a better basketball team."

GREENSBORO PAGE 102, WATAUGA 64

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SCORE BY PERIODS 1 2 3 4 TOTAL

WATAUGA HIGH 13 11 19 21 - 64

GREENSBORO-PAGE 30 26 19 27 - 102

WHS: HARRILL 14, EGGERS 6, GAILES 4, POULOS 4, DOBBINS 7, JONES 6, BAKER 7, LAMBERT 16. FG: 13, 3FG: 9, FT: 11-11.

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PAGE: GAVIN 4, GRAVES 18, BANKS 4, EAVES 24, HARRIS 19, SEEGARS 12, HILL-MAIS 4, MELTON 3, OVERTON 5, FUSSELL 9. FG: 26, 3FG: 14, FT: 8-15.

Photo Courtesy: Jay Harrill, WHS Athletics

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