

## Pioneers Win Opener, 41-24

Written by Mike Kelly

Saturday, 23 August 2014 13:03

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The Watauga High football team has turned into a well-oiled machine under the direction of head coach Ryan Habich. In just his second season at the helm, the Pioneers (1-0) have established themselves as a team with big-play ability.

The Pioneers exhibited those talents in Friday night's season opener against Alexander Central in Taylorsville, N.C. And senior T. J. Poulos grabbed center stage. Poulos jump-started the Pioneers as he returned the opening kick-off 65 yards to the Cougars 26-yard-line. Poulos scored four times Friday night, and he racked up 250 yards of total offense as the

Pioneers blasted Alexander Central 41-24 at Cougars Stadium.

The Pioneers scored on their first four possessions and built a 27-7 lead with 11:19 left to play in the first half. The Pioneers were so explosive, they scored three touchdowns in a span of four-minutes and 21 seconds. Poulos, who caught two TD passes, and ran for a pair of scores, capped off the blitzkrieg with a 33-yard run.

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"I'm proud of the way we played tonight," Habich said. "We executed our offense, and we made some adjustments, because of injuries. I was a little worried coming, with the heat and all, and with us playing up to seven guys both ways. Some of our guys cramped up, but for the most part, they played well under these conditions.

It was 94 degrees at game time. And the Pioneers were missing two of their top players---tight end/linebacker Hunter Isaacs, who is out for the season with a shoulder injury, and strong safety/wide receiver Michael Ebaugh, who dressed for Friday night's game, but was slowed by a sprained ankle. But Poulos, Dobbins, and running back Zach Williams more than made up for it.

Dobbins threw for 69 yards (he was 6-10 through the air) with two TD passes; he also ran for 99 yards on 13 carries; Williams ran for 146 yards on just 13 carries and scored twice. His two-yard run with 3:06 to go gave WHS a 17-point lead and put the contest out of reach.

"Everything just worked out," Williams said. "Our line did a great job, and our traps worked real good. We put in a lot of plays this off season, but we just ran what Habich called. We ran the ball real well tonight."

The Pioneers, who had 407 yards offensively, ran for 338 yards. And despite a valiant comeback try by the Cougars, (0-1), their efforts came up short.

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To their credit, Alexander Central cut the lead to 11 points by halftime, and Landon Hammer's 23-yard scoring pass to Matt Carrigan with 7:52 left to play, narrowed WHS' lead to 34-24. But Williams' TD run coupled with Poulos' interception on Alexander's final possession of the game, squashed any comeback hopes.

"Hammer and (Davante) Clark are outstanding players," Habich said. "Hammer also threw the ball pretty well tonight. But I thought our defense stiffened up when it had to. They hit some big plays on us, but for the most part, we didn't let it get out of hand. It was a good win on the road against a good team."

Hammer and Clark paced the Cougars. Hammer ran for 109 yards on 11 carries. He also threw for 84 yards. Clark ran for a game-high 151 yards on 17 carries and a TD.

"Those guys have to carry us," said Alexander Central coach Nick Bazzle. "They're our best players, and it's all on them. But like I told our guys after the game, 'we didn't lose to a scrub team. We lost to a very good football team.' They've got an outstanding quarterback. He puts the ball on the money. He's got a future in this game. And they beat us up on the line of scrimmage. We couldn't get them off the field."

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"It feels so great to run the ball as well as we did tonight," said senior center Jacob Rutz. "Last year, we struggled with the run. But we've got a good group up front, and we got a good push tonight. It was hot, and some of us cramped up at times, but our off-season conditioning really paid off."

WHS' new offensive line is led by Rutz, Jake Williams, August Sauls, Stephen Miller and Adam Green.

"It was great tonight," Poulos said. "It's my senior year, and I wanted to make a statement. We really put in the time during the off-season and it really paid off tonight. The line opened up the holes, and our running game just took over. We ran the ball a lot better tonight. Last year, we struggled running the ball. I just wanted to be a leader tonight, especially for the young guys. We went with what worked for us tonight, and running the ball worked."

The Pioneers have beaten Alexander Central four times in their last five meetings. They also picked up their first win in Taylorsville since 2008.

The Pioneers return home to play Ashe County next Friday night. Coverage begins at 6:30 p.m. on AM 1450, WATA and GoBlueridge.net.

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**NOTES:** Alexander Central leads the all-times series 21-17.....Poulos came two TDs shy of tying the school record of six TDs in one game set by Eric Breitenstein against Central Cabarrus in the second round of the state playoffs in 2007....Breitenstein scored five TDs in the season opener against West Caldwell in 2006.

**WATAUGA 41, ALEXANDER CENTRAL 24**

### Score By Quarters

1	2	3	4	TOTAL
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WATAUGA	21	6	7	7	-	41
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ALEXANDER C. 7 9 0 8 - 24

### 1st:

11:00 WHS - DOBBINS 23 YARD PASS TO POULOS, (FORONI KICK), 7-0

9:32 ACHS - CARRIGAN 5 YARD RUN, (GAST KICK), 7-7

6:38 WHS - POULOS 3 YARD RUN (FORONI KICK), 14-7

2:58 WHS - POULOS 33 YARD RUN (FORONI KICK), 21-7

### 2nd:

11:19 WHS - DOBBINS 26 YARD PASS TO POULOS, (KICK FAILED), 27-7

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7:37 ACHS - CLARK 1 YARD RUN (RUN FAILED), 27-13

0:00 ACHS - ALANIS 28 YARD FIELD GOAL, 27-16

**3rd:**

6:32 WHS - WILLIAMS 13 YARD RUN (FORONI KICK), 34-16

**4th:**

7:52 ACHS - HAMMER 23 YARD PASS TO CARRIGAN, (HAMMER RUN) 34-24

3:06 WHS - WILLIAMS 2 YARD RUN (FORONI KICK), 41-24

**TEAM STATISTICS:**

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FIRST DOWNS: WHS 23, ACHS 17

RUSHING YARDS: WHS 38-338, ACHS 39-302

PASSING YARDS: WHS 69, ACHS 84

TOTAL YARDS: WHS 48-407, ACHS 54-386

FUMBLES/LOST WHS 1-0, ACHS 2-0

PENALTY YARDS: WHS 8-52, ACHS 6-28

POSSESSION TIME: WHS 21:25, ACHS 26:35

3RD DOWN CONVERSIONS: WHS 2-4, ACHS 4-10

4TH DOWN CONVERSIONS: WHS 0-0, ACHS 1-2

RED ZONE CHANCES: WHS 3-3, ACHS 4-5



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### **INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS:**

#### **RUSHING:**

WHS: WILLIAMS 13-146-2TD, DOBBINS 13-99, POULOS 9-85-2TD

ACHS: CLARK 17-151-TD, HAMMER 11-109,

#### **PASSING:**

WHS: DOBBINS 6-10-0-2TD-69

ACHS: HAMMER 5-14-1-TD-84, ALANIS 0-1

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### **RECEIVING:**

WHS: POULOS 4-46-2TD, FORD 2-23

ACHS: BARNETT 2=27, BAYLOR 1-26, CARRIGAN 1-23

### **FRIDAY NIGHT'S GAMES**

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

**WATAUGA 41, ALEXANDER CENTRAL 24**

FREEDOM 49, EAST BURKE 0

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STATESVILLE 70, HICKORY 19

MAIDEN 25, FRED. T. FOARD 21

BANDYS 27, ST. STEPHENS 6

MOUNTAIN HERITAGE 25, PATTON 6

HIBRITEN 67, WEST IREDELL 39

## **OTHER GAMES**

ASHE COUNTY 50, NORTH SURRY 42

CLOUDLAND (TN) 6, AVERY 0

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**Photo Courtesy: T.J. Poulos, WHS Athletics**