

Pioneers Batter Eagles, Win Fourth Straight

Written by Mike Kelly

Saturday, 21 September 2013 01:20

The Watauga High football team finished its final tune up before it plays its Northwestern 3A/4A Conference opener next week with a lopsided 42-0 win against Wilkes Central Friday night at Jack Groce Stadium. Like they did last week against Avery, the Pioneers (4-0) were in complete control from the start.

It took WHS just three plays to take the lead. The drive covered 63 yards and concluded with a 35-yard scoring strike from Aaron Dobbins to T.J. Poulos for a 7-0 lead with the game just one-minute, and 20-seconds old. WHS made it 14-0 as it scored on its next possession. Dobbins hooked up with Cam Baker on an 18-yard touchdown pass, capping off a ten play, 90-yard drive. Dobbins was 8-14 on the night for 175 yards and two touchdowns. He also ran for 99 yards on six carries (an average of 17-yards a pop). And Dobbins has been a force at quarterback this season. In just nine quarters of work, the Pioneers have scored an impressive 112 points.

Zach Williams, who ran for 99 yards on 15 carries and scored three times, made it 21-0 as he rambled in from five yards out with 10:40 left in the first half.

The Pioneers scored on their first three possessions of the game, and on four of their five possessions on the night. Michael Ebaugh added the exclamation point as he returned an interception 72 yards for a TD with 26 seconds left in the first half. That play halted a Wilkes Central (0-4) scoring drive, and it gave WHS a commanding 28-0 halftime advantage.

"We're just a better football team," said WHS coach Ryan Habich. "(Wilkes Central) got some injuries, they've got some people hurt, and they're young. We did a good job moving the ball in the first half. And Michael did a good job reading the play on that interception."

"I just caught the ball and got so excited," Ebaugh said. "I didn't know what I was doing. I've got to get faster this off-season. But I did out run the defense. Coach told me to keep an eye on (Victor Williams) on that pass. It was great to throw a shutout. We worked all week on containing (Victor Williams) and not allowing their speed to beat us.

"Coach has moved me around. I've been a wide receiver, a wing back, a tight end, a linebacker. He finally moved me to safety. I wasn't crazy about it at first, but I like the shutout, and I like getting physical on the field."

It was also WHS' first shutout since a 6-0 win at Hickory in 2011. The Pioneers preserved their shutout by stuffing Wilkes Central on the one yard line in the third quarter on fourth and goal. The Pioneers jammed up the middle, and Eagles' running back Alex Dyer ran into his own man and fell down.

The Pioneers then took the ball and marched it 99 yards in just eight plays for a 35-0 lead with 11:34 left in the game. A 29-yard run by Dobbins on first down moved the ball to the WHS 30-yard line. The Pioneers, who picked up three consecutive first downs on that drive, finished things off on Williams two-yard run.

"Aaron did a great job reading the option tonight," Habich said. "And he's got a huge stride when he starts to run. A lot of people underestimate his speed. With the defense they were running, I really felt we could run the option against them. We want to get first downs and keep moving the chains. We'll have to do a consistent job of that in conference.

"And we've got the guys that can make the big plays. We can move the ball. We can throw it,

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we can run it. It's a good balanced attack, and we showed that on that 99-yard drive."

The Pioneers had their running game in high gear for the second week in a row. They finished with 251 yards on the ground. WHS has picked up 571 yards (an average of 286 yards) in its last two games. The Pioneers also turned in their second straight 400-yard effort (426 to be exact).

The Eagles finished with 204 yards, including 196 on the ground. Williams paced the Eagles with 128 yards on 24 carries. He also had a run of 41 yards.

"The key is that you have to have a receiver like Cam in the scheme," Habich said. "It makes it tough for a defense to play the option in the box, while keeping two guys on one receiver. It just opens things up."

T.J. Poulos displayed his evasiveness early in the fourth quarter as he took a short toss from Dobbins, eluded a would-be tackler, and worked his way down the near sideline before the Eagles finally stopped him at the two-yard line. That 34-yard catch-and-run set up Williams two-yard TD run. Poulos led the Pioneers with 105 total yards.

"The line just opened up the holes tonight, and we found ourselves in the secondary a lot," Dobbins said. "The running game compliments the passing game, and the passing game compliments the running game. We've really worked hard in practice to perfect the run. Everyone just had a great game tonight."

"The thing you want to do is win all your non-conference game," Habich said. "The Ashe County game was real beneficial. It showed our kids that we can win the close games. We had some injuries, and we persevered a little bit during our non-conference schedule. It's gotten us ready for conference play. We're doing a better job running the ball, and we have some confidence going into conference next week."

The Pioneers will begin Northwestern 3A/4A Conference play at home next Friday night against St. Stephens. The Pioneers will also celebrate Homecoming. Coverage begins at 6:30 p.m., on AM, 1450 WATA and GoBlueridge.net.

NOTES: The Pioneers have beaten Wilkes Central 12 consecutive times....The Pioneers lead the series 26-13-1....The Eagles haven't beaten WHS since 1991....The Pioneers have outscored the Eagles 112-24 in their last three games....The Pioneers are 4-0 for the first time since 2006....WHS has scored 99 points in its last two games....The Pioneers have scored 146 points in their first four games (an average of 37 points a game)....The Pioneers defeated St. Stephens in Boone last year, snapping a two-game losing streak against the Indians.

WATAUGA 42, WILKES CENTRAL 0

Score by Quarters 1 2 3 4 Total

Wilkes Central 0 0 0 0 - 0

Watauga High 14 14 0 14 - 42

1st 10:40 WHS - TJ Poulos 35 yd pass from Aaron Dobbins (S. Shirley kick), 3-63 1:20 7-0

02:26 WHS - Cam Baker 18 yd pass from Aaron Dobbins (S. Shirley kick), 10-90 4:44 14-0

2nd 04:55 WHS - Zach Williams 5 yd run (S. Shirley kick), 10-66 4:06 21-0

00:26 WHS - Michael Ebaugh 72 yd interception return (S. Shirley kick) 28-0

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4th 11:34 WHS - Zach Williams 2 yd run (S. Shirley kick), 8-99 2:36 35-0

03:43 WHS - Zach Williams 1 yd run (S. Shirley kick), 7-70 4:00 42-0

TEAM STATISTICS

FIRST DOWNS: WHS 18, WCHS 16

RUSHING YARDS: WHS 251, WCHS 196

PASSING YARDS: WHS 175, WCHS 8

TOTAL YARDS: WHS 426, WCHS 204

FUMBLES/LOST: WHS 0-0, WCHS 0-0

TURNOVERS: WHS 0, WCHS 1

PENALTY YARDS: WHS 6-58, WCHS 5-43

POSSESSION TIME: WHS 17:47, WCHS 26:30

THIRD DOWN CONVERSIONS: WHS 6-8, WCHS 6-13

FOURTH DOWN CONVERSIONS: WHS 1-2, WCHS 1-4

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

RUSHING

WHS: DOBBINS 6-99, WILLIAMS 15-99-3TD

WCHS: WILLIAMS 24-138, DYER 20-65

PASSING

WHS: DOBBINS 8-14-175-2TD

WCHS: COOK 1-4-1-8

RECEIVING

WHS: BAKER 5-84-TD, POULOS 2-69

WCHS: MATHIS 1-8

Photo Courtesy: Michael Ebaugh, Rob Moore