

Pioneers Pound Huskies, Win 4th Straight

Written by Mike Kelly

Saturday, 07 December 2013 10:48

The Watuaga High boy's basketball team didn't waste any time putting Ashe County away Friday night. The Pioneers (4-0) turned an early 3-2 lead turned into a 24-8 first-quarter advantage as they crushed Ashe County 72-43 at Lentz-Eggers Gym.

Senior Cameron Baker put on a clinic in the first half. He scored 16 of his game-high 20 points as the Pioneers defeated Ashe County (0-5) for the third consecutive time.

"When he came off the floor during a time out I gave him a high five and told him that's the way you come out and play in a rivalry game," said WHS coach Rob Sanders. "He really gave us a great jump start. But we told these guys not to look past this Ashe County team.

"Yes, they are reeling a bit, but they're coming off one of their best performances of the year (a one-point loss to North Surry Tuesday night). If we come out here just showing up to win, we could have been in a dogfight."

The Pioneers were in complete control. They eventually built their biggest lead of the game at

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42-10 with 58 seconds left in the first half on a bucket by T.J. Poulos. Ten of the 11 players Sanders utilized in Friday night's game scored.

The Huskies never got any closer than 22 points the rest of the way. Utah Jones come off the bench and poured in 12 points; Matt Lambert finished with ten. Trevor Eggers, who gave WHS its initial lead with a three, finished with nine points.

Devan Sheets led the Huskies with 11 points in the loss. Cullen Ashley finished with eight.

"We had the chemistry tonight and we had good ball movement," Baker said. "We knew coming in this was a rivalry and we had to set the tone. We scored early and often, so we could set the tempo and play our style of game."

"I told these guys after practice on Thursday that they owed Raheim (Andrews) and Jonah (Richardson) some playing time," Sanders said. "We had to come out and play like we were playing for a conference championship. Those guys are just as responsible for our success. They work hard everyday in practice. They push our guys every day. It's a team effort. And I told our guys that they needed to build a enough of a cushion that would make it comfortable for me to play these other guys."

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And the Pioneers were never seriously challenged. They led 46-20 at halftime, 56-34 after three quarters. The win gives WHS its best start since the 2009-10 season, when the Pioneers marched their way to the sectional finals (in the final game ever played at the old Lentz-Eggers Gym). But Sanders isn't getting all caught up in WHS' jackrabbit start.

"We're not looking at our record," Sanders said. "It's nice to win, and we're living in a result-based society. Everything is judged on wins and losses. We're having fun, and it makes things easier to teach and coach these guys. Sure we're 4-0, but we could easily be 0-4.

"But we still have a lot of room for improvement. We're really focusing on the mistakes we've made, so far. Rebounding, passing, our defensive responsibilities. If we want to be a championship team, we have to play together every night no matter who is on the schedule that night."

The Pioneers also swept their way through a demanding week, where they played three games in five days. And they picked three wins against three rival schools in Avery, Alexander Central and Ashe County.

"And we get to do it again next week," Sanders said. "And those teams are going to make adjustments against us next week. It's very scary. We still have to play at Avery and Ashe

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County next week, and those are tough buildings to play in. And our guys know what we're up against. We got through the first part of this rivalry week unscathed. We'll see what happens next week."

"We knew this was going to be a demanding week," Baker said. "We were a little tired (especially after Wednesday's double overtime game against Alexander Central), but having a day off Thursday helped us after that game against Alexander (Central). We have another tough week coming up. We'll see the same exact teams next week, and they'll be better prepared for us. We just have to be better prepared ourselves."

The Pioneers are scheduled to play at Avery Monday night, weather permitting. If the Pioneers get to play, coverage of those games begin at 6:05 p.m. on AM 1450, WATA and GoBlueridge.net.

NOTES: The WHS junior varsity girls defeated Ashe County 29-25. Sydney Farthing led WHS with 10 points. Karson Hamrick had six points; Tristen Derrick finished with four.....The WHS JV boys won, 43-30. Levi Wilcox led the Pioneers with 15 points. Holden Russell and Caleb Bryson each had eight points.

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WATAUGA 72, ASHE COUNTY 43

SCORE BY PERIODS 1 2 3 4 TOTAL

ASHE COUNTY 8 12 14 9 - 43

WATAUGA 22 24 10 16 - 72

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ASHE COUNTY: BOWERS 6, SPENCER 5, SHEETS 11, McNEILL 2, WOODIE 2, OWEN 3, ASHLEY 8, LUCAS 6. FG: 13, 3-FG: 4, FT: 5-6.

WHS: HARRILL 3, EGGERS 9, GAILES 2, ANDREWS 2, POULOS 4, DOBBINS 5, JONES 12, EBAUGH 5, BAKER 20, LAMBERT 10. FG: 19, 3-FG: 7, FT: 13-22.

ASHE GIRLS 33, WHS 29

It's been a tough year to say the least for head coach Klay Anderson and the Watauga High girl's basketball team. And things got a little tougher Friday night.

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WHS' (0-4) best player, Savanna Wood, suffered a sprained left ankle at practice Thursday and was forced to sit out Friday's non-conference match up against Ashe County. In turn, the Pioneers, who built an 11-point lead and held Ashe County (2-3) scoreless in the second quarter, lost 33-29 at Lentz-Eggers Gym.

It's the 19th time in the last 21 games that Ashe County has downed WHS. It's also Ashe County's tenth win at WHS in 11 years.

Morgan Hudler jump-started her team as she scored a game-high 16 points---all of those in the second half. Eight of those points came in the third quarter as the Huskies outscored WHS 17-3 in the period and turned a 15-4 halftime deficit into a 21-18 lead heading into in the fourth quarter.

"I was very, very disappointed at halftime at our performance," said Ashe County coach Laura Foster. "Of the 11 turnovers we had in the first half, only three were forced by Watauga. We treated the ball like a hot potato. I didn't even realize we didn't score in the second quarter. But I have really depending on Morgan. She 's a three-year varsity player, and I thought she played very well. And we needed it."

The Huskies, who grabbed a short-lived 4-2 lead with 6:20 left in the first quarter on a bucket by

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Savannah Brooks, didn't score again until Hudler hit two free throws with 6:20 left in the third periods. And those free throws also ignited Ashe County's dormant offense, which failed to score in two quarters in a lopsided loss at North Surry Tuesday night.

"I like our defense right now," Foster said. "But we really need to get our offense going. Also, with Savanna Wood not playing, that really helped our cause. Like I told her before the game, 'I wish she could have played tonight.' She's a very good player, and you could see that when we got the lead, they were a little hesitant and started looking for her on the floor."

The Huskies outscored WHS 29-14 in the second half. A conventional three-point play by Paige Spell with 1:33 left in the third quarter gave Ashe County its first lead at 19-16. The Huskies eventually built their lead to eight points at 26-18 with 5:33 left to play.

WHS came charging back and got withing 28-26 on a layup by Ryan Loflin with 1:48 to go, but Hudler buried a three from the top of the key that basically put the contest out of reach for the Huskies.

"We're not use to playing with a lead," Foster said. "We made some mistakes, and we started rushing ourselves a little bit, but we never let the lead get away. It's hard to play at Watuaga. They're very good on this floor. Klay does a very good job with his girls, but to tell you the truth, I was disappointed Savanna did not play. A lot of times when the star player isn't playing, it rallies the rest of team. I was worried, especially at halftime. But I'm proud of our effort in the

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second half. It was like night and day."

Spell finished with five points; Brooks and Ashton Lee each had four points apiece. Clare Harris led the Pioneers with 11 points. Loflin and Kaelin McNeill each had four points.

Wood is listed as day-to-day. There is speculation, Wood may not play until next Friday night when the Pioneers travel to Ashe County.

The Pioneers travel to Avery Monday night. Coverage begins at 6:05 on AM 1450, WATA and GoBlueridge.net.

ASHE COUNTY 33, WATAUGA 29

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SCORE BY PERIODS 1 2 3 4 TOTAL

ASHE COUNTY 4 0 17 12 - 33

WATAUGA 5 10 3 11 - 29

ASHE COUNTY: HUDLER 16, SPELL 5, LEE 4, LOPP 2, BROWN 2, BROOKS 4. FG: 9, 3-FG: 2, FT: 9-13.

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WHS: MILLSAPS 1, DERRICK 2, HARRIS 11, LOFLIN 4, McNEILL 4, BROWN 2, JONES 3, FOUTZ 2. FG: 7, 3-FG: 3, 6-10.

Photo Courtesy: Cameron Baker, WHS Athletics

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