

South Point's Josh Justice looks for running room during their game against Ashbrook Friday night.

John Clardy/
The Gazette



Live to play on

Red Raiders escape Green Wave in overtime thriller

By Phillip Gardner

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BELMONT — How in the world was this a 34-point game last time?

Ashbrook made this rematch much closer and gave South Point a scare before watching the Red Raiders pullout a 21-14 overtime win in the first round of the 3AA state playoffs Friday.

Aaron Crumbley scored on fourth down from the 1 in overtime and South Point pushed Ashbrook backwards on its possession to advance to the second round, where it will face Forestview in another Big South 3A Conference rematch.

"We fought as hard as we've fought all year long. South Point, give them credit, they fought right back," said Ashbrook coach Mike Briggs, whose team won its final two regular-season games to qualify for the playoffs. "Neither team wanted to lose this one. We just came up short in the end."

South Point (10-2) will make a trip to Forestview (10-2) next week in hopes of avenging the Jaguars' 21-20 last-second win earlier in the year. Those teams shared the Big South title.

Ashbrook (4-8) nearly spoiled that chance, controlling possession for much of

the game and holding South Point to 184 yards — half its average.

And to think South Point rushed for 224 yards and passed for another 78 in the 34-0 win earlier this season that both sides insisted was much, much closer than the score indicated.

"I remember the first game that I was thinking that, man, these boys are the biggest and fastest and hardest-hitting defense we've played," South Point quarterback Josh Justice said. "I don't know how we scored that many points. They just slipped up a couple of times."

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Inside the game

Total yards — Ashbrook 252 (234 rushing, 18 passing); South Point (135 rushing, 49 passing)

Turnovers — Ashbrook 1 (interception); South Point 0
Next week — South Point travels to Forestview in a rematch of Forestview's dramatic 21-20 win earlier this season

Key play — Shane Merrill caught a jump-ball pass with 7:35 remaining at the Ashbrook 10 to set up South Point's tying touchdown. Ashbrook's Nortavius Otis also appeared to have possession, but the tie went to the offense

Watch it again — Gaston County Schools will air the game without commentary next week on Time Warner Cable Channel 21. The game will air Monday and Tuesday at 7:30 and 9:30 p.m.

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In the end, South Point did what it took to win.

On the first overtime possession, Justice carried on the first three plays down to the 1, setting up Crumbley's TD on fourth down.

Ashbrook then fumbled on its first play of overtime and although quarterback Austin Scott recovered the ball, the play resulted in a four-yard loss. South Point brought down Angelo Crawford for a 4-yard loss on second down and took down Curtis Armstrong for a 4-yard loss on third down.

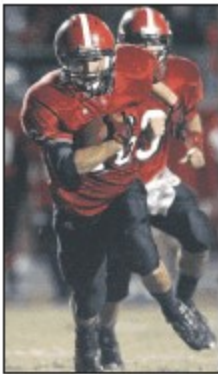
Forced to throw, Scott went deep but the ball was tipped just short of the goal line and Tydre Crawford picked it off in the end zone and took a knee to close out the wild victory.

"It was probably one of the best football games execution-wise, physical hitting-wise that I can remember since I've been here since 1990 by both teams combined," South Point coach John Devine said. "They were fast and furious and physical and executed well."

Ashbrook dominated a scoreless first half before taking leads of 7-0 and 14-7 after the break. Preston Watts' 19-yard TD run made it 14-7 with 9:11 remaining and the Green Wave appeared on its way to the upset.

But South Point answered with a six-play, 72-yard scoring drive highlighted by Shane Merrill's 43-yard grab from Ramon Costner on a halfback pass. Officials ruled that Merrill and Ashbrook's Nortavius Otis had joint possessions, and the tie goes to the offense in that situation.

Crumbley took it in from 1 yard two plays later to tie with 6:56 remaining. South Point



John Clark/The Gazette

South Point's Aaron Crumbley runs for a big gain during their game against Ashbrook Friday night.

had a chance to win in regulation but Joey Mitchell's 40-yard field goal attempt was wide left with 32.7 seconds remaining.

Ashbrook wound up with 234 rushing yards — its fourth-highest total of the season — and 252 total yards of offense. Angelo Crawford rushed for 126 yards, including a 50-yard TD run. Watts finished with 90 yards on 19 carries and Jordan Toomer was held to 35 yards on 12 carries.

Justice led South Point with 91 yards on 19 carries. Crumbley managed only 28 yards on 13 carries but scored twice, giving him 80 TDs for his career — four shy of the Gaston County record.

Ash	0 0 7 7 0 — 14
SP	0 0 7 7 7 — 21

Third quarter

A—Angelo Crawford 50 run (Andrew Robinson kick), 7:27.
SP—Josh Justice 5 run (Joey Mitchell kick), 2:27.

Fourth quarter

A—Preston Watts 19 run (Robinson kick), 9:11.
SP—Aaron Crumbley 1 run (Mitchell kick), 6:56.

Overtime

SP—Crumbley 1 run (Mitchell kick)