
VARSITY REPORT

by Jamey Andrews

“Raiders Halt Sandlapper Invasion...Squash Clover, 28-0”

In the grand scheme of things, relative to the world of high school football, a loss to a non-conference, out-of-state opponent does not spell disaster for a team's season. Generally little more than pride is on the line when teams travel across the border for the always interesting contests. But given the domination of the Clover Blue Eagles over Gaston County teams in recent history, pride was all that South Point needed as motivation to face the challenge of the Blue Eagles. Clover barreled in on the heels of a 7 game win streak through Gaston County football with their last loss coming in 2014 to Forestview. But following a thorough 28-0 smashing by the Red Raiders at Lineberger Stadium, the Blue Eagles limped back across the state line! Clover sported a potent offense with an impressive passing game that had some success, as far as completions are concerned, against South Point. But the Raiders defense was quick enough to the ball to limit big gains. South Point's offense meanwhile was steady, grinding out yardage in a contest that would see both teams limited in total possessions. In the end it was South Point's hard-nosed, unselfish, team-oriented brand of football that ended Clover's run

Winning the toss, Clover elected to set the tone early on offense. Beginning from their thirty-eight, the Blue Eagles tried to establish a ball control style of play. With the game's initial snap, South Point defensive lineman Tyler Kotula shed his block, burst into the backfield and recorded the seven yard tackle for loss. Kotula's play inspired the Red D. The Raiders defense never broke and forced a Clover punt after the Blue Eagles had crossed midfield. South Point took over at their sixteen and went to work on offense. In seven plays, quarterback Scottie Lee, fullback Jake Alexander, and split end Ray Grier moved the Raiders to the Clover nine yardline. On the eighth play of the drive, Lee followed the outstanding sealing blocks of offensive linemen Wesley Barker and Larry Dowdy around the left side for the last nine yards. Lee's touchdown put the Raiders on the board and kicker Cade Ratliff added the PAT for the early 7-0 lead. Ratliff's ensuing kickoff found the endzone for the touchback and the Blue Eagles took possession at their twenty yardline. Clover ran seven plays, mixed with a couple of penalties on both sides, to move to the South Point forty-eight. Facing a fourth and sixth the Blue Eagles opted to leave the offense on the field. The decision may have been an expression of confidence in their offense, or it could have been they had confidence that their defense could stop the Red Raiders if their attempt to convert was unsuccessful. Either way the decision was akin to a slap in the face of the Red D! A heavy Red rush forced a hurried throw that sorely missed the mark and South Point took over on downs with 1:13 remaining in the quarter. The Raiders ran three plays to end the first stanza and carried momentum into the second.

With first and ten from the Clover thirty-seven, South Point continued to churn out the yardage against the Blue Eagles defense. Three plays into the second quarter, Alexander burst through the middle, off center Ethan Jackson's right side, and raced 24 yards for the Raiders' second score. South Point advanced the lead to 14-0 with 11:18 remaining before halftime. Thriving on the established momentum the Red D flexed even more muscle. Clover picked up

nine yards on the first down of their ensuing drive, but was then shutdown by the South Point defense. Unable to gain the one yard needed and with the ball resting at the Clover thirty-six the Blue Eagles inexplicably decided to go for it on fourth down. Bad idea! The swarming Red D gang tackled the scrambling Clover quarterback clearly short of the line to make. South Point took over deep in Blue Eagles territory. Executing their own style of grind-it-out offense, the Raiders used nine plays to once again put points on the board. A perfectly thrown pass by Lee to the corner of the endzone was hauled in by a leaping Grier. Grier came down in play to notch the six. South Point moved out to the 21-0 advantage and was dominating a contest that was billed to be more competitive. The team traded possessions to end the first half with Clover punting and the Raiders running out the clock.

To begin the third South Point picked up where they left off. A seventy-five yard drive that culminated in a Caleb Gibson three yard run put the Raiders up 28-0 with 7:36 remaining in the quarter. Clover continued to fight and would finally muster some success on offense driving to the Raiders twenty-five. The Blue Eagles would be forced to attempt a 42 yard field goal. The kick fell far short as the Raiders' Mario Brandon applied the pressure. The drive served only to eat away time and the Blue Eagles were facing an end to their Gaston County run. South point closed out the quarter with possession of the ball. The Red Raiders were twelve minutes away from a second straight shutout and a 4-0 start to the season.

Desperation had long since set in for Clover, trailing 28-0 going into the final stanza. Both teams traded possessions, suffering turnovers and with Blue Eagles claiming the only scoring threat of the quarter. But South Point continued to add to the highlight reel on defense as linebacker Nate Hamilton dove in front of a would be receiver and picked off a Blue Eagles pass in the endzone. The athletic play recharged the Red Raiders and they were able to close out Clover to hand them their first loss across the state line this season. Asked about motivation for the defense and their ability to shutdown the Blue Eagles offense, the Raiders' Matthew Robinson downplayed much of the pre-game hype. "We knew it was going to be a challenge, we just answered it", said Robinson. His teammate on the defensive line, Phillip Davis explained the game plan, "We read the hats" said Davis, adding that they just fill the gaps. The defenders recognized the importance of preparation and admitted that they know the reputation of the Raiders defense.

The Clover Blue Eagles rolled through Gaston County picking up victories against Ashbrook, Forestview, and Hunter Huss before visiting Lineberger Stadium. The Red Raiders were ready, eager, and more than capable of booting the Sandlappers back across the state line with a loss. South Point used a ball control, unselfish offense and a hard-hitting, quick-to-the-ball defense to blank the Blue Eagles. Next up for the Red Raiders is the Stuart Cramer Storm... 'nuff said.

Go Get 'Em, Red!

Notable Facts and Thoughts

Will this be the year?

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