

Game Recap

Raiders Maul Panthers, Down Dudley, 74-41

Statistics in sports typically provide for conversation and little else when fans recognize that numbers give no guarantee of a victor in a contest. The nature of sports competition, and in particular high school football, requires that an outcome be decided on the field of play and not according to what's recorded on paper. Numbers may be important for analytics. They may aid coaches in determining an opponent's tendencies on offense, defense, or special teams. With this information, along with game video, a coach might script plays or designate alignments that give his team the best chance for success against an opponent. But mostly the numbers are there just to impress the reader and maybe give the fan something to hold onto when the team takes the field in a big game. In 1901, the Michigan Wolverines set a record that may be the most unlikely to be broken for as long as football teams do battle. That year, the Wolverines scored 555 points over the course of 11 games. An impressive total, but not the most eye-popping stat associated with their record that season. In those same 11 contests, Michigan surrendered 0 points to their opponents! Fast forward to 2022 and the James B. Dudley High School Panthers attempted a similar feat leading up to their hosting the South Point Red Raiders in the 2nd Round of the NCHSAA 3A State Playoffs. After a win and two losses against 4A opponents, the Panthers held six consecutive conference foes scoreless while averaging 48.5 points per game in those contests. At that point, nine games into the season, the Panthers had accumulated 332 points for, and given up 45 points against. The impressive effort earned Dudley the conference title, the #6 seed, and an opportunity to host the Red Raiders for a chance to continue their title defense. The numbers told the story of an athletic team with a potent offense and stingy defense, one capable of embarrassing "pretenders" to their crown. But the Big Red rewrote the ending! South Point proved themselves to be "contenders" by mauling the Panthers 74-41 on a rainy night in Greensboro!

South Point won the toss and deferred their option to the second half. Dudley chose to receive the ball to begin the game. An effective passing attack was evident on film and the Panthers decided to go to it early. A quick out was thrown toward the Panthers sidelines on the first play from scrimmage. DL Aiden Ramirez snatched the toss and rushed to the endzone for the touchdown. His pick-six put the Raiders up early,

extremely early, 6-0 with six seconds gone in the first quarter. "We worked on it in practice (because) we saw it on film", said Ramirez. He added that he knew it was coming. Usually, opening scores can be thought to set a tone for the game, but this contest still had 47:54 of regulation remaining, so a lot was bound to happen. And a LOT did! Dudley rebounded with a drive of 3:44 that ended with a run of 4 yards and a 7-6 lead. South Point's first offensive drive of the game picked up positive yardage, but a chop block penalty stalled the momentum. Then on consecutive possessions, Dudley proved their quick strike and big play ability. A 35-yard pass for a touchdown was followed by a punt return for a score to give the Panthers a 21-6 advantage. The Raiders needed a spark. It came on the Dudley kickoff. Back deep for the Raiders, SE Aaron Chaney assumed the role of return specialist. He fielded a short kick after bobbling the catch and scooping up the ball. Chaney then broke through a seam and sped toward the endzone. He should have been credited with the touchdown after diving across the goal line, but the trailing official decided to mark the ball at the Dudley 1-yardline. FB Cam Medlock made good on Chaney's return, bursting through the line and putting six on the board. K Charlie Birtwistle nailed the PAT to close the gap to 21-13 with 1:38 to go in the opening quarter. On the try, a lineman for the Panthers drew a flag for attempting to leap the line to go for the block. The penalty was enforced on the kickoff, allowing Birtwistle to tee up at the Dudley 45-yardline. An onside kick was in order, and it was executed perfectly. The Raiders recovered and the possession carried over into the second quarter.

Beginning play deep inside Panther's territory to open the quarter, South Point drove to the Dudley 6-yardline and faced a 4th and inches. A questionable spot seemed to require a measurement but was not called for by the referee who accepted the decision of the head linesman. The Panthers took over on downs, but the Red 'D' maintained the momentum by forcing a quick three-and-out. The Dudley punt was downed at the Raiders 46-yardline where the Red 'O' went back to work. Three quick plays put South Point at the 22 of the Panthers. From there, QB Patrick Blee lofted a perfect spiral that fell into the hands of WB Dawson Tobin. Tobin cruised into the endzone to pull South Point to within one at 21-20. The score gave notice that there was no quit in the Big Red. Rather they would keep punching as long as there was anything but zeroes on the clock. Dudley was shocked but stuck to their game plan. The 20 points hung on them was the most by any opponent since the second game of the regular season. And there would be many more to come in this contest! The Panthers answered with another touchdown on a 32-yard run and conversion that made the score 29-20 with 2:16 remaining. The Raiders began the ensuing drive at the South Point 31-yardline. From there it took a single play to keep the pressure on the Panthers. Blee kept and burst through the left side of the line and raced to the endzone. The PAT pulled the

Raiders within two at 29-27 with just under 2:00 to go in the half. Penalties and incomplete passes kept Dudley from running out the first half clock. And with 56 seconds remaining, the Red 'O' had another opportunity from the Panthers 46-yardline. A first down run picked up five yards and the clock continued to roll. Then on second down Blee lofted a pass down the right sideline to TE Jackson Blee who made the catch and was marked down at the Panthers 7-yardline. Quickly to the line, the ball was spiked to conserve time. Blee then called his own number and again burst through the left side for the 7-yard touchdown run. The QB later admitted, "the job is to score every time." "If we score every time, we can't lose", said Blee. His words pointed to the determination of the Big Red to continue to battle. South Point was up and down early but managed to carry a 34-29 lead into the half.

The teams traded punts as the third quarter began. But after the opening drive, the Raiders would never send the punt team onto the field again! On their second possession of the half, South Point increased their lead to 41-29 on a Medlock 11-yard run. The Red 'D' turned in another shutdown performance to force another Dudley punt. The wet ball (due to the rainy conditions) appeared to slip out of the punter's hands, and he fell on the ball giving the Raiders excellent field position at the Panthers 23-yardline. Four plays later, Blee was in for the 1-yard score and a 48-29 South Point advantage. The onslaught continued. After a quick strike by Dudley pulled them to within 48-35, the Raiders went to work from the South Point 18-yardline and 2:35 left in the quarter. The Red 'O' continued to wear down the weary Dudley 'D'. Moving quickly to the Panthers 26-yardline, Blee hit WB Elijah Phifer streaking straight up field for the score. Phifer's catch and run moved South Point out front 55-35 with 0:25 remaining before the final quarter. Phifer said emphasis was placed on not leaving Greensboro without a victory and that the team's mentality was to "put it all on the line." The Big Red did that and much more through three quarters of "Dudley demolition"! The Panthers carried their next possession into the final 12:00 of regulation.

A 34-yard touchdown pass and catch kept the Panthers hopes kindled early in the fourth. But the Raiders were poised to put the tiny spark out! Leading 55-41, South Point kept grinding down their opponent. A nine-play drive ended with OL Dylan Owenby falling on a loose ball in the endzone to gain six more for the Raiders. "I looked down, saw the ball, jumped on it, and I was in the endzone", said the focused lineman. Asked about the resolve of the Raiders heading into the game Owenby added, "We had to play every quarter like it was our last". There is no denying the message. This is the reality of playoff football. His score put South Point up comfortably, 62-41, but it would not be the last bid for points for the Big Red. An errant Panthers snap rolled into the

endzone on Dudley's next play from scrimmage and DL Jack Milford was on the spot! Milford slid into the endzone and outmuscled the Dudley QB for the ball and was able to add six more to the Raiders scoreboard total. "I just slid in there and he tried to recover, but I got it", said Milford. His effort put South Point up 68-41. Remarkably, in eleven games this season, including a first-round playoff win, Dudley had surrendered only 63 points. South Point scored that and more in just under 3 ½ quarters of play. If the Panthers had not yet accepted their fate, they would be forced to on their next possession. A pass on third down was lofted down the sidelines and hung in the air. Playing deep for his position, CB Jaquis Rumph broke on the ball and timed his leap perfectly to complete the interception. South Point again took over on offense and Phifer took over under center. His 7-yard run up the middle put more points on the board with 1:44 to go. The Big Red had all the answers to reach the final 74-41 outcome that ended the defending state champions' reign.

Keeping stats has an important place in football. It keeps fans engaged, coaches informed, and provides both with necessary points for conversation and analytics. But they matter little when teams take the field. Outscoring opponents looks impressive on paper, but it's not what sends a team deeper into the playoffs. The effort between the lines makes that determination. Dudley's story had been one of a high-scoring offense and a stingy defense. But South Point changed the ending of that story. The Raiders mauled the Panthers to secure a third-round meeting in the NCHSAA 3A State Playoffs. Stay focused, Red!

Go Get 'Em, Red!

Notable Facts and Thoughts

South Point hosts conference rival Crest in the 3rd round of the playoffs. The Chargers will be eager to avenge a 35-13 regular season loss to the Raiders. The powerhouses are familiar foes and are no strangers to post season play. One moves on and one goes home. Expect the Big Red to ride the Chargers out of town and keep moving forward.