

Game Recap

Raiders Outlast Wildcats, Advance Over Eastern Guilford, 28-25

New York Giants, and former Penn State, star running back, Saquon Barkley once remarked, "I fumbled my senior year in the playoffs. It just annoyed me." It seems a simple comment; one made in passing without much meaning. But thoughtfully considered, it points to an important aspect of playoff football. Every play has the potential to be a game changer. (Those mentioned last week turned out to be "outcome" changers.) But the point is, every play has some significance. The result benefits the defense or the offense. And likely, at least one player involved will remember his contribution - or lack thereof - long after the game is over. Even with accomplishments that include a stellar college career (fourth in Heisman voting) and second overall pick in the NFL draft, Barkley is still stung by a miscue in high school postseason play. The pro running back's words acknowledge that so much rides on every play in the playoffs. That's why it's important to be focused on every down. Typically, the teams that enjoy deep runs in the postseason are those that treat every play as if it will be the game changer that could mean the difference in extending a season or...not. By the fourth round, close contests should be expected. After all, only championship caliber teams make it to the latter rounds. With a date in the West Regional Final of the NCHSAA 3A State Playoffs on the line, the showdown between South Point and Eastern Guilford was as evenly matched as could be expected. Both teams were focused on the task at hand. Each squad stuck to game plans that had served them well to get to this point. And while both were victimized by miscues, they were each able to battle through to give their team a chance to advance. In the end, it was the ability of the Raiders to remain focused and execute game-winning plays that framed their success. Driven by the enthusiasm of the Big Red crowd at Lineberger Stadium, South Point moved a step closer to their ultimate goal! It was a single play among many, but a covered onside kick preserved the 28-25 victory that kept the Raiders on their path!

South Point won the toss and deferred the option to the second half. Eastern Guilford elected to receive the opening kick and the game got underway. A drive of 4:17 moved the Wildcats to the Raiders 10-yardline. Facing a 4th and 8, Eastern Guilford opted for a field goal attempt. The kick was good and the Wildcats opened the scoring with a 3-0 advantage. Beginning at their 32-yardline, the Red 'O' hit the line with their familiar ground attack and managed a pair of first downs, crossing midfield. A fumble cost the Raiders as the Wildcats recovered at their 40-yardline. The Red 'D' was equal to the task, forcing a quick 3-and-out and forcing a punt. With 3:08 remaining on the 1st quarter clock, South Point managed positive yardage out to midfield before the drive

stalled. The Raiders punted with under a minute remaining and Eastern Guilford carried their third possession of the game into the second stanza.

The Wildcats moved to the Raiders 39-yardline where they faced a 4th and 3. The punt team took the field. The snap was good but the Big Redrush was better! Coming off the left side of the line, LB Winter Kincaid extended to block the punt. His effort was rewarded when teammate LB Chance Ford broke around the right side, caught the ball on the bounce and raced to the endzone for six. K Charlie Birtwistle's PAT was true and South Point was on the board with a 7-3 lead. Execution on special teams took some of the sting out of the first quarter fumble that stalled the Raiders' momentum. The teams stuck to their game plans with Eastern Guilford spreading the field and using a mix of passes and runs along with a scrambling quarterback to pick up yardage. The Raiders mixed in a single pass play with their triple option to move the ball. Possessions were traded up to the 2:48 mark. From that point, the Wildcats managed a drive from their 27-yardline to the South Point four. A run around the line regained the lead for Eastern Guilford and they took the 10-7 advantage into the half.

The Raiders received the opening kick of the second half and the Red 'O' went straight to work. Grinding out the yards, South Point moved from their 39-yardline to the Wildcats two. FB Cam Medlock punched in for the touchdown that put the Raiders back in front 14-10. The momentum shift was not yet firmly established as Eastern Guilford mounted a drive on the ensuing possession that took them to the South Point four. Then on a 1st and goal play, LB Brock Wilsey grabbed the Wildcat running back just as the handoff was completed and the ball popped free. DL Josh Crowder dove on the loose ball and thwarted the scoring opportunity. Momentarily. The Raiders failed to pick up a first down and were forced to punt from deep in their territory. A high snap was chased down and collected in the endzone by Punter Aiden Ramirez. Ramirez made a strong effort to advance the ball to save the safety, but he was unable to gain the yards needed for a new set of downs. Eastern Guilford took over and in one play had retaken the lead, 17-14 with 1:22 remaining in the quarter. With their next drive, South Point managed the Wildcats 35-yardline before carrying the possession into the final 12 minutes of regulation.

Facing a 2nd and 5 to begin the 4th quarter, the Red 'O' kept the drive alive picking up chunks of yardage on the ground. QB Patrick Blee carried over from 11-yards out to South Point the 21-17 advantage with 9:57 to go in one team's season. Eastern Guilford tried to answer but the Red 'D' refused to cave. The Wildcats managed to move the ball by virtue of a scrambling and elusive quarterback. But South Point continued to battle and finally forced the turnover on downs. The clock stood at 5:34 and the Raiders were finally in position to punch their ticket to the regional final. Medlock barreled through from the Eastern Guilford 2-yardline to add to his total yards

and increase the advantage for South Point at 28-17. Medlock later addressed the offensive effort that included his accounting for 203 yards on the ground. "We just stayed together and we just kept churning out those yards", said the fullback, alluding to the execution of the South Point game plan. Just under two minutes remained (1:20) and the Raiders' season seemed destined to continue. But this was the fourth round and teams playing this late in the year do not quit. The Wildcats came back out swinging. Plays of desperation, including a long pass completion to near the South Point 14-yardline kept the Eastern Guilford hopes alive. Two plays later, a 6-yard pass drew the Wildcats closer. The ensuing two-point conversion was good and with a 28-25 lead, the Raiders knew their season would hinge on covering an onside kick. (Of course the same could be said for the Wildcats.) The kick was drilled into the ground and took a high hop. An Eastern Guilford hand contacted the ball but possession was not secured. Players from both sides went to the ground. And when the pile was uncovered, the ball was red! The Raiders offense came on, took two knees, and South Point advanced with the win!

Every play has significance in playoff football. Even NFL professionals like Saquon Barkley of the New York Giants still recall the good - and bad - of their efforts during high school postseason runs. Teams that are focused and recognize that every play could be a game changer are better able to execute a game plan that helps them stay on track to reach their goals. The fourth round of the NCHSAA 3A State Playoffs pitted two evenly matched combatants. And when the clock went to 00:00, the Big Red survived to fight again! Stay focused, Red!

Go Get 'Em, Red!

Notable Facts and Thoughts

South Point faces the East Lincoln Mustangs in the West Regional final. The Mustangs dismantled the Mountaineers of Kings Mountain in a fourth round battle of unbeaten.