

Game Recap

Raiders Outlast Jaguars – Down Forestview in 2 OTs, 17-14

In every season there is usually one game in which the heart of a team is fully on display. It may be the contest that salvages a season in which conference championship hopes are lost. It may be the matchup that is assured to be the hardest hitting based on a rivalry dominated by one program. Or it may be the one challenge that demands effort above that required in previous competitions. For the South Point football program, and especially this year's squad, each of those statements held true last Friday night at Joe Alala Stadium on the campus of Forestview. South Point and Forestview found themselves battling for pride, having lost chances to finish atop the conference standings. The Red Raiders have compiled an all-time 20-3 record against the Jaguars, proving dominance in the series. And Forestview had put together a respectable season that separated them from the bottom tier of the Big South 3A standings. The lines had been drawn and the clash begun. The foes battled in a conference contest that saw each move the ball up and down the field. Both would gain and both would lose momentum. And at the end of regulation, both would have seven points on the scoreboard. The tally remained even at fourteen after one overtime session. The game had already produced victories for both sides, those of the "moral" type as the contest was a hard fought affair. Each team had experienced successes in all phases of the game. But moral victories are not accounted for in the W-L column. A winner had yet to be determined.

And then the ball was spotted to begin the second overtime -

With identical conference records at 3-2, the stage was set for a battle between South Point and Forestview. Any marginal advantage would be coveted, and the Raiders were given first opportunity on offense. The motivated Jaguars defense stood up to the early challenge and after consecutive false start penalties by the visitors, South Point was forced to punt. The Red 'D' quickly returned in kind by forcing a three-and-out on the Jaguars first possession. The Raiders managed to move the chains on their next drive but became their own worst enemy with another false start, a muffed pitch, and an interception that was returned to the Raiders' one yardline. In two plays Forestview had the early 7-0 advantage. And when South Point was forced to punt on the ensuing possession, with time running out in the quarter, it appeared that the Jaguars would maintain the momentum. But in an unusual turn, the Forestview returner opted to dive on the live ball rather than allow the Raiders to down the punt. The miscue was recovered by South Point and the Raiders continued the drive, carrying the possession into the second quarter.

South Point faced a 2nd and 8 at the Jaguars' eighteen to begin the stanza. A pickup of five yards by RB Tyson Riley had the Raiders at the eleven needing three for the fresh set of downs. On the third down play, QB Elijah Phiffer handed off to Riley just ahead of contact by a blitzing middle linebacker. Riley broke through the left side and charged to the endzone. K Charles Birtwistle knotted the game at 7-7 with the PAT. The game clock indicated 11:09 remaining in

the half with Forestview set to receive the ball. The Jaguars embarked on a drive that included a mix of positive plays, negative mistakes and some solid defensive play by the Raiders. Forestview was finally forced to punt but not until they had taken 8:28 off the clock. The Red 'D' managed to finally get off the field but the Red 'O' would be called on to, at a minimum, hold the ball for the remainder of the half. The Raiders offense delivered considering they took possession at their own three yardline after the Jaguars punt. South Point ran out the clock and the teams went to the half tied.

Forestview received the opening kick of the second half. The teams continued to battle with momentum swings throughout the third quarter. Neither was able to mount a significant scoring threat as both defenses held firm. A Jaguars' fumble and a pair of Raiders punts marked the events of the stanza and the teams moved to the fourth still even.

The final 12:00 of regulation flowed as had the previous three quarters, a hard fought battle that seemed headed to the winner being decided on a final play. The squads traded punts and Forestview claimed the final drive opportunity with 1:38 to go. The Jaguars were forced to begin at their ten yardline after a P Dylan Nicks punt of 55 yards was downed. Unable to advance against the Red 'D', Forestview opted for conservative play to take the game to overtime.

NCHSAA rules dictate that teams alternate possessions with four downs to score from the ten yardline in overtime play. Rules further address continued ties, dictating a point in the contest at which two-point conversions must be attempted after touchdowns, and so on. South Point had the first possession of the first overtime session. A Riley run of two and a Phiffer gain of six put the Raiders at the two yardline on third down. Riley sped around the left end untouched for the score and South Point's first lead of the game. The Raiders held the 14-7 lead with the Forestview possession to come. After no gain on first down, the Jaguars were able to punch through to even the score at 14. Forestview would then have the first possession of the second overtime session.

With the ball at the ten, the Jaguars second overtime drive began and in two downs the Red 'D' had forced a third and goal from the nine. From his defensive line position, DL Aiden Ramirez executed a textbook spin move off the line of scrimmage and charged to the quarterback. His teammate DL Xarique Culbreath had also broke through leaving the quarterback with little options for escape. With Ramirez' speed the Jaguar signal caller was quickly caught and smothered to the ground for the sack. The fifteen yard loss moved the ball to the twenty-three yardline where on fourth and goal Forestview was left to attempt a 40 yard field goal to keep their hopes alive. The kick was wide left and the score stood at 14-14 with South Point poised to end the contest. The Raiders immediately sent the kicking unit onto the field. OL Wyatt Triplett's snap was on line, backup holder Ashton Green's hands were sure, and Birtwistle's kick was true! The result was a 27 yard field goal that crushed the hearts of the Jaguars faithful and ignited the RaiderNation! More importantly, the clutch kick validated the outstanding defensive

effort of the Big Red 'D' given the amount of time they spent on the field and keeping the Forestview offense at bay.

Asked about their parts in the outcome, Riley, Ramirez, and Birtwistle weighed in on the tremendous effort. Riley credited the blocking of his teammates that allowed him to score the go-ahead touchdown in the first overtime and give the Raiders their first lead of the game. "Everybody was in the box and as soon as they made their blocks, I was able to get through", said Riley. Asked to address the sack in the second overtime that set the Raiders up for the win, Ramirez rather spoke of the strength of the Raiders defense. "That was just all effort, effort was all we needed to give our offense a chance to win the ballgame", explained the defensive lineman. Birtwistle admitted that, due to injury, backup holder Ashton Green was forced into service before the overtime. Asked about the nerves he may have experienced prior to the game-winning attempt, the steady kicker insisted, "When he gets the ball in his hands I know I've got to do my job and I have to rely on my teammates to do their job." He added that neither he nor any of his teammates had a doubt that the points were going on the board!

This season may have taken a turn that the Red Raiders consider unacceptable. The mark of a great program is the routine expectation to be the best in the league. With such programs there's never a question of the heart of the team that takes the field. And if the lack of a conference championship this season has given cause for doubt, all was erased last Friday night at Forestview. The Raiders and the Jaguars met with identical conference records and were set to battle for county pride. The contest proved evenly matched for the foes as the game entered overtime, each with a single touchdown to their credit. The Big Red never backed down, but continued to battle to the end and beyond. They left everything on the field and their effort was rewarded as soon as the ball was spotted – in the second overtime!

Go Get 'Em, Red!

Notable Facts and Thoughts

South Point ends the regular season next week, hosting the North Gaston Wildcats. For the season the Wildcats own a single victory over conference foe Hunter Huss. The Red Raiders have an opportunity to solidify their position in the conference standings as the season winds down. Don't look past a team with nothing to lose and everything to gain. Go Big Red!

*There will be no Twitter coverage from @superraider88 for the North Gaston contest. Our apologies for any inconvenience.