

Game Recap

Raiders KO Jaguars, Oust Forestview, 27-7

The hype leading up to the rematch between South Point and Forestview was naturally expected given the stakes of the outcome and the fact that the regular season contest required two overtimes to determine a victor. Motivation is never in short supply when playing in a game that could mark the end of a season. And for the Jaguars, the heartbreaking loss to the Raiders during the regular season would certainly inspire South Point's conference rival to exact the revenge they felt they deserved. But hype simply initiates conversation. And motivation isn't exclusive to a single team in battle. Rather what matters is what takes place on the field once the whistle blows. In this third round matchup of the NCHSAA 3A Playoffs, what happened was a complete game win by the home standing Red Raiders! On offense, defense, and special teams, the South Point effort earned them the opportunity to "practice on Thanksgiving Day", to prepare for a fourth round contest with Crest. The Raiders turned an even first quarter tilt in their favor midway through the second, and never looked back. The result was a dismantling of the Jaguars and an end to the rival's season.

With the opening possession of the contest Forestview came out with intention to pick up big yards quickly. But a first down run lost a yard and consecutive incomplete passes marked the first three-and-out by the Red 'D'. The punt that followed was shanked out of bounds and the Raiders offense immediately gained in the battle for field position. RB Ashton Harris, QB Elijah Phiffer, and RB Tyson Riley alternated carries to move the ball from the Forestview thirty-four to the game's first points. Running through holes created by the O-line, Wyatt Triplett, Ethan Thagard, Hudson Spargo, Sullivan Absher, and Jacob Patterson, the trio quickly moved inside the Jaguars' five yardline. From three yards out, Riley put six on the board and K Charles Birtwistle added the extra point for the 7-0 advantage. Forestview answered on the ensuing drive, aided by a pair of Raiders penalties that moved the ball deep into South Point territory. A one yard run evened the score at 7-7, and the stage was set for what appeared to be a mirror image of the contest played between the rivals four weeks earlier. Neither team mounted another scoring threat in the first, and the Jaguars carried their third possession of the game into the second quarter.

Attempting a mix of plays, Forestview managed to move the sticks but were routinely forced into long yardage situations by the Raiders defense. Minimal gains on the ground would send the Jaguars to the air. But The Red 'D' was efficient in pass coverage and the D-line accounted for numerous pressures on the quarterback. The Jaguars punted and South Point took over at their thirty-four yardline to begin their third drive of the game. The Forestview defense was no match for the triple option of South Point, and the Raiders moved downfield eating time off the clock along the way. A seven-yard run by Phiffer put South Point ahead, 14-7, with 5:43 remaining before halftime. A punt by each team ended play in the first half. And South Point held the one score advantage going to the locker room.

Tyson Riley scooped up the squib kick that signaled the start of the third stanza, and the speedy ball carrier set the Raiders up at midfield to begin play. South Point managed a drive of 5:55 before adding three with a 31 yard field goal by Birtwistle. The Raiders lead moved to 17-7 and the Big Red was starting to flex some muscle with the two possession advantage. The Jaguars faced a 4th and 1 from their thirty-five on the ensuing drive after a third down stick by DB Jaquis Rumph. A pitch and run to the left was met head-on by LB Ryan Harris. Harris moved laterally to follow the play and stood the ball carrier up in the backfield. As the two were going to the ground, the back tossed a lateral to his quarterback who was trailing the play. The Raiders' pursuit was too much as no fewer than nine red hats were behind the line of scrimmage by that time. DB Ben Lunsford was quickest to the scrambling quarterback. His sure tackle ended the play, but more importantly gave his offense possession at the Forestview 21 yardline. On their first down play, Phiffer pulled the ball out of Riley's grasp, drew the defense, before pitching to RB Cam Medlock. Medlock broke around the end and cut back inside, covering the needed yardage for the touchdown. The South Point lead stood at 24-7 with 3:39 to go in the third quarter. Describing the one play, 21-yard touchdown run that put the Raiders up by three scores, Medlock admitted that the play doesn't typically incorporate a pitch but that Phiffer made the right decision as the play developed. He recognized the blocking of a teammate as well. "Great blocking by (WR) Joseph O'Neil; he ran (the defender) off in the endzone and it was there", said Medlock, adding "I've got to give credit to my teammates." The Red 'D' maintained their grip on momentum by forcing another three-and-out series later in the quarter. South Point carried their next possession into the final stanza.

The Raiders had control of the contest and the emphasis shifted to clock control and continued stout defensive play. It was mission accomplished as the Jaguars never threatened but were forced to turn the ball over on downs twice in the final twelve minutes. In between, Birtwistle added a 23-yard field goal at the 4:56 mark that would become the final, 27-7.

The win earned South Point another game in the playoffs. Asked about the defensive effort, DL Xarique Culbreath said, "It was a dogfight on the line, we did our jobs." His teammate, DL Shane Wilson, echoed the point after accounting for a sack in the fourth quarter to force a fourth down. "Our main objective was to get as many three-and-outs as we (could) to get their offense off the field and ours on so we could score", stated Wilson. The work of the defense had as its reward short fields from which the offense was able to take advantage and stay in front. The common theme among the players comments emphasized the intent to play for one another and that is the mark of a championship caliber program.

South Point's dismantling of Forestview proved that attention given to pre-game hype carries no weight. The proof is in the effort applied once the whistle blows. And when the final horn sounded at Lineberger Field last Friday night only one team was afforded the opportunity to practice on Thanksgiving Day. And that team wears RED!

Go Get 'Em, Red!

Notable Facts and Thoughts

South Point is faced with another rematch in their playoff run. The Red Raiders travel to Crest for an opportunity to avenge an early season, one point loss. More importantly, a win gains an opportunity to reach the semifinal contest of the NCHSAA 3A Playoffs.