

Game Recap

Raiders Good Enough; Whip Wildcats, 35-14

Stating the obvious does not fix a problem. It does nothing to correct an issue that, in football, can mean the difference between winning and losing. It can't motivate a team to play to their potential. In short, stating the obvious does little more than initiate a conversation. In Super Bowl XXIV, the Denver Broncos stood in the way of the San Francisco 49ers attempt to win their second straight championship. Linebacker Karl Mecklenburg of the Broncos commented before the game on what it would take to slow down a potent 49ers offense. "Defensively, I think it's important for us to tackle," he said. There's no denying the accuracy of his statement, but unfortunately his wisdom didn't carry over onto the field. San Francisco ran roughshod over Denver, enroute to a one-sided, 55-10 victory. With that bit of trivia digested, here's another obvious statement to consider, winning ugly is still winning. And even though the scoreboard suggested that South Point's three touchdown victory over North Gaston was easy, the reality is, it was anything but the thrashing it appeared. The Raiders were at times their own worst enemy. Possessions with scoring potential took negative turns and the Raiders found themselves having to overcome costly mistakes. Injuries forced changes in key positions on the field. Fortunately, the Big Red managed and were able to notch their third consecutive victory. But there's work to be done in the week leading into the playoffs. South Point will need to lean heavily on the heart and character of the team to carry them in the postseason. Fortunately, heart and character are qualities fully evident in this group of Red Raiders.

South Point took the opening kick and set out to establish the flow of the contest. The Raiders controlled the line of scrimmage, driving to the Wildcats 10-yardline and threatening to put the first points on the board. But a costly fumble was recovered by North Gaston inside their five. With momentum from the stop, the Wildcats went for big plays through the air. And although the throws seemed to be little more than heaves into the air that fell into the hands of their receivers, the results were the same. In four plays, North Gaston had tilted the scoreboard in their favor, leading 8-0. South Point was put immediately on notice that the Wildcats intended to put years of futility in the series behind them and give the Raiders their best shot in this contest. The Big Red responded. Driving from their 45-yardline, the Raiders moved to the Wildcats twelve. From there, WB Harrison McKinney, lining up in the FB position, burst through for the touchdown. K Charlie Birtwistle booted the PAT and the gap was closed to 8-7. The Raiders defense dug in on the ensuing Wildcats possession. The Red 'D' forced a punt and South Point took over with good field position near midfield. A solid drive to the North Gaston 4-yardline ended with another Mckinney run for points. The Raiders overcame the early quarter miscue to take the lead 14-8 as the second stanza approached.

With the ball to begin the second, the Wildcats were not able to sustain a drive and were again forced to punt. The kick took a South Point bounce and the Raiders began play at the North Gaston thirty-five. South Point kept the ball on the ground...literally. Another fumble stalled a scoring threat as the Wildcats once again covered a Raiders miscue. The Red 'D' stood firm and were able to stop North Gaston for a third consecutive possession. The following punt took another South Point bounce and the Raiders benefitted with a drive starting at the Wildcats 48-yardline. Moving quickly to the North Gaston

twenty-five, FB Chayne Ford got onto the scoresheet with a 25-yard run for six. South Point built a 21-8 advantage and would carry that lead into the intermission after holding the Wildcats on downs on the ensuing possession.

The third quarter provided the opportunity for South Point to "clean the slate", eliminate the mistakes and take charge of the contest. And everything seemed on track when the Red 'D' held the Wildcats on downs to begin the second half. North Gaston had driven deep into South Point territory, but could not put up points. The Raiders took over at their 8-yardline and rode the momentum to two big plays. A McKinney run to the Wildcats twenty-six was followed by a QB Patrick Blee run for the score. South Point moved in front, 28-8, with time remaining in the third. North Gaston managed a measure of respect on their next drive to draw within two scores on a touchdown pass. The Raiders lead was cut to 28-14 as the final quarter neared.

With the ball to begin the final 12:00 of regulation, South Point was only able to burn some clock before punting the ball back to North Gaston. The Wildcats could muster no threat and were forced to return the ball to the Raiders. Then things took another ugly turn. The teams traded interceptions as time ran down in the final quarter. Finally, South Point was able to sustain a drive that began at midfield to put the final points on the board. A Ford 5-yard run accounted for the final 35-14 victory.

Stating the obvious won't correct the mistakes that could cost a team a victory. Playoff football is unforgiving. So teams with the best chances to advance limit their miscues. At this point in the season, there's no more time to master technique or learn new habits. The Raiders will need to ride the momentum built from three straight victories, and rely on the heart and character of the team to carry them through the playoffs. At this time of year, champions will make themselves known. And everybody knows the Big Red!

Go Get 'Em, Red!

Notable Facts and Thoughts

South Point travels to Statesville to face the Greyhounds to open the playoffs. No common opponents between the Raiders and Greyhounds, but one note of possible interest, Statesville crushed the defending 3A state champions, East Lincoln Mustangs, in the regular season (42-14).