

## Game Recap

### Red Raiders Close the Deal; Top Hilltoppers in Final Seconds, 29-22

The year was 1982, the New York Giants were visiting the Washington Redskins during an NFL players' strike shortened season. Nine games would be played that year, giving teams little time to be at their best to earn playoff spots. Washington was seeking to end a five year post-season drought, and a chance to advance to their second Super Bowl in team history (they lost to the undefeated Miami Dolphins in Super Bowl VII, 1973). Trailing 14-3 at halftime, the Redskins had seemed to lose all focus and intensity and were on the verge of slipping back into mediocrity. In his halftime speech, Coach Joe Gibbs is said to have scripted how the second half would play out. He told his team that they would score a quick touchdown to get back in the game, adding that the shift of momentum would serve as the push for the win and a date in the playoffs. As described, Washington scored the touchdown, but missed the extra point making the score 14-9 in favor of the Giants. The teams battled back and forth as the clock wound down. The fourth quarter began, and the flow of the game did not change. Finally, the Redskins mustered a drive for 31-yard field goal attempt. The kick sailed through as the snow began to fall on Robert F. Kennedy Stadium. The struggle continued with the Giants ahead 14-12. With just over three minutes to go, Washington began a drive from their 29-yardline. They chipped their way to the New York 19 before a holding call pushed them back to the 25 and mere seconds remaining. Mark Moseley, the last of the old-school, straight-on kickers trotted onto the field. The Redskins lined up for the 42-yard attempt that could advance their season. The snap, the hold, Moseley's approach, and the kick...end over end and side-to-side is how the wobbly kick was described. The ball sailed through the uprights and Moseley was carried off the field by his teammates after securing the 15-14 victory. Washington would not lose another game that season. The Redskins avenged their only Super Bowl loss by defeating the Miami Dolphins in Super Bowl XVII.

The point of the "history lesson" is to emphasize that no matter the type of year a team is having, there is always one game that can be pointed to as the one that changed the complexion or course of the season. And while there is still plenty of football to be played and post season positioning to be decided, for South Point, that one game may have been played at R-S Central last Friday night. Battling injuries and depending heavily upon a "patchwork" effort, the Red Raiders proved capable of great success late in a contest and perhaps even late in the season. And the factor that may go unnoticed by casual fans, given the Raiders' "next man up" mentality, is that players have often been called upon to fill positions that they may have only played briefly in practice. South Point has depended on the sheer will and athleticism of the players to put points on the board and make stops on the field. The effort was outstanding against the Hilltoppers as the Red Raiders scored with 40 seconds to go to secure the 29-22 conference victory!

With the ball to begin the contest, the Red 'O' marched from their 39-yardline to the Hilltoppers' three. Under center for South Point was Devon King and on a first and goal from

the three, the QB bounced off the left side for the score. K Carson Smith drilled the PAT and the ground-pounding drive of 6:38 put South Point up 7-0. R-S Central countered with a running attack that was formidable. The Hilltoppers drove from their 43-yardline to the Raiders seven but could not gain more yardage against the Red 'D'. The Raiders forced a field goal attempt. The 25 yard kick sailed wide left and the South Point lead remained at seven with twenty-seven seconds remaining in the first quarter.

The second stanza continued as a hard fought battle in the trenches. The Raiders turned the ball over on downs with their first possession of the quarter. The Hilltoppers fared no better. After crossing midfield and gaining ground into South Point territory, penalties cost R-S. Facing a first and long, the Hilltopper quarterback dropped back and was forced to scramble by a pursuing LB Jackson Risk. An ill-advised heave was picked out of the air by CB Will Rhinehart. Rhinehart returned the ball to the Raiders' sixteen but more importantly he and his defensive teammates thwarted the R-S advance. South Point would be forced to punt on the possession but held the ball long enough for the Red Defense to be ready to make a stop of their own. The Hilltoppers' ensuing drive was stalled, forcing another punt. The give-and-take ended the half and the teams retreated to the intermission with South Point up by the single score.

Entering the contest, the Hilltoppers and Red Raiders claimed identical 2-1 conference records, so on paper the teams seemed to be evenly matched. R-S buffered that notion by taking the initial drive of the third quarter 79 yards for the equalizing touchdown. The momentum shift carried over for the Hilltoppers defense as they would stop the Raiders on the next drive, taking over on downs. South Point returned the favor by deflecting a fourth down pass at the goalline on the home team's next drive. With the ball at their 34 yardline, Rhinehart got under center for South Point. The speedy QB took the snap, cut around the left side between a couple of sealing blocks, and raced to the R-S 4 yardline. FB Naseem Jones dove to the two on the next play. Then on second and goal, a fumbled exchange nearly doomed the Red Raiders. But alertly, Rhinehart dove on the ball across the goalline for the touchdown and a 14-7 South Point lead. The third stanza ended with the Hilltoppers in possession and driving.

A light drizzle started to fall as the final 12:00 began. Taking advantage of a short field, R-S drove to the South Point 2 yardline. The Hilltoppers punched in for what was likely the tying score. But after a "phantom" offsides penalty against the Raiders was flagged, the offense for R-S returned to the field. The conversion was successful and South Point trailed 15-14 with 11:20 remaining. Covering the ensuing kickoff at their forty-one, South Point began play on offense. On first down, Rhinehart faked to Jones up the middle then pitched to RB Hunter Hogue. Hogue juggled the pitch before securing the ball and rumbling to the Hilltoppers' 44 yardline. On the next play, Rhinehart tried the right side and promptly scampered 44 yards for the go-ahead touchdown. South Point was back up 21-15 with plenty of time left on the clock. R-S took advantage. A drive of nearly seven minutes resulted in 7 points and a 22-21 lead for the Hilltoppers. More importantly, South Point's gallant effort was 3:47 away from not being enough. But the heart of the Red Raiders would not allow them to accept defeat! Beginning at their 45, the Red 'O' quickly moved across midfield. Pushing to the Hilltoppers 34 and with

under a minute to go, Rhinehart dropped back. The South Point southpaw launched a pass in the direction of King who had returned to the game in a wide receiver position. The pass was on target, leading the determined receiver. King laid out and grabbed the pass in the endzone for the touchdown! “We knew it would be a fight to the end”, said Rhinehart. He added, “When one of our best players goes down, another man has got to step up and that’s what we did tonight.” His teammate echoed the attitude. “My team needed me; I had to step in and play my role”, said King. The two point conversion was successful and with forty seconds of regulation remaining, the Raiders reclaimed the lead, 29-22. The Red ‘D’ slammed the door on the Hilltoppers, and South Point carried home the hard fought, gut-wrenching, victory.

Teams that realize success in a season can usually point to one game, or maybe even one play, that signaled something special was (is) possible. The Red Raiders have battled their share of adversity this season, mostly in the form of injuries both in game and in practice. They have been forced to fill slots with players who have limited or no experience in the position they’re called on to play. Such was the case at R-S Central. And depending upon how the 2019 season progresses, this game could be the one that is pointed to as a turning point, the one game that defined the Red Raiders and their heart to fight through to the end. The confidence of the Red Raiders should be bolstered by their understanding that ‘next man up’ means not only stepping in when needed, but also stepping in WHERE needed.

Go Get ‘Em, Red!

### **Notable Facts and Thoughts**

Red Raiders keep pace with the top half of the conference standings. Games with Chase and Shelby remain.