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# VARSAITY REPORT

*by Jamey Andrews*

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“Red Raiders Manhandle Mountaineers...Cruise to 3<sup>rd</sup> Round Over Tuscola, 45-6”

A team with one loss on a season may boast an intimidation factor entering the second round of the NCHSAA 3A State Playoffs. The Tuscola Mountaineers fit the description and that quality may have been sustained through the first six minutes of the initial quarter last Friday night at Lineberger Stadium. The Mountaineers turned momentum and a South Point turnover into an early 6-0 lead in the second round contest. But the Raiders remained poised and took control, pulling away with a convincing 45-6 victory to advance to the third round of the playoffs. South Point will now host the only “other” team to defeat Tuscola, the Pisgah Bears. Pisgah, by virtue of their overtime, 23-20, win over Tuscola during the regular season will come in with an equally impressive overall record. But, as they say, records mean nothing at this point of the season; all that matters is who’s still standing at the end! And considering any intimidation factor, it could be the Red Raiders who may possess such a quality after having surrendered a scant six points in two playoff contests. No doubt, South Point is focused when they take the field! And the reward is “four more quarters.”

Tuscola took the opening kickoff and began play from their 29 yardline. A quick three-and-out by the Red ‘D’ forced a Mountaineer punt. The Raiders defense seemed to have grabbed the early momentum in the contest. But on the South Point drive that ensued, starting from the Raiders’ 31, a tipped pass interception set Tuscola up on the home side of the fifty. The Red ‘D’ stiffened, forcing a fourth and five. A mobile quarterback hit an open receiver in the open field and the scamper took the ball to the Red ten. Aided by an encroachment penalty, the Mountaineers scored first on a two yard push into the endzone. The PAT was contested and with 5:25 remaining in the first, the Red Raiders would have to regroup and play from behind. The Red ‘O’ did what they do best! A ground-pounding 12 play, 70 yard drive culminated with an 8 yard Jake Alexander run to knot the score. Thomas Lempereur’s PAT put the Raiders in front 7-6 with 24 seconds remaining in the quarter. The following Tuscola possession would carry over into the second stanza.

Early in the second, South Point forced another Mountaineer punt. Then to put to rest any question that they had control of the game, the Raiders cranked out another impressive 12 play drive. This one covered 82 yards and ended with an Alexander run of 26 yards. The South Point scoreboard advantage grew to 14-6, but the more important advantage was the clock-chewing, scoring drives that proved the Raiders had command of the contest. With fewer than five minutes remaining (4:50) before the half, South Point was not satisfied with the 8 point edge. The Mountaineers looked to make up the difference by going to the air. The improved, and now considerably reliable, Red pass defense flexed some muscle! Cornerback Nick Farmer picked off a Tuscola pass and set up his offense at the Mountaineers’ forty. South Point took a seven play drive from that point to take a 21-6 lead on a quarterback Scottie Lee 8 yard run. Tuscola ran into the teeth of the Red ‘D’ on the next drive and ran out the clock. The teams went to the locker room with the Raiders up two scores.

With the ball to begin the third quarter, South Point took advantage of a Max Mead kickoff return to the Tuscola 26 yardline. Three plays into the possession and out of the wingback position, Farmer took a pitch and ran around the left side for 11 yards and the fourth Raiders touchdown. South Point had advanced the lead to 28-6 with 10:47 remaining in the third. The Raiders defense continued to pressure the Mountaineers and the result was another three-and-out possession. It had become obvious that the Raiders were not content to simply protect a lead and thus alter their approach to the game. In every phase, South Point fought from whistle to whistle and their effort never waned even when faced with having to overcome mistakes. A promising drive that followed the Tuscola punt ended in a stripped ball turnover that was recovered by the Mountaineers near their goalline. Unfazed by the momentum shift, the Raiders defense once again stiffened. With defensive ends Matthew Robinson and Lawrence Haley applying pressure, the scrambling Mountaineer quarterback forced a throw that was picked off by linebacker Nick Muse. Muse returned the pick fifteen yards to pad the lead and regain momentum for the Red Raiders. South Point had fought to a 35-6 lead and they were not done! With the defense back on the field, the Raiders would stop the Mountaineers on a fourth and two at the Tuscola 39 to give the Red offense another chance. Wingbacks Caleb Gibson and Ty Tinker, along with Alexander and Lee worked the ball to the Tuscola twelve. From there, Lempereur drilled a 29 yard field goal to put the Raiders up 38-6 going into the fourth quarter.

On a possession that extended from the third, the Mountaineers face a 2<sup>nd</sup> and 10 from their 21 yardline. Pressure from a host of Raiders forced another quarterback scramble and this time linebacker Nathan Hamilton broke on the pass and picked it off deep in Tuscola territory. Two plays later, Lee lofted a jump ball to the endzone. A leaping Ray Grier made the grab and put more points on the board for South Point. The Raiders advantage had grown to 45-6 and, with that score, only 11:21 remained in the Tuscola season! On the next Mountaineer drive, Farmer picked off his second interception of the game and returned to the Tuscola 49 to set up the Red offense. The swing enabled many backups to enter the contest. The sustained drive killed the clock before turning the ball over to the Mountaineers at the Tuscola fifteen. In fact, neither team would mount another scoring threat but the damage had been done.

South Point ignored any intimidation factor that accompanies facing an opponent with a single loss on the season. The Red Raiders withstood, and emphatically countered, an opening score by running away from the Tuscola Mountaineers to advance to the third round of the NCHSAA 3A State Playoffs. In two playoff contests, the effort of the Raiders has been unmatched. The Red 'D' has held opponents to minimal output. The Red 'O' has owned the clock and put points on the board. And the Raiders' special teams have aided both the offense and defense by winning the battle of field position. The most impressive attribute of South Point's playoff run has been the effort. The team's determination to battle from start to finish, and on every play, sends a message to all opponents. No doubt as the playoffs progress, any intimidation factor belongs to the Red Raiders. The next season to end? The Pisgah Bears.

Go Get 'Em, Red!

**Notable Facts and Thoughts**

South Point scored in every quarter of the Tuscola game. Including the twenty-eight straight through the conference regular season, the Raiders have now scored in 35 of 36 quarters. And the defense has allowed a paltry 6 points in the last 15 quarters of play. This is evidence of a team that has continued to improve with every game. With the second round victory the Raiders have gained four more quarters...four more quarters in which to score and shutout an opponent!

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