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# VARSAITY REPORT

*by Jamey Andrews*

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“Red Raiders Advance To Second Round...Blast West Henderson, 59-0”

During the NCHSAA 3A State Playoffs, the name of the game is “survive and advance.” At South Point the focus is to “earn four more quarters.” The Red Raiders accomplished that goal in a big way by easily dismantling the West Henderson Falcons, 59-0, at Lineberger Stadium last Friday night. The playoffs were delayed by a week due to game cancellations forced by Hurricane Matthew earlier in the season. South Point reeled off five consecutive double digit wins in the final contests of the regular season. Any momentum, and rhythm, built by the Raiders had the potential to be slowed by the delay. And in fact, that concern gained merit after a scoreless first quarter. But then the rust was knocked off and the Raiders began to shine! A thirty-one point burst in the second stanza essentially vaulted South Point to the victory and four more playoff quarters.

The Raiders won the toss and deferred the option, electing to put the defense on the field to begin the game. The Falcons were quickly forced to punt but would reclaim possession after a muff that they recovered near midfield. The Red ‘D’ stiffened and would hold West Henderson to minimal gains before finally taking over on downs. The pace of the quarter was sped along by running plays and few penalty flags. So when the Raiders finally took their first official possession of the contest, nearly half the first quarter was done. A promising drive ended up doing little more than chewing five minutes off the clock before South Point would punt with under two minutes remaining. The Raiders streak of scoring in 28 straight quarters was in jeopardy, but that was not the concern at the moment. The Red ‘O’ needed the ball and to get on track. The Red ‘D’ did their part. They held the Falcons to a three-and-out possession to get the ball back into the hands of the offense. With 00.42 remaining on the clock, the South Point possession would carry over into the second quarter.

Driving to the Falcons 5 yardline, the Raiders faced a fourth down and rather than risk a shift of momentum, the Red elected to attempt a field goal. The decision, while conservative, proved to be the right move as Thomas Lempereur nailed the 22 yard attempt to give South Point the 3-0 lead. Once on the board, the Raiders “put the accelerator through the firewall!” The Red took advantage of field position, opponent miscues, and outstanding play in all phases to snowball the scoring efforts! A quick possession that netted 6 yards led to another West Henderson punt and good field position for South Point. On second down from their 44 yardline, quarterback Scottie Lee pitched to motion wingback Mario Brandon. The speedy back took off around the end and was off to the races, easily outdistancing his nearest trailer by 10 yards! The 56 yard run put the Raiders up 10-0 and looking for more. On the ensuing kick, the Falcons set up at their own 22, first and ten. A wall of defense burst through the line and linebackers Nathan Hamilton and Tanner Canterbury laid hard hits on the running back. The ball was stripped away and bounced toward the ten yardline where defensive lineman Phillip Davis scooped it up from a low bounce and never broke stride, crossing the goalline for the Raiders’ second touchdown. Asked to describe the play, Davis said he reflected on his earlier days in football. “I just saw the middle school days when I used to run the ball and make touchdowns,” said the prototypical

nose guard. His athleticism and speed had been put on display alongside his size and strength. The return advanced the lead to 17-0, but the Red was not yet ready to put things in cruise control. A fumble recovery on the following kickoff set the Red 'O' up at the opponents 5 yardline. Two plays later fullback Jake Alexander burst through for the touchdown and a 24-0 advantage. The Falcons tried to reclaim a measure of momentum and, in fact, picked up a first down on a fake punt from their own 28 yardline. The Red 'D' stiffened and forced a negative possession in which West Henderson didn't gain another yard but rather totaled a loss of six on the drive. A Raiders punt return deep into Falcons territory had the offense poised for another score before the half. A twenty-five yard completion from Lee to Nick Muse put the ball at the West Henderson 3 yardline. Muse's one-handed grab could be described as "unbelievably routine." Battling a defender with one hand, while making a catch with the other, was "unbelievable." But this type of effort is "routine" for Muse, who is skilled at making a play on the ball especially when his team needs it most. Alexander punched through from the three for his second score to push the South Point lead to 31-0. The teams headed to the intermission with the contest all but decided.

To begin the third quarter, South Point set up to receive. No doubt the halftime locker room included a discussion about continuing to control the tempo and pound out a victory on the ground. Some part of the motivational speech was lost on Nathan Silver. He took the opening kick of the second half and sped through would-be tacklers 92 yards for the touchdown! Fourteen seconds into the second half and the advantage had grown to 38-0. The teams would trade a couple of punts in the third before South Point would set up again at their 30 yardline. One play, one handoff, and 70 yards later, Alexander made the score 45-0, Raiders. The 45 point spread caused the remainder of the contest to be played with a live clock and allowed the Raiders to insert a few backups. Keaton Hale took over under center and Naseen Jones became his workhorse. Following another Falcons punt the Red 'O' moved to the West Henderson forty yardline. From there Jones took a handoff up the middle and didn't stop running until he had put South Point up 52-0! The only thing quicker than Jones was the game clock that mercifully took the teams to the final 12 minutes.

A turnover on downs and a punt marked the first two possessions of the fourth quarter. The Red 'D' held firm and continued to pressure the Falcons. Desperate to avoid the shutout, West Henderson went to the air attempting to pick up chunks of yardage in short order. The move backfired. Rayonta Grier picked off a late Falcons pass and breezed 40 yards for the Raiders final touchdown. South Point had crushed West Henderson in the opening round contest by a 59-0 count.

South Point turned "survive and advance" into "thrive and advance" as they easily dismantled the West Henderson Falcons to move to the second round of the NCHSAA 3A State Playoffs. The Red Raiders' journey toward a championship continues against a formidable opponent in the second round. The Tuscola Mountaineers will visit Lineberger Stadium next Friday night with a season on the line. Preparation will be a key for a Raiders victory. South Point has proven capable with the talent and attitude to "earn four more quarters."

Go Get 'Em, Red!

## **Notable Facts and Thoughts**

Tail of the tape for the Tuscola matchup suggests a close contest. The Mountaineers narrowly lost a conference championship with their only loss coming to Pisgah. A prolific offense and a stingy defense, Tuscola has scored 541 points this season (SP-463) and given up 149 (SP-127). Concerning common opponents, the Mountaineers walloped West Henderson 56-0 (SP-59-0). Four more quarters is the reward!

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