

## SOUTH POINT FALLS IN SECOND ROUND



Gazette photos by Renee Sauer

Ragsdale's Joey Smith, left, is able to strip the ball from South Point's Jeremy Jackson on the Red Raiders' first possession of the night. The play set the tone for the remainder of the game for the South Point offense. Below, South Point's Michael Wilkinson gets a faceful of Ragsdale's Jovon Lewis, who applied a stiff-arm on his way around left end.

# Red Raiders go South

■ Six turnovers too much for South Point to overcome

By JOSH STEWART  
Gazette Sports Reporter

BELMONT — "How does a championship football team fumble the ball away three times in the first half of a football game, give up 14 points and not score anything?" Devon Lowery said while shaking his head.

Lowery had no answer. Neither did Chris Stowe, Jarien Jackson or coach John Devine.

But it happened. The worst nightmare South Point could have had turned into a sobering reality as the Red Raiders bowed out of the 3A playoffs with a 17-16 loss to Ragsdale Friday night.

Stowe didn't need to talk about the final drive of the game, about Shaun Bennett's interception of Lowery's pass at the Tiger 7 with 1:45



left in the contest after the Raiders had driven to the Ragsdale 20 down 17-14.

"If we don't give up those fumbles, we ain't in that situation," a dejected Stowe said. "We were a better football team than they were, but what are you going to do when you give them that

much?"

South Point (12-1) set a rough tone from the opening of the contest. Jeremy Jackson ran for 13 yards on South Point's first play from scrimmage, but let go of the ball, prompting a recovery by Tiger Ben Whitney.

On the ensuing posses-

sion, Lowery put the ball on the ground, allowing Ragsdale's Adam O'Connor to get his hands on the ball at the Raider 28. Neither turnover led to a score, but the miscues kept South Point from getting their potent offense out of the blocks.

And the Tigers made them pay for it.

Late in the first quarter, Ragsdale mounted a drive that began from the Raider 46. It looked as if the Raiders had stalled the Tigers on three plays, as Ragsdale stepped back to punt on fourth-and-2 from the South Point 38.

But the Tigers employed the first of two trick plays that put South Point on its heels all evening. Ragsdale snapped the ball to one of two up-men, who handed the ball to the other up-man, Ben Whitney. As the first up-man faked a sweep, Whitney hid the ball for a moment, then plowed up the middle. He ended up with a 21-yard gain and a first down, and three

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plays later, Jovon Lewis' 11-yard run put the Tigers up 7-0.

"They end up with four first downs in the first half, and one of those was on a dad gum fake punt," Devine said. "But you do have to take your hats off to them, because they executed."

South Point then took the ball at its own 30, and Stowe looked like he would be able to get something started. He took the first-down handoff from Lowery and went for 9 yards up the middle. But Stowe lost the ball driving for extra yardage, and O'Connor was once again able to cover a Raider fumble.

On the ensuing play, Ragsdale coach Tommy Norwood reached into his bag of tricks and went for broke. He hit a home run. Wide receiver Andy Kensmore went from his split end position and took a handoff from Tiger quarterback Tripp Barksdale on what looked to be an end-around run. But Kensmore set his feet and threw a strike to receiver Tony Adeniyi at the Raider 7. Adeniyi was brought down at the Raider 1, and Whitney broke through the line two plays later to make the score 14-0.

"We had the offense going," Devine said. "We just got impatient, got greedy. When you don't take care of the ball, what can you say?"

The Red Raiders looked as if they got the ship righted, as they took their first possession of the second half and went 80 yards in 10 plays to cut into Ragsdale's advantage. Jeremy

Jackson got the option smoking, as he rushed for 39 yards on three carries, including an 11-yard scamper to make the score 14-7.

But the earlier mistakes proved to be too costly. When Ragsdale's Andrew Brannan connected on a 38-yard with 7:21 left, it forced the Raiders to score twice to get the victory. South Point could only come up with one, when Lowery connected with Michael Windham on a 20-yard touchdown pass with 4:46 left to play.

"I don't know if we thought it was going to be a cakewalk or what," Jeremy Jackson said. "I don't know where (the fumbles) came from."

"But everybody was off early in the game. (Their defense) was easier to read than anybody's we had faced all season, but we came out without any rhythm. We finally got fired up and going in the third quarter, and we're down 14. That hurts."

It was a rough finish to a special season for the Red Raiders, who were picked to finish fifth in the Southwestern 3A but ended up with a perfect regular season and conference record.

Devine, still hoarse from a night of hard coaching, said: "The boys gave it everything. We're disappointed with the way things turned out, but I'm very proud of our young men and our coaching staff. There will never be another 1999 South Point football team."

"This team was one-of-a-kind."

# Ragsdale made most of opportunities

By BART BLASENGAME  
Gazette Sports Reporter

BELMONT — After the biggest win in his tenure as Ragsdale coach, Tommy Norwood couldn't help but feel a little, well, sick at his stomach.

"Who'd a thunk it, huh," Norwood asked reporters as he bent over, hands on his knees trying to catch his breath — and his lunch. "People had us surrendering before we even got here, but we've got a lot of pride and we didn't back down."

Norwood's postgame sickness, which has become a weekly event, quickly subsided though once he had time to soak in the buzz of his team's 17-16 upset win over South Point, the No. 1 team in the Western Region of the 3A state playoffs. Not only did the Tigers, the No. 8 seed in the West, manage to contain one of the highest-octane offenses in the state, but also they consistently moved the ball on a Raider team that hadn't been bullied all season long.

"We knew above all that we had to stop their big plays," Norwood said. "We could give up the small stuff, but not the 80-yard burst."

South Point's longest play of the night was a 20-yard touchdown pass in the fourth quarter and the Raiders' 228 yards rushing were a season low. The previous low was 257 yards in a win over 4A Ashbrook.

But Ragsdale didn't just get the job done by overpowering South Point. They used a little trickery as well.

With 1:22 left in the first quarter and his team facing a fourth-

and-one at the Raider 37, Norwood called a fake punt — a play the Tigers hadn't used all season. Ben Whitney took the direct snap 20 yards up the gut of South Point's stunned defense to put the Tigers on the Raider 17.

Three plays later they would score their first touchdown.

Norwood said the call was a no-brainer.

"When you're the No. 8 team and you're playing the No. 1 team, you've got to let you hair down a little bit," Norwood said. "Inside I was dying though. I checked out all the bridges on the way up here just in case it didn't work, but it ended up being a big play."

Of course, the Tigers got some help.

South Point fumbled the ball away three times in their first four possessions. While the mistakes turned into just seven Ragsdale points, they did manage to keep the Raider offense off the field. According to running back Jovon Lewis, the fumbles were all apart of the gameplan.

"They're more of a speed team, not a power team," said Lewis, who had 84 yards and a touchdown. "We knew that if we fought back with our power we could make them fumble."

Lewis was especially motivated to beat South Point. After being named the Shrine Bowl as a defensive back, he became the target of frustration for a few Raiders players who thought they were deserving of the honor. Some of the comments they made came out in local papers and a friend saw them posted on the Internet.

"Somebody said that while I

would be practicing for the Shrine Bowl, they'd still be playing for a state championship," Lewis said. "I had that copied and in my hands by first period today. I'm not going to have anybody tell me I'm going to lose a game."

While Lewis was pointing to the game as a personal stepping stone, Norwood saw the win over Southwestern Conference champ South Point — and the previous week's win over SW3A newcomer Forestview — as a milestone for the Ragsdale program.

"It's (SW3A) a tremendous football conference," Norwood said. "To beat the top two teams in that league in back-to-back weeks is a tremendous accomplishment for this football program."

## Ragsdale 17, So. Point 16

Ragsdale 0 14 0 3 — 17  
South Point 0 0 7 9 — 16  
Rag — Jovon Lewis 11 run (Andrew Brannan kick)  
Rag — Ben Whitney 1 run (Brannan kick)  
SP — Jeremy Jackson 10 run (Michael Wilkinson kick)  
Rag — Brannan 38 FG  
SP — Michael Windham 20 pass from Devon Lowery (Wilkinson kick)

|                 | Rag    | SP     |
|-----------------|--------|--------|
| First downs     | 13     | 19     |
| Rushes-yards    | 47 178 | 42 228 |
| Passing yards   | 72     | 63     |
| Comp-Att-Int    | 4-10-1 | 5-18-2 |
| Fumbles-lost    | 1-0    | 5-4    |
| Penalties-yards | 8-65   | 8-50   |

## INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

RUSHING — Rag: Jovon Lewis 21-84, Ben Whitney 6-33, Joey Smith 9-32, Shaun Bennett 5-13, Doug Brown 2-10, Tony Adeniyi 1-8, Tripp Barksdale 3-2. SP: Jeremy Jackson 10-105, Chris Stowe 12-58, Devon Lowery 14-46, Jarlen Jackson 4-20, Tiger Williams 2-(-1).  
PASSING — Rag: Andy Kensmore 1-10, 37; Barksdale 3-9-1, 35. SP: Devon Lowery 5-18-2, 63.  
RECEIVING — Rag: Tony Adeniyi 3-44, William Ingram 1-20, Doug Brown 1-8. SP: Michael McWhirter 3-37, Michael Windham 1-20, Jarlen Jackson 1-6.