

End of the line

■ Ragsdale defense stymies Raiders' offensive attack

By BRYAN C. HANKS

Gazette Sports Reporter

BELMONT — South Point ran out of miracles Friday night.

The Red Raiders, on a magical ride all season, came up short in a 17-12 loss to Jamestown Ragsdale in Friday's 3A third-round game at Belmont's Lineberger Stadium.

The loss was made even tougher by the fact that it came at the hands of the Tigers — the same team that ended South Point's undefeated season a year ago.

A key component of the mighty Raider Red Bone triple-option attack, junior fullback Rasharde Reid, was not able to perform because of a groin injury and South

Point (11-1-1) was unable to compensate for his loss.

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South Point seniors take loss hard.

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Although freshman Joe Brown stepped into Reid's position and finished with 72 yards rushing,

Reid's loss proved to be too much.

"He played on one leg last week (in South Point's 38-31 double-overtime win over A.L. Brown)," said South Point coach John Devine. "He just didn't have the same zip tonight."

Neither team scored in the first quarter. South Point struck first in the second quarter when Phillip Stowe finished a four-play, 20-yard drive with a 1-yard plunge. A bad snap on the extra point attempt gave South Point a 6-0 lead.

The Raiders had no trouble with the Tigers (12-1) offense until the final moments of the first half. South Point had held Ragsdale to less than 25 yards of offense until Tiger running back Keith Goode broke off a 14-yard run on first-and-10 from his own 20-yard line. On the very next play, sophomore quarterback Wes Pope hit junior wide receiver Doug Brown on a 66-yard touchdown strike and a 7-6 halftime lead.

All of a sudden, Ragsdale found their offensive groove. Another touchdown pass, this time



Andrew Russell/The Gazette

South Point's Tiger Williams breaks the tackle of a Ragsdale defender on his way to a big gain Friday night. Williams had a big night, rushing for 65 yards on 16 carries and returning a kickoff 98 yards for a touchdown. But it wasn't enough as Ragsdale beat South Point for the second straight year in the 3A state playoffs.

▼ South Point

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from Pope to fellow sophomore Emmanuel Byers, gave Ragsdale a 14-6 lead. The Tigers forced a Raider three-and-out and Andrew Brannon hit a 39-yard field goal and the Tigers led 17-6.

"On the ensuing kickoff, Tiger Williams sprinted 98 yards to pull the Raiders to within five at 17-12. That's as close as South Point would get.

The Raiders did have one more legitimate chance to score, though. Senior defensive back Drew Devine picked off a Pope pass at the Ragsdale 29-yard line with 3:08 remaining. Faced with a fourth-and-three with 90 seconds remaining, a Devon Lowery pass intended for Devine went through the receiver's arms and the Tigers held on for the upset.

"No one feels worse than Drew Devine," Coach Devine said, but added, "If Drew doesn't intercept that pass, then we don't have a fourth-down play."

Coach Devine said that he was proud of his seniors, who have the best two-year record in school history (23-2-1).

"I'm disappointed that we didn't win, but I'm not disappointed in the effort," said Devine. "We gave up a couple of big plays, but our effort was tremendous."

Ragsdale advances to the 3A Western championship game next Friday night at Mooresville. The Blue Devils (13-1) defeated West Rowan 36-29 and will host the game that will determine who will represent the western region in Chapel Hill on Dec. 8.

Ragsdale 17, South Point 12

R 0 7 10 0 — 17

SP 0 6 6 0 — 12

SP — Phillip Stowe 1 run (run failed)

R — Doug Brown 66 pass from Wes Pope (Andrew Brannon kick)

R — Emmanuel Byers 5 pass from Pope (Brannon kick)

R — Brannon 39 field goal

SP — Tiger Williams 98 kickoff return (run failed)



South Point's Devon Lowery knocks down a pass intended for Ragsdale's Chris Ingram Friday night at South Point.



South Point's Rasharde Reid suffered a pulled groin muscle early in Friday's game and didn't play much in the second half of the Raiders' loss.

Loss to Ragsdale doesn't sit very well with seniors

■ Tigers eliminated Red Raiders last year in 3A playoffs

By DEREK SMITH
Gazette Correspondent

BELMONT — For the South Point seniors, losing to Jamestown Ragsdale Friday in the state playoffs for a second year in a row was a bitter pill to swallow.

The Tigers, who eliminated the Red Raiders 17-16 in 1999 in the second round of the 3A Western Regionals, did it again this year, ending South Point's hopes of a state title with a 17-12 victory at Lineberger Stadium.

"It hurts real bad," said senior running back Tiger Williams. "I can't even explain it."

Revenge had been on the minds of the Red Raiders all week as they prepared to meet the team that handed them their last loss. South Point entered the third round of the playoffs with a record of 11-0-1, and hadn't lost since Ragsdale knocked the Southwestern 3A champions from the postseason in November 1999.

Ironically, South Point was unbeaten in 1999 when the Tigers ended their season, just as the Red Raiders had not lost this year when the Tigers came to Belmont Friday.

"I feel bad for myself and the rest of the seniors because it's our last game," said Shrine Bowl selection Devon Lowery. "But for the juniors, sophomores and freshmen, it's just a building process. They got to experience playing in the third round of the playoffs."

Despite the loss, Lowery was upbeat as one could be following the end of a stellar prep career.

"I love this atmosphere," Lowery said. "The fans are great. The people treat us like kings. I can't ask for better teammates. I don't think I could find guys who care about each other more than we do."

Lowery, who finished the season with 1,357 yards rushing and 20 touchdowns, was held out of the end zone in his last high school game and rushed for only

85 yards.

"Our goal was to go out there and beat them bad," he said. "They played hard, and had some big plays, and we didn't. That's how the game goes."

Junior Rasharde Reid, the hero of last week's double-overtime win over A.L. Brown with his three scores, injured a groin in Friday's game and didn't see much action.

Lowery said Reid's injury didn't necessarily hurt the offense's production.

"It wasn't a step down at all," he said. "(Freshman) Joe (Brown) and Tiger (Williams) both did great jobs. We just couldn't put the ball in the end zone when we needed to."

Ragsdale used a balanced attack on offense, pounding the football inside with Keith Goode and getting timely passing from quarterback Wes Pope.

"They had a good offense," said South Point senior linebacker Ian Gibson. "They executed well at times, and at times we could stop them. We had a good defensive game, but they scored more points than we did."

The Tiger offense, though, really didn't get going until late in the first half. Trailing 6-0, Pope connected with Doug Brown on a 64-yard touchdown to give Ragsdale a 7-6 halftime lead.

"That was a big momentum change for them," Gibson said. "It happens. It takes a little bit out of you, but you've got execute the next drive and get the momentum going back your way."

Ragsdale opened the second half with two quick scores, a 5-yard touchdown pass from Pope to Emmanuel Byers and a 39-yard field goal from Andrew Brannan, to go ahead 17-6.

Williams returned a kickoff 98 yards for a touchdown late in the third quarter, and the Red Raiders were back in the contest.

Twice in the fourth quarter, South Point had the ball deep in Tiger territory, but couldn't come away with points.

"I'm extremely proud of the seniors, especially," Gibson said of his teammates. "The effort was great. (But) it was a sad, wishy-washy game."