

Raiders red hot

Snow, cold, No. 1 seed Asheville can't stop rolling South Point



Gazette photos by Andrew Russell

South Point's Wade Harris cheers with the rest of the team after South Point's victory over Asheville in the 3A West region final at Friday at Asheville. Below, South Point's Tyler Gorton gets tackled in the snow. The Red Raiders advanced to the 3A title game with the 57-10 win.

Raiders' players, coaches revel on 'frozen tundra' in Asheville

By RICHARD WALKER
Gazette Sports Reporter

ASHEVILLE — It was a scene out of "Monday Night Football" in Green Bay.

And, as South Point High football players left Asheville High's Memorial Stadium Friday night after their 57-10 victory over Asheville in a snow-covered field, all they could talk about was that they'd been a part of "Lambeau Field South."

"It was wonderful," said Red Raiders offensive lineman Adam Hodge. "It was like playing for the Packers in Green Bay. It was pretty cold out there. But winning sure helped. It's definitely going to make that ride back home a lot better."

There's no question the atmosphere for the game was like no other in the

35-year history of South Point football.

Red Raiders assistant Phil Tate has seen more South Point High football games than perhaps anyone since he's been on the school's coaching staff for 29 years. He said last year's playoff loss at Winston-Salem Carver three days after an early December snow was easily the worst conditions he can remember for a South Point game.

That is, until Friday, when late afternoon snow flurries turned into blizzard-like snowfall right before kickoff and throughout much of the first half.

Tate thinks it's the first game in the history of either Belmont or South Point the Red Raiders have played in a snowstorm.

"I just told somebody a little bit ago that if I stayed in coaching another 37

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Red Raiders reach 3A state title game

By PHILLIP GARDNER
Gazette Sports Reporter

ASHEVILLE — South Point had a lot of obstacles to hurdle Friday for a berth in next week's state championship game.

First, there was the two-hour bus ride up the mountain. Then there was a No. 1-ranked, undefeated Asheville team that figured to present South Point its biggest threat since a season-opening loss.

Finally, there was the heavy-blowing snow and 30-degree temperatures.

None of that fazed South Point, which dominated as usual in a 57-10 win at a packed Memorial Stadium.

The victory plants the Red Raiders (14-1) in the 3A state title game Dec. 6 against Northeast Guilford, a 35-27 winner over West Craven in the 3A East final. Northeast Guilford took an 11 seed into the playoffs. The title game will begin at noon in Chapel Hill.

South Point received a trophy after the game for its 3A West title, but the Red Raiders aren't ready to stop yet. They're seeking the school's second football state title and first since 1979.

"I'm ready to bring the state championship home to Belmont," linebacker Chris Richards said. "It's been since 1979. It's time to get a new picture on the wall."

South Point has defeated all four of its playoff opponents by at least 40 points and outscored them by a combined 222-45.

Even a quick, physical Asheville defense couldn't slow down the Red Raiders' potent triple-option attack, which accounted for 439 yards - 335 rushing and 104 passing. And the snow-covered field - about two inches had fallen by the end of the night - didn't seem to matter, either.

Since South Point's 28-21 loss to Rock Hill (S.C.) Northwestern on Aug. 22, the Red Raiders have knocked each opponent by no less than four touchdowns.

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"I quit being surprised with these guys in here," South Point coach John Devine said. "I quit being surprised a long time ago."

The Red Raiders set the tone early. After a 29-yard opening kickoff return by Brandon Reid, South Point needed just three plays to reach the end zone. Quarterback Javar Williams threw a quick slant pass to Jamari Crawford, who sped past the Asheville secondary for a 48-yard score.

It was one of three touchdowns for Crawford, a 5-foot-10, 160-pound junior wingback who came into the game with six touchdowns all year. Crawford ran 18 yards for a third-quarter score and added a 3-yard touchdown run midway through the fourth.

"They were crashing down on the ends and I was open all night," Crawford said. "Whatever they give us, we're going to take it."

Williams was 5-for-9 passing with 104 yards and no interceptions. He led all rushers with 140 yards on 20 carries.

Asheville keyed on fullback Joe Brown early, but he eventually broke through for 102 yards on 15 carries and scored twice on 1-yard runs.

South Point scored on four of its first five possessions for a 23-3 halftime lead. It only got worse, as the Red Raiders scored on all four of its second-half possessions, not to mention a 27-yard fumble return for touchdown by Cameron McGlenn.

"They were a good team. Offensively, they were better than us," Asheville linebacker Tony Koone said. "We could have beaten them. It just didn't go our way tonight."

A South Point defense that has been dominant all year didn't disappoint. The first team



Andrew Russell/The Gazette

South Point's Brandon Reid kisses the West Region championship plaque after his Red Raiders beat Asheville.

held the Cougars (13-1) out of the end zone as Asheville didn't score a touchdown until there was 4:23 remaining, when Johnny White ran 34 yards.

Asheville's two 1,000-yard rushers, Crezdon Butler and

White, were held to 27 and 46 yards, respectively.

On a night when everything went South Point's way, the cold, slippery conditions didn't seem so bad.

"It was fun to play," Craw-

ford said. "It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience. We played as hard as we could and did what we had to do."

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years, I might not see another situation like this," said Tate, who coached eight years at other area high schools in addition to his 29 at South Point. "This was sort of unusual."

On a night when temperatures hovered around freezing and approximately two inches of snow fell on the Memorial Stadium turf, South Point could've easily faced the adversity and wilted. After all, a muddy turf that had snow scraped off of it hours earlier was the site of last year's 27-6 season-ending loss at Winston-Salem Carver.

But the Red Raiders didn't use the field as an excuse for that loss and they were hardly going to let this adversity cause them trouble this time around. If anything, they strongly adhered to head coach John Devine's "72-degree principle."

"All year long, you have to convince the kids it's 72 degrees, no matter if it's 110 degrees or 10 degrees out there," Devine said. "Both teams have to play in it, so you block everything out and play football."

South Point needed look no further than two of their most superstitious, ritual-oriented coaches for reinforcement of Devine's theory.

Assistant coaches Mickey Lineberger and Mike McWhirter have worn shorts for every game this season, and Friday's inclement weather hardly forced them to change.

"It's tradition, superstition or whatever you want to call it," McWhirter said. "It's me and Mickey and we didn't want to change a thing."

Hodge and star runner Joe Brown said they used the weather and last year's disappointment as motivation to do better this time.

"On the way up here, I saw the flurries and looked at (fellow lineman) Jesse Whitley and said, 'You know it's going to snow on us,'" Hodge said. "And I was a little worried at first because of what happened with Carver. But we played like we had some experience with a slippery field."

"I tried to make it a good memory," Brown said. "I reminded everybody that we'd



Andrew Russell/The Gazette

Ivey Watson trudges through the snow and through the Asheville defense for a big gain in the first half Friday night.

been through this before."

And, actually, Devine and his players said Friday's field conditions were easily better than those of a year ago. Then, the field was a virtual quagmire and solid footing was virtually impossible.

On Friday, the lateness and thickness of the snow made footing at least acceptable.

"At first, when the snow's blowing in your face and it's freezing cold, it was tough to get footing or even to know where to plant your foot," Hodge said. "But after awhile, it was a lineman's dream, because the snow packed in pretty good and everybody was moving around pretty well."

Or, as Tate put it: "It was fun. I thought the kids loved it out there. I didn't see many slip-ups."

Before the game, Asheville school officials used leaf blow-

ers and brooms to clear end zone, boundary and yardage markers.

And, if anything, the biggest headache from the game was for statisticians and sports-writers trying to chart who was doing what and for how long on the field.

It's because for much of the opening half, it was impossible to see across the field with any expert accuracy, either to mark the football or identify tacklers or ballcarriers.

Even that worked to South Point's favor, if you ask Devine.

"There was definitely a lack of visibility out there in the first half," Devine said. "But it helps when you're running the option."

It sure did for the Red Raiders who got to enjoy a "White Christmas" a month early in Asheville.

Summary

South Point 57, Asheville 10

SP 13 10 13 21 — 57

A 0 3 0 7 — 10

SP-Jamari Crawford 48 pass from Javar Williams (Andrew Rinehart kick), 10:55.

SP-Williams 3 run (kick failed)

A-FG Neville Hayes 27

SP-FG Rinehart 32

SP-Joe Brown 1 run (Rinehart kick)

SP-Crawford 18 run (kick blocked)

SP-Brown 1 run (Rinehart kick)

SP-Crawford 3 run (Rinehart kick)

SP-Cameron McGlenn 27 fumble ret (Rinehart kick)

A-Johnny White 34 run (Hayes kick)

SP-Wes Carroll 1 run (Rinehart kick)

	SP	A
First downs	21	11
Rushes-yards	47-335	34-133
Passing yards	104	20
Comp-Att-Int	5-9-0	2-11-2
Fumbles-lost	1-1	2-1
Penalties-yards	6-55	4-25

Individual statistics

RUSHING-SP: Williams 20-140, Brown 15-102, Crawford 4-40, Carroll 4-22, Josh Robinson 1-20, Tyler Gorton 1-7, Jonathan Graham 1-4, McGlenn 1-0. A: White 12-46, Thaddeus Boyce 8-38, Crezdon Butler 7-27, Michael Byrd 6-21, Marcus England 1-1.

PASSING-SP: Williams 5-9-0, 104. A: Byrd 2-10-2, 20; Butler 0-1-0, 0.

RECEIVING-SP: Crawford 2-63, Gorton 1-16, Ivey Watson 2-25. A: Roger Reid 1-14, Boyce 1-6.