

South Point rolls to title win

More than 3,000 fans watch
Raiders beat Northeast Guilford

BY PHILLIP GARDNER
Gazette Sports Reporter

CHAPEL HILL — As soon as the final second ticked off the clock Saturday, Tim Brown had an important phone call to make.

The Belmont resident had to call his wife and pass along the good news from Chapel Hill — South Point had just won the 3A state football championship.

Brown's wife couldn't attend the title game at Kenan

**South Point 27,
Northeast Guilford 10**

Complete coverage of the 3A
state football championship.

Pages 1,6-7C

Stadium. She was tending to her daughter, who had just given birth within the past week.

It was only the second South Point game Patti Brown missed all year.

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South Point players wave to their fans after winning the 3A state football championship on Saturday in Chapel Hill.

John Clark/
The Gazette

▼Title

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Even though her son, backup quarterback Corey Brown, tore knee ligaments during the third game of the season and never returned, she was sad to miss the biggest game of the year.

"It was hard for her (Saturday) morning when we pulled out, but she knew that we'd keep in contact with her," Tim Brown, 43, said.

Tim Brown has attended every South Point game for the past four years, but Saturday's might have been the most enjoyable to watch.

The Red Raiders scored the

game's first three touchdowns on their way to a 27-10 victory over Northeast Guilford. They finished the season 15-1 after losing their opener and defeated their final 15 opponents by an average of more than 41 points.

"We knew this was going to happen when these kids were 11 years old," said Tim Brown, who's had an eye on this bunch since their youth football days. Many of the current South Point seniors advanced to the Pop Warner national semifinals in 1997, when they suited up for the McAdenville Dolphins.

Tim Brown was in good

company on a clear but chilly day. South Point's crowd was estimated at 3,500 — more than twice the number of fans on Northeast Guilford's side of the stadium. Official attendance wasn't announced.

"Isn't this an unbelievable thing? Look at all these people here," said Andy Whitley, father of offensive lineman Jesse Whitley.

"It's unbelievable all the people here to support South Point. There's probably nobody in Belmont."

Bradley and Tekla Poay of Belmont sported Santa hats that read "#1 SP" and "Red Raiders."

They joined hundreds of South Point fans who tailgated in a parking lot before the game. And they're not even parents of a South Point football player.

"We're showing our support for a great football team," Tekla Poay, 37, said. "That's all we're doing is supporting our hometown."

Thanks to the Poays and thousands of others, Belmont was well supported as the Red Raiders delivered the school its second state championship and first since 1979.

Contact Phillip Gardner at (704) 869-1843 or phillip_gardner@link.freedom.com.

RAIDERS WIN



John Clark/The Gazette

South Point players celebrate by holding up the trophy after defeating Northeast Guilford 27-10 to win the 3A state championship Saturday in Chapel Hill.

South Point caps dominant season with state title

South Point's numbers make case for Gaston County's greatest team

CHAPEL HILL — The clock had barely struck zero on South Point's 27-10 Class 3A state football championship victory over Northeast Guilford Saturday at Kenan Stadium when fans, observers and sportswriters were asking the same question:

Was this Red Raiders' team the best in Gaston County history?

Even South Point coach John Devine got into the debate in the midst of his team's post-game press conference.

"How do we rank?" Devine asked a group of sportswriters. "I don't know. You'll do the math and tell us all that."

Well, coach, other than a season-opening 28-21 home loss to Northwestern High of Rock Hill, S.C., the math is fairly clear in favor of the 2003 Red Raiders.

Their 15 victories and 752 points scored are new county records.

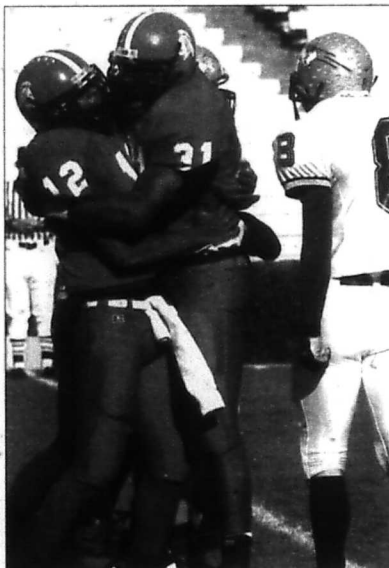


RICHARD WALKER

Prep football

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► **Reld packs punch in title game.** 7C



Williams, offense hit for big plays; defense holds up at key moments

By **PHILLIP GARDNER**
Gazette Sports Reporter

CHAPEL HILL — South Point has played like a champion almost all season long. An eventual state title seemed certain as the Red Raiders dominated opponent after opponent following a season-opening loss.

But even though Saturday's 27-10 defeat of Northeast Guilford for the 3A state championship came as no surprise, the players, coaches and fans were no less excited about taking home the trophy.

"A guy told me the other day up at Kyle Fletcher's that winning a state championship is greater than any feeling you'll ever feel as a football player. And it has been," senior center Adam Hodge said. "It's the greatest feeling. I didn't care if we won 72-0 or 2-0. It didn't matter to me, just so we won."

The 2003 Red Raiders join South Point's 1979 team on the school's list of football state champions.

South Point (15-1) wasn't as dominant Saturday as it has been in recent weeks, but the Red Raiders still staked their claim as possibly the best team in

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Joe Brown (31) celebrates with Javar Williams after Williams scored one of his two touchdowns. Nick Daggy/The Gazette

▼ Red Raiders

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Gaston County history and one of the best the state has ever seen.

And don't get the players wrong for not showing much emotion in the postgame press conference.

"They're used to winning. They expected to win this game," South Point coach John Devine said. "They expect to win every time they go out. It's just like getting into the end zone. They've been there before. They know that this is a reward for all the hard work and dedication."

The Red Raiders, which had defeated its previous four play-off opponents by at least 40 points each, made Saturday's victory possible with a suffocating defense led by South Point's most outstanding defensive player, Brandon Reid.

The Red Raiders twice held Northeast Guilford on fourth-and-goal and eventually forced the Rams out of their initial gameplan.

On fourth-and-goal from the 1 with South Point ahead 14-0 just before halftime, Josh Robinson and Brian Bradshaw stopped Nathan Cockman for no gain. Then in the fourth quarter, Reid caught William Waddell from the back of his jersey and threw him out of bounds for a 1-yard gain on a fourth-and-goal play from the 3.

"They just stood their ground like they have been all year," Devine said. "That's not the first time we've seen that."

Reid, a senior defensive back, finished with 23 tackles, including nine solo tackles and three for a loss.

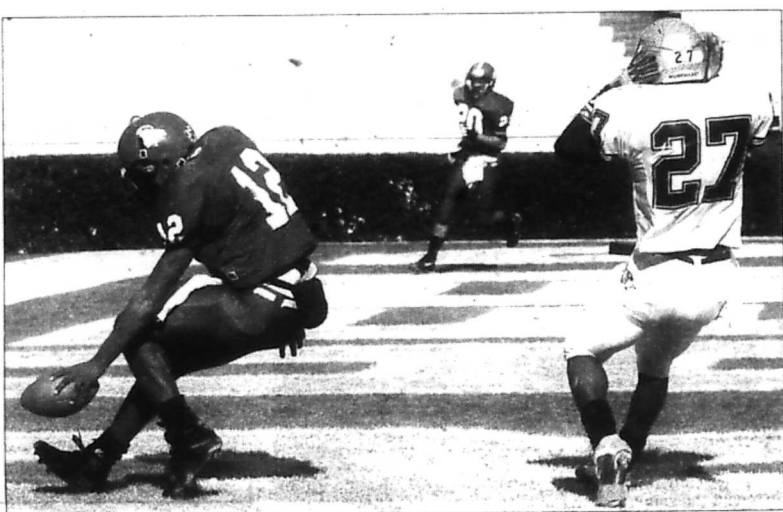
The Rams (12-4) at first tried to induce their will upon the Red Raiders by executing their run-oriented option offense. But South Point's physical front four of Andrew Rinehart, Randy Robinson, Sammy Redden and Jamie Tuttle gave the Rams little room to run. Northeast Guilford finally figured out how to move the ball through the air, but by then it was too late.

The Rams finished with 101 rushing yards and 183 passing.

It also helped South Point that fullback and Shrine Bowl selection Matt Deese missed much of the second half after aggravating a previous knee injury. The Rams' go-to guy limped off the field with 2:41 remaining in the second quarter and took himself out of the game again after carrying for a 7-yard gain five plays later. Deese, who had made several nice runs in the early going, carried only three times in the second half and finished with 37 yards on 12 carries.

"That was a factor because he's our obviously our best offensive threat," Northeast Guilford coach Tommy Pursley said. "They did a good job of taking him out of the game, which opened up, you would think, the outside. But (South Point's) No. 10 (Reid) took care of that."

Meanwhile, the Red Raiders rolled up 333 yards of total offense, topping the 300-yard mark for the ninth straight game.



Nick Daggy/The Gazette

South Point quarterback Javar Williams scores one of his two rushing touchdowns Saturday. Williams also added a 74-yard scoring strike to Jamari Crawford during the second quarter and finished with 191 total yards.

INDIVIDUAL AWARDS

Most valuable player
Javar Williams, QB, South Point

South Point
Outstanding offensive player:
WB Jamari Crawford
Outstanding defensive player:
DB Brandon Reid

Northeast Guilford
Outstanding offensive player:
WR Nathan Cockman
Outstanding defensive player:
DT Dennis Marsh

But many of those yards came on big plays — a 40-yard run and a 74-yard catch by Jamari Crawford and a 31-yard run by Joe Brown — as the Red Raiders' triple-option offense faced its toughest defensive challenge in weeks.

"They were the hardest hitting team we've played all year," said South Point quarterback Javar Williams, who was named the game's most valuable player. "They were getting after the football."

But the Red Raiders made the plays when they needed to.

After South Point punted and fumbled on its first two possessions, Crawford put the Red Raiders on the board with his 40-yard touchdown run. Two drives later, Crawford found himself wide open on a 74-yard pass from Williams that gave South Point a 14-0 lead with

9:38 left in the second quarter. "Their offense is good," said Northeast Guilford defensive lineman Dennis Marsh, a Shrine Bowl selection who has committed to Maryland. "They just beat us. We stopped them, they got a few big plays."

Crawford finished with 42 yards rushing and 74 receiving in becoming South Point's most outstanding offensive player. Williams completed five of six passes for 155 yards and a touchdown and rushed 15 times for 36 yards to earn his award. Brown finished with 102 yards on 15 carries but failed to reach the end zone for only the third game this season.

Two big offensive plays set up South Point's third score. After forcing a Northeast Guilford punt on the opening drive of the second half, Williams connected with Tyler Gorton for a 32-yard pass, and Brown ran 28 yards to the 6. Williams needed just one more rush to find the end zone and put the Red Raiders up 21-0.

Ryne Powell finally got the Rams on the scoreboard with a 42-yard field goal on the ensuing possession, and Northeast Guilford later scored the team's only touchdown with less than a minute remaining.

Contact Phillip Gardner at (704) 869-1843 or phillip_gardner@link.freedom.com.

GAME SUMMARY

How they scored

Rams 0 0 3 7 — 10
Red Raiders 7 7 13 0 — 27
SP — Jamari Crawford 40 run (Andrew Rinehart kick)
SP — Crawford 74 pass from Javar Williams (Rinehart kick)
SP — Williams 6 run (Rinehart kick)
NG — FG Ryne Powell 42
SP — Williams 1 run (kick blocked)
NG — Brad Jones 9 pass from Nathan Cockman (Powell kick)

Team statistics

| | NG | SP |
|-----------------|---------|--------|
| First downs | 17 | 10 |
| Rushes-yards | 47 101 | 34 178 |
| Passing yards | 183 | 155 |
| Comp-Att-Int | 12 17 1 | 5-6-0 |
| Fumbles-lost | 2 1 | 2 1 |
| Penalties-yards | 2 9 | 6-55 |

Individual statistics

| | |
|---------------------------|--------------|
| Rushing | |
| Northeast Guilford | |
| Nathan Cockman | 15-41 |
| Matt Deese | 12-37 |
| William Waddell | 7-18 |
| Justin Brown | 4-7 |
| Scott Maynor | 9(-2) |
| South Point | |
| Joe Brown | 15-102 |
| Jamari Crawford | 3-42 |
| Javar Williams | 15-36 |
| Tyler Gorton | 1(-2) |
| Passing | |
| Northeast Guilford | |
| Maynor | 11-16-1, 174 |
| Cockman | 1-1-0, 9 |
| South Point | |
| Williams | 5-6-0, 155. |
| Receiving | |
| Northeast Guilford | |
| Cockman | 6-109 |
| Waddell | 3-36 |
| Jay Smith | 1-26 |
| Jones | 1-9 |
| Antonio Hall | 1-3 |
| South Point | |
| Gorton | 2-57 |
| Crawford | 1-74 |
| Wade Harris | 1-13 |
| Ivey Watson | 1-11 |

COMING WEDNESDAY

The Gazette celebrates the South Point Red Raiders' 3A state championship with a commemorative four-page keepsake, complete with a look at each player, the team's long road to Chapel Hill and how the Red Raiders stack up against the best teams in county history.



Nick Daggy/The Gazette

South Point's Cameron McGlenn gives coach John Devine a ceremonial post-game shower after the Red Raiders won the state championship.

▼ South Point

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As is the 622-point differential over their opponents.

But the real measuring stick is in how South Point simply manhandled its opposition at a time of the year when competition is supposed to be the toughest.

Yes, South Point fell a few points shy of a state record for playoff point differential.

But the Red Raiders' 194-point winning margin in five postseason games is quite a compelling argument for just how thoroughly they dominated their competition.

That's why longtime high school observer Dwight Frady says he thinks this year's team is tops.

"They've been more dominant than anybody I've ever seen," said Frady, a former *Gazette* sports editor and current Belmont Banner sports editor. "Their depth, experience and chemistry sets this group apart."

Frady has witnessed parts if not all of the seasons of seven of the 10 state championship teams in Gaston County history, including all three won by South Point.

In Frady's opinion, only the 1971 and 1979 South Point teams or the 1963 Mount Holly team can rival this year's edition of the Red Raiders.

"You know, those three teams can say they were unblemished," Frady said. "And the '79 team didn't lose and didn't tie anybody. But, still, I just think this team right now is special."

Perhaps a more biased view comes from current Red Raiders assistant coach Jeff Williams.

Williams watched nephew Javar Williams earn most valuable player honors in Saturday's victory, starred on the 1979 team and watched as a fan in 1971 when South Point tied Salisbury 14-14 for the old Western N.C. Activities Association title.

"They're pretty doggone good," Jeff Williams said of

this year's team.

But then the quarterback of the '79 team that went 14-0 smiled and offered:

"Now I don't know if they could beat us or not. And neither team could handle Scott Crawford (star running back of the '71 team). He was just too much."

The reverence with which South Point fans and foes alike hold for Crawford is well-served.

But, years from now, the record books will show that the '71 Red Raiders finished 12-0-1 and outscored its opponents 456-88 as opposed to this year's 15-1 record and 732-130 point differential.

The other candidates?

The 1979 South Point team finished 14-0 with a 334-92 scoring advantage.

Mount Holly's 1963 team

went 11-0 with a 273-40 scoring margin. Its 1967 team went 12-0-1 with a 343-61 point differential.

Of the other five state champions, perhaps two of the earliest had seasons comparable to South Point this year.

The 1946 title team of old Highland High rolled to an 8-0 record and 241-15 scoring margin.

And, all the way back in 1925, old Gastonia High shut out 10 of its 11 opponents in an 11-0 season that featured a 286-6 scoring margin.

How long ago was that? The "Green and White" as they were called then beat Sanford 8-0 at Chapel Hill's Emerson Field. The game was played at Emerson because Kenan Stadium was one year from being built and two years from opening.

And, speaking of Kenan, quite possibly the proceedings later Saturday at that stadium give this year's Red Raiders another emphatic vote for all-time best.

It's because Crest hammered previously unbeaten Eastern Randolph from start to finish in a 40-0 victory for the Class 3AA state title.

The win was the Chargers' 12th straight.

Care to guess who handed Crest its last loss? South Point. By a 35-7 margin in Belmont in September.

You can reach Richard Walker at jrwalk22@aol.com.

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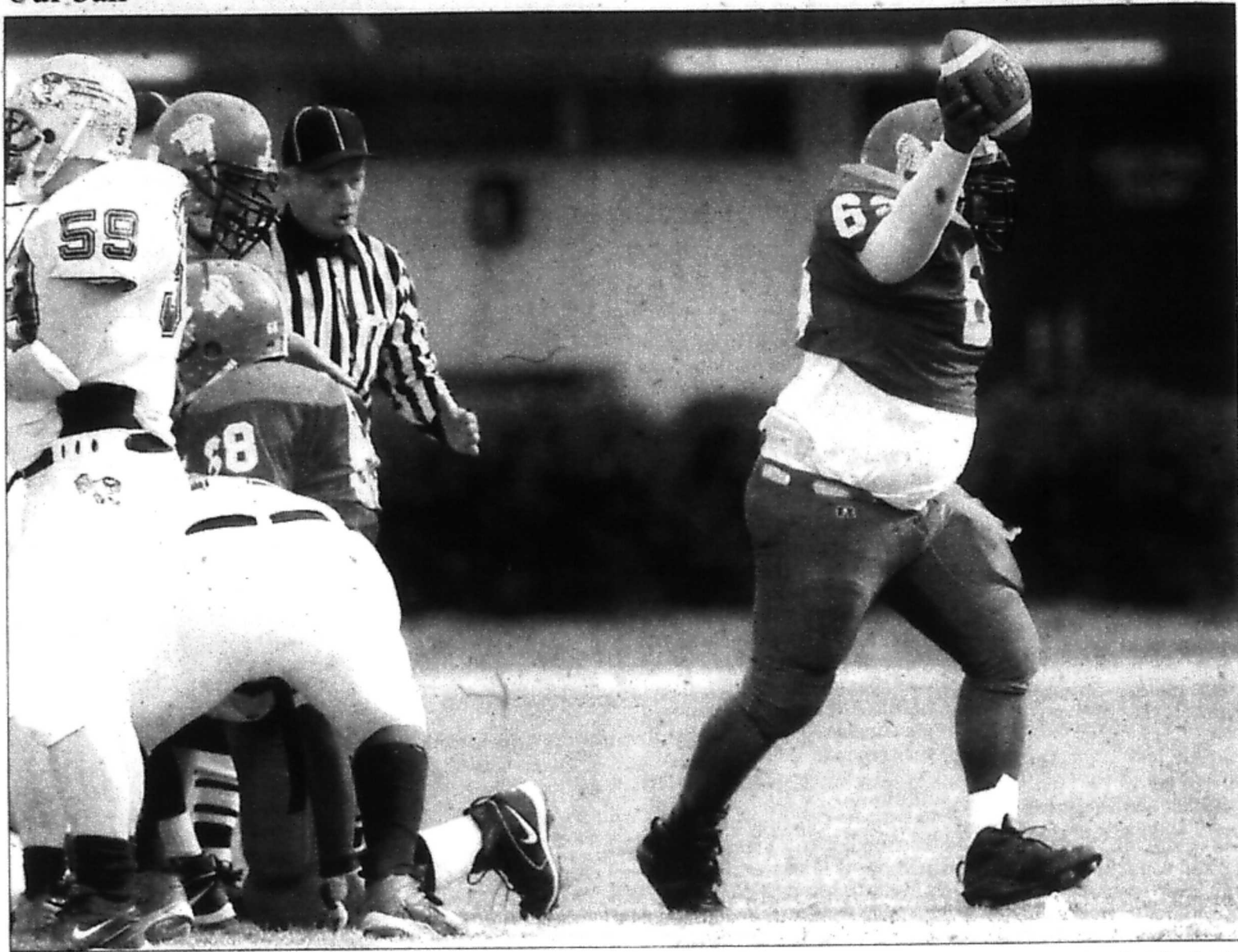
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YOUR F THE W

Carrier is t



Our ball



John Clark, The Gazette

South Point defender Randy Robinson holds up the ball after recovering a fumble during Saturday's 3A state championship game in Chapel Hill. The Red Raiders held the Northeast Guilford offense to 101 yards rushing and 183 passing in a 27-10 victory.

'They've got so many weapons'

Red Raiders make big plays when it counts

Potent offense proves too much for upstart Rams

By PHILLIP GARDNER
Gazette Sports Reporter

CHAPEL HILL. — South Point finally faced an opponent who could slow down its potent triple-option attack. But the Red Raiders' many options eventually overwhelmed Northeast Guilford's stiff defense in Saturday's 27-10 victory in the 3A state championship.

Against South Point's toughest defensive challenge since possibly the Sept. 12 game against Crest, the Red Raiders managed 195 rushing yards — their lowest rushing total of the year and far below their 353.3-yard average. But the Rams could hold for only so long, as the Red Raiders broke free for runs of 25, 31 and 40 yards.

"They've got so many weapons, it's just hard to stop all of them all the time," Northeast Guilford coach Tommy Pursley said. "I was very pleased with the job we did on the run. They broke two long runs ... other than those two long runs, I thought we stopped the run pretty well."

South Point's previous low rushing total was 218 yards in the season-opening, 28-21 loss to Rock Hill (S.C.) Northwestern, a game in which the Red Raiders had three turnovers.

Delighted, excited

As president of the N.C. High School Athletic Association, Dr. Ed Sadler handed South Point players and coaches their championship trophy.

Sadler, superintendent of Gaston County Schools, could have presented awards at the 4A championships in Winston-Salem or the 2A title games in Raleigh. But he chose Chapel Hill several weeks ago because he thought two of his member schools — South Point and Ashbrook — had a chance to vie for the 3A titles.

"It's a wonderful experience," Sadler said moments after presenting the postgame awards. "I'm just so delighted and so excited for these students and for the entire community. These kids and coaches have worked so hard and it's just wonderful that they were able to have this kind of reward."

No shutout

When Northeast Guilford scored a touchdown with 46 seconds remaining for the final score, South Point defensive line coach Phil Tate pulled off his hat in disgust.

"They kept throwing balls up in the air and we kept fanning on the interceptions," Tate said. "We should have intercepted about four or five different balls, and I don't know what happened. But anyway, we won and that's No. 1."

South Point was trying for a shutout — what would have been its fifth of the year — but couldn't hold Northeast Guilford's pass offense in check during the second half. The Rams scored their first points on a field goal with 7:47 to play in the third quarter and a touchdown during the final minute of the fourth quarter.

3A CHAMPIONSHIP NOTEBOOK

"All those completions — they kept the football instead of giving the ball back to the offense," Tate said. "That's what we've done all year. ... That hurt our offense not getting the football when we should have gotten the football."

Rooting interest

The Big South 3A Conference was clearly supportive of South Point on Saturday.

Forestview coach Scott Lee (a former South Point assistant) and North Gaston coach Bruce Clark watched the entire game from the South Point sidelines.

It's the second straight season the league produced a state champion. Ashbrook won the 3AA title last year.

Boomer

Devine sang praises of Andrew Rinehart for not only his play at defensive end, but also his performance as punter.

Rinehart, a junior, punted five times for a 40.8-yard average, including a 50-yarder.

"How big was Andrew Rinehart today? ... He boomed the ball. They were sending eight after him, we only had seven to block them. What kind of pressure is that?"

Should be repeat?

Devine said Saturday's championship should have been the Red Raiders' second consecutive. He thought his team should have defeated Winston-Salem Carver in last year's 3A state semifinals and gone on to win the title. But Carver's muddy field — officials removed snow with a tractor and plowed off grass in the process — made conditions unplayable, Devine said.

South Point lost 27-6.

"They should have won the state championship last year," Devine said. "It's probably my fault for allowing that game to be played on a muddy field that was unsafe, probably."

Record holder

With Javar Williams' 206 total yards of offense Saturday, the senior quarterback set the county record for single-season yardage. Williams, who finished the season with 2,926 yards, passed East Gaston's Jadarian Moore, who accounted for 2,786 total yards this season.

Williams also holds the career record with 5,553 yards.

Shaken up

South Point defensive tackle Sammy Redden sprained his ankle midway through the third quarter and did not return. The 6-foot-3, 215-pound senior, however, was walking without help after the game.

Choices, choices

Brandon Reid, South Point's championship game most outstanding defensive player, has visited N.C. State, Wake Forest and Lenoir-Rhyne. The 6-foot, 170-pound defensive back would like to play football at N.C. State next year, but the Wolfpack hasn't made an offer, he said Saturday.

Richard Walker contributed to this report.



Nick Daggy/The Gazette

South Point fans celebrate after a Red Raiders touchdown.

Gritty defensive back totals 23 tackles

REIDING RED

South Point defender hammers NE Guilford offense all day long

By RICHARD WALKER
Gazette Sports Reporter

CHAPEL HILL — Brandon Reid may have missed last year's playoffs.

But the South Point senior defensive back more than made up for that lost time due to injury this season.

Not only was Reid one of the leading tacklers on the Red

Raiders state championship defense, but he put an exclamation point on the season in Saturday's 27-10 win over Northeast Guilford at Kenan Stadium.

Reid collared a Rams' runner for a 5-yard loss on their second play of the game and kept right on putting down one Northeast Guilford runner after another the rest of the afternoon.

Before he was through, Reid had a game-high 23 tackles — three for losses — and South Point's most valuable defensive player honors.

"We just stood our ground," said South Point coach John Devine, whose team turned the Rams away without scoring seven times out of nine advances into Red Raiders' territory. "But I can't tell you how big No. 10 (Reid) was. Brandon just did a heckuva job."

It came in a game in which Reid appeared possessed to erase the bad memories of missing last year's playoffs with a torn anterior cruciate knee ligament suffered in the regular-season finale at East Lincoln.

"That's what's made me play harder all season long," Reid said. "Not just this game."

Reid's impact Saturday could be felt and heard throughout the game.

Three Rams were helped off the field after hard hits from Reid.

Reid himself suffered the brunt of one of his own collisions when his helmet-to-helmet

hit left him with a jammed leg and forced him to come out briefly late in the fourth quarter.

His play clearly impressed Northeast Guilford coach Tommy Pursley.

"He's a player," said Pursley, a 1972 Bessemer City High graduate. "Take him out of the game and I think it's a different situation. Last time I saw one individual dominate like that was when we played (Carolina Panthers defensive lineman) Julius Peppers (of Southern Nash) in the playoffs of 1997."

Pursley said Reid didn't just make tackles, he made momentum-changing stops.

At the end of the first half, with South Point leading 14-0, the Rams were inside the Red Raiders 10 when Reid stopped Nathan Cockman just shy of the goal line.

Two plays and two more stops later, the Rams were held scoreless.

More impressively, Reid collared another Northeast Guilford runner, William Waddell, at the Red Raiders 1. The play came in the middle of the fourth quarter and when Waddell appeared to have the angle for a touchdown.

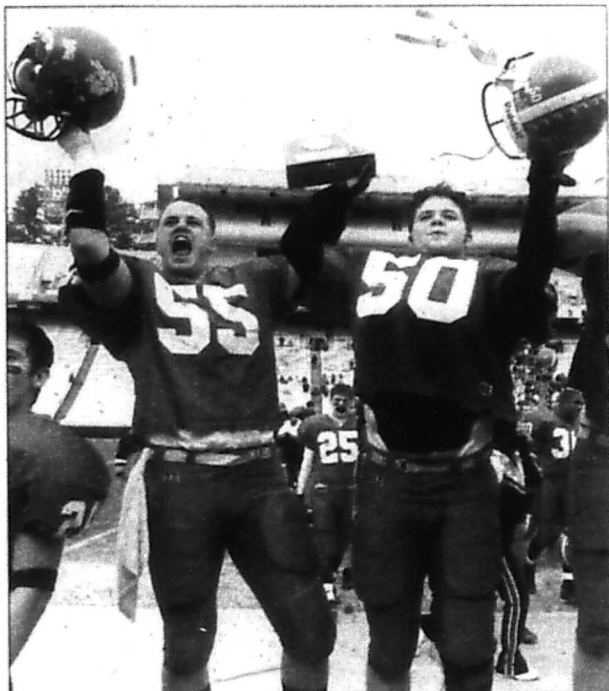
"We'd have holes and he'd get there," Pursley said. "We'd pitch the ball on the corner and he'd come out of nowhere and make the play for a 2- or 3-yard loss to no gain. He was the difference."

Said Reid of the plays: "I don't know what was going through my head. I just had to get to the ball. You know, speed kills."

Speaking of speed, many high school players say their heart is racing with anticipation and anxiety of playing such a big game.

Not Reid.

"You have all kinds of thoughts going through your head," Reid said. "Because it's the last game for some of us. And the last game for some of us, period. But, once we got on that field, it was all business; just like it's been for us all year long."



Photos by John Clark/The Gazette

Top, South Point's Adam Hodge, left, and Jamie Tuttle show off the Red Raiders' 3A state championship trophy. Above, Jamari Crawford celebrates one of his two touchdowns Saturday.