

Red Raiders look sharp vs. Wolves

Rinehart connects on back-breaking touchdown pass

By RICHARD WALKER
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BELMONT — So much for the notion South Point High's defending N.C. Class 3A state football champion is rebuilding this year.

Two weeks into a season after 18 starters and 27 seniors departed from a 15-1 title team, South Point has looked impressive in a 2-0 start. And they were particularly sharp in Friday night's 41-7 win over visiting Lincolnton at Lineberger Stadium.

Challenged late in the first half and holding a somewhat uncomfortable 14-7 halftime lead, South Point blew the game open in the second half with 27 unanswered points.

"We hear that we're rebuilding all the time," said Bryan Jennings, the Red Raiders fullback who sparked Friday's effort with 126 yards rushing and four touchdowns. "We just don't let it bother us because we feel like we're still one of the top teams around."

South Point will get another opportunity to show just where it stands among the state's best next Friday when the Red Raiders visit defending N.C. Class 3AA state champion Crest. South Point beat the Chargers 35-7 en route to last year's championship.

"It's for bragging rights, but it's also a game where we can see where we are right now," Red Raiders coach John Devine said.

In rolling up the 2-0 record, South Point has outscored Kings Mountain and Lincolnton 85-28 and outgained those two opponents 773-429.

Friday's effort was easily the most impressive of the two games, as the Red Raiders outgained the Wolves 450 to 188.

Not only was first-year quarterback Andrew Rinehart more crisp with both the running and passing offense, South Point showed the kind of quick-strike offense its fans have grown accustomed to behind departed two-time Gazette offensive player of the year Javar Williams, now a freshman at Carson-Newman.

In addition to Jennings' production, freshman Brandon Spencer picked up 132 yards rushing and one touchdown, Josh Robinson had 51 yards

rushing and Rinehart had 145 yards passing and one score.

"We feel like we're getting better," Devine said. "We're not where we want to be. But we like the direction we're heading."

Rinehart, the senior who was converted from defensive end to quarterback in the offseason, had four miscues running the offense — he had two bad pitches, fumbled an attempted handoff and threw a pass interception.

But he also authored the game's biggest play — a 60-yard touchdown throw to David McMillan with South Point facing a third-and-11 play while leading only 14-7.

"I thought we were in the game at halftime," said Lincolnton coach Scott Cloninger, whose team pulled within 14-7 at the break on Dusty Friday's 5-yard TD run with 1:23 left in the first half. "Then that pass play down the sideline when it was third and (long) hurt us a lot. It hurt us on the scoreboard and it probably hurt our feelings."

Devine felt the TD pass was an example of how efficient Rinehart was operating South Point's "Red Bone" offense.

"You know, you lull them to sleep running that option and then you get a receiver behind the defense," Devine said. "Andrew did a really good job giving him (McMillan) some air on that pass to run under it."

The rest of the half was up to the running game, as Jennings, Spencer and Jennings again scored basically untouched on long TD runs.

Does this mean talk of South Point's rebuilding will cease?

Jennings doesn't think so.

"It's weird to hear about how we've got so many people gone," Jennings said. "But we've just got to keep working hard and playing our game. Just because people think we're rebuilding doesn't really motivate us in the games. But it does help motivate us to work hard in practice."

Apparently, those practices are paying off.

Lin 0 7 0 0 — 7
SP 7 7 13 14 — 41

SP — Bryan Jennings 2 run (Andrew Rinehart kick)

SP — Jennings 4 run (Rinehart kick)

L — Dusty Friday 5 run (George Ramirez kick)

SP — David McMillan 60 pass from Rinehart (Rinehart kick)

SP — Jennings 26 run (Kick failed)

SP — Brandon Spencer 60 run (Rinehart kick)

SP — Jennings 19 run (Rinehart kick)