



Shih Fa Kao/The Gazette

Ashbrook's Eric Boyce evades South Point's Josh Robinson during the second quarter of their game Friday night. Boyce rushed for a game-high 187 yards as Ashbrook posted its first win over South Point since 1998.

Turnover at top

Ashbrook's pass-catch duo sparks fourth quarter rally

By DEREK SMITH
Gazette Correspondent

GASTONIA — Ashbrook senior quarterback Cole Russell wasn't sharp. Former quarterback-turned-wide receiver Devin Harris didn't have any catches.

But the two connected for a pair of touchdowns late in the game to rally the Green Wave past South Point 31-27 in a thriller Friday at Bill Eccles Field.

Trailing 27-16, Russell found Harris open for 33- and 68-yard touchdown passes to lead the comeback and end the Red

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■ A full roundup of Friday night's games.

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North Gaston. They now have an all-time record of 20-2 since the inception of the league four years ago.

"Devin and Cole made the big pass plays and the line blocked," said Ashbrook head coach Joe Shepherd, an alumnus of South

Raiders' streak of 16 consecutive conference victories. South Point's last defeat in the Big South 3A came in 2001 after a 41-34 loss to

Wave takes advantage of five Raider miscues

By PHILLIP GARDNER
Gazette Sports Reporter

GASTONIA — Parity was the operative word during the preseason for Big South 3A Conference schools desperately wanting to knock South Point off its throne.

Coaches, players and fans foresaw the most competitive conference race they've seen in the league's four-year history, but South Point appeared to be proving the doubters wrong as they rolled to a 2-0 start.

The Red Raiders finally

showed they were vulnerable Friday.

In the type of dramatic win that has become the norm for Ashbrook, Devin Harris caught a 68-yard touchdown pass from Cole Russell with less than a minute to play as the Green Wave knocked off South Point 31-27 Friday night at Eccles Field.

Ashbrook (5-2, 3-0 Big South 3A) not only gained the inside edge toward a conference title but beat South Point (4-2, 2-1) for the first

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Photos by Shih Fa Kao/The Gazette

Ashbrook's Eric Boyce breaks free from the Red Raider defense during the first quarter on Friday. Friday was Boyce's first win over South Point.

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time since 1998 and halted the Red Raiders' conference winning streak at 16.

"All through my high school years I've never beaten South Point in football, so it was great to finally beat them," said defensive end Andrew McKay, who helped force a second-quarter fumble.

Ashbrook trailed 27-24 when a South Point fumble gave the Green Wave the ball at its own 7-yard line with 1:58 to play.

After three straight incompletions set up a fourth-and-10, Russell connected with Harris for a 13-yard gain. Andrew Rinehart sacked Russell on the next play, but Russell found Harris open again on second down for an 18-yard completion.

That set up Harris' game-winning reception, where he caught the ball over South Point defensive back Josh Robinson at the South Point 35 and jogged the rest of the way to the end zone after Robinson fell to the ground trying to go for the interception.

"I think he sort of bit on a fake a little bit," Harris said of Robinson. "He was able to recover a little bit and jump for it and sort of missed and I was able to keep going."

The game marked only the second Big South 3A Conference loss for South Point in the league's four-year history. The Red Raiders hadn't lost a Big South game since dropping a 41-34 decision to North Gaston in the second-to-last game of 2001.

"All good things end," South Point coach John Devine said. "Tonight it was our turn to get beat. What we'll try to do is start a new one. We're very proud of our record."

A productive Ashbrook offense and a bend-but-don't-break defense did the trick.

The Green Wave rolled up 456 yards of offense — 279 rushing and 177 passing — with strong running by fullbacks Phillip Ford and Patrick Hall setting up big gains for quick tailback Eric Boyce, who finished with 187 yards on 16 carries.

Russell completed six-of-12 passes for 177 yards without an interception. Five of his completions went to Harris for 173 yards — all in the second half.

South Point's undoing was a rash of turnovers. After fumbling 10 times and losing four of them in a season-



South Point's Josh Robinson is tackled during the fourth quarter by Ashbrook's Antonio Surratt on Friday.

opening win over Kings Mountain, the Red Raiders had appeared to correct the problem, lowering their turnover total to four, three, two and one in the past four games.

But South Point fumbled six times Friday — three lost — and threw two interceptions while forcing only one Ashbrook turnover.

"I thought we had gotten over that hump, but obviously, we've still got a long way to go on it," Devine said.

South Point appeared to take the wind out of Ashbrook's sails when Brandon Spencer's 14-yard touchdown run with 7:51 to play in the fourth quarter gave the Red Raiders a 27-16 lead.

But Ashbrook responded about quickly as possible to make it a game again. The Green Wave needed just two plays — 41- and 33-yard passes from Russell to Harris — and 36 seconds to light up the scoreboard and close the gap to 27-22.

Ashbrook elected to go for the 2-point conversion and succeeded when Russell connected with tight end Josh Sparks to make the score 27-24.

A bizarre sequence of events followed, with South Point fumbling at midfield on the first play of its next possession, then Ashbrook fumbling the ball back to the Red Raiders two plays later with 6:17 on the clock.

An unsportsmanlike penalty on Ashbrook after the play gave South Point possession at the 50, and the Red Raiders went in for the kill from there. They drove the ball 42

yards in eight plays and had first and goal from the 8, but quarterback Andrew Rinehart fumbled after a 1-yard gain and Ashbrook's Jerome Johnson recovered.

The Green Wave had their work cut out for them, needing to drive within field goal range from its own 7-yard line with one minute, 58 seconds remaining.

That's when Russell and Harris began their magic for the game-winning score.

South Point had 44.1 seconds to work with when it got the ball back, but Dakwan George intercepted Rinehart's pass attempt at the Ashbrook 45 and dove on the ground to seal the win.

SP 70 6 14 — 27

A 79 0 15 — 31

A — Patrick Hall 7 run (Colin Muelman kick)

SP — Bryan Jennings 1 run (Andrew Rinehart kick)

A — Eric Boyce 62 run (kick failed)

A — FG Muelman 39

SP — Jennings 1 run (run failed)

SP — Cameron McGinnis 69 pass from Rinehart (Rinehart kick)

SP — Brandon Spencer 14 run (Rinehart kick)

A — Devin Harris 33 pass from Cole Russell (Josh Sparks pass from Russell)

A — Harris 68 pass from Russell (Muelman kick)

Note

Ashbrook retired the No. 18 baseball jersey of Wes McCall, a two-time conference player of the year who graduated in May and now attends UNC Greensboro on a baseball scholarship.

▼ Duo

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Point "I'm so proud of these players. What a great football game."

Friday also marked the first time since 1998 that Ashbrook had beaten South Point. The teams tied 10-10 in a non-conference game in 2000.

Russell, a starter since midway through his sophomore season, misfired on his pass attempts during the better part of three and a half quarters of Friday night's game against the Red Raiders. He completed only one pass for 4 yards in the first half and struggled to hit the open receiver until the last two drives of the night.

"The first half it just wasn't happening," Russell said. "It just started to click (in the second half). The linemen were holding them off, but I just couldn't get it together."

Finally, he and Harris got in rhythm and looked as good as any tandem in the area.

"We have extreme confidence in ourselves and we don't think one incomplete pass will let us down," Harris said. "He kept throwing and throwing and it turned out well."

Harris had been Russell's intended target on several pass attempts in the second half, but he either couldn't get open or watched the passes sail over his head.

When the pair got hot, Ashbrook made a run at the defending 3-A state champions.

Harris caught passes of 41, 33, 13, 18 and 68 yards, all in the fourth quarter, to spark the upset. He finished with 173 yards and two touchdowns — not bad for a guy who was Russell's backup at quarterback the last two seasons.

"My adrenaline was just pumping and my quarterback just found me and I was open," Harris, a junior, said. "He made great throws and I was able to take it to the house."

Russell completed six of 12 passes for 177 yards and two touchdowns.

"Cole's a gamer. He's a winner. I'll take Cole every time," Shepherd said.