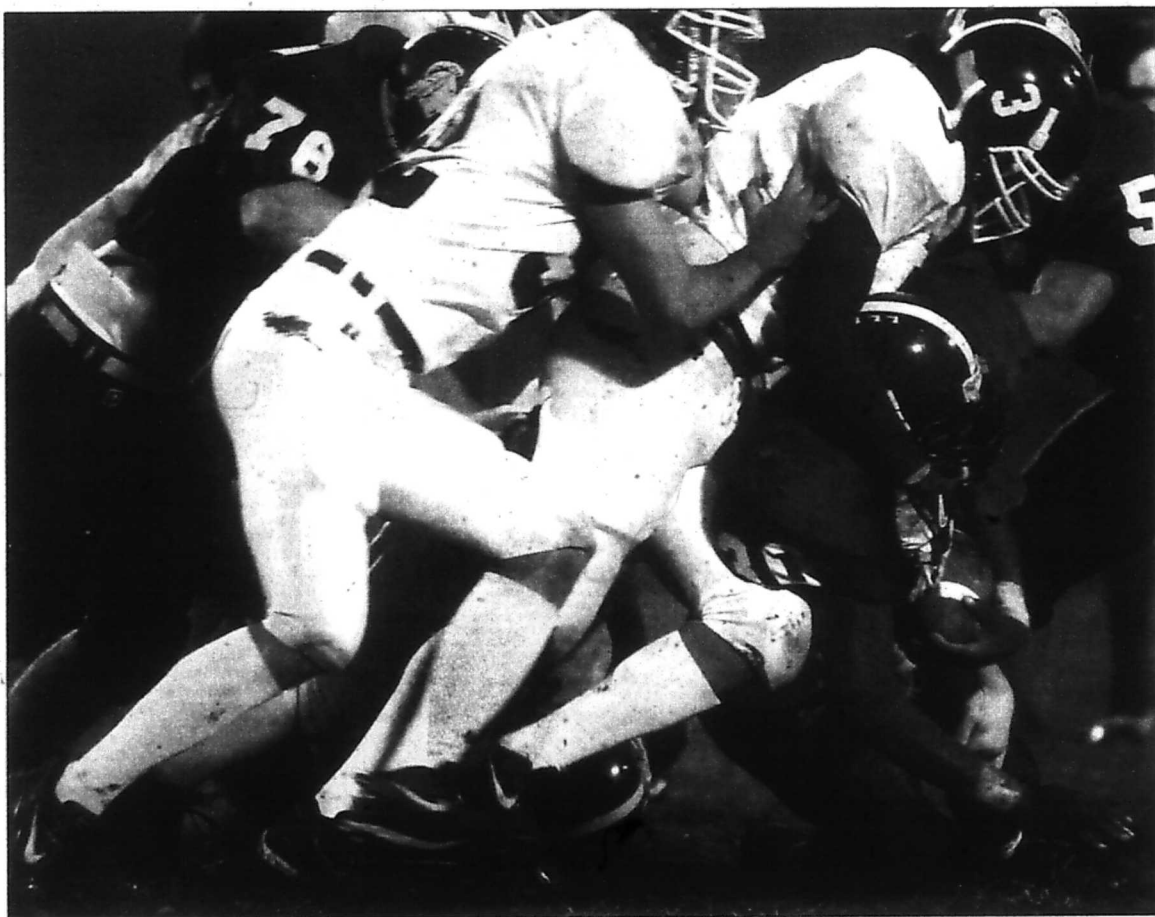


STATE FOOTBALL PLAYOFFS

Raiders rocked



Defending state champs totally dominated by upstart Franklin

By RICHARD WALKER
Gazette Sports Reporter

BELMONT — Virtually every time a state high school football champion sees its title defense come to an end, there's an element of surprise.

Friday was more than that as visiting Franklin abruptly, decisively and thoroughly ended South Point's reign as N.C. Class 3A state champions with a 29-15 victory.

"It was just a good night for us," said Franklin coach Fred Goldsmith, whose Panthers had seen their two previous seasons end in losses at South Point.

Goldsmith's sentiments may have been the understatement of the night, as Franklin dominated South Point in virtually every way at rain-soaked Lineberger Stadium on a misty, foggy November night.

The Panthers outgained the Red Raiders 406 to 114 and held South Point without a first down until 7:11 remained in the third quarter. Franklin also maintained possession for 33:39 of the game's 48 minutes in a game in which South Point did not run a play from scrimmage in the first quarter.

Associated Press

South Point's Jordan Gilmore, right, is taken down by a host of Franklin defenders Friday at South Point. Franklin used a stingy defense and efficient offense to knock off the defending 3A state champions, 29-15.

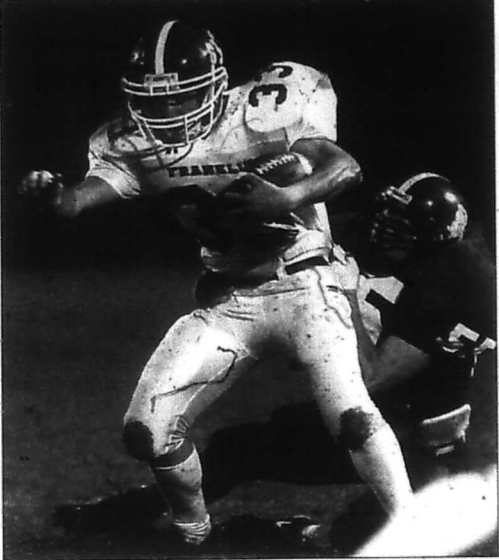
first quarter.

Quarterback Chase Holland led Franklin's effort, as he completed seven of 10 passes for 176 yards and three touchdowns. Two of Holland's scoring tosses went to 6-foot-2 end Dustin Cabe, including a momentum-changing 98-yarder early in the second quarter.

"They moved the ball and got the benefit of a couple of calls early and we couldn't stop them," said South Point coach John Devine, whose team finishes 8-3 after winning a Gaston County-record sixth consecutive conference title.

Franklin (7-5) advances into next week's N.C. 3A second round against the winner of the R-S Central at Winston-Salem Carver first-round game.

Meanwhile, South Point is left to ponder the sudden end of a season that had previously been such a smashing success.



Michelle Williams/The Gazette

Franklin's Chris Lequire tries to break free from South Point's John Goodwin during Friday's first-round playoff game at South Point High School.

▼ Raiders

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"You've got to come out and block and tackle," Devine said. "You've got to take your hat off to Franklin. They did it better tonight. They handed it to us."

"We thought we had a good game plan. Obviously, it wasn't good enough."

The loss marked South Point's earliest playoff exit in nearly 10 years (1995), as the Red Raiders had won first-round games in five consecutive years beginning in 1999 after missing out on the postseason from 1996 through 1998.

Franklin's opening possession proved a harbinger of bad things to come for South Point. Not only did the Panthers score on Holland's 9-yard pass to Bryan Bell, but they marched 80 yards in 14 plays that covered 7:47 of the game clock. Two of their six first downs on the drive were pass interference penalties on third-down plays where South Point defenders appeared to have recorded successful break-ups.

The Red Raiders would strike back quickly to go on top as Josh Robinson fielded Matt Corbin's squibbed kickoff at his own 14 and raced untouched 86 yards for a touchdown. Andrew Rinehart's extra point gave South Point a brief 7-6 advantage.

Franklin responded with a 10-play, 77-yard drive that ended with Corbin's 26-yard field goal to take the lead for good at 9-7 with 11:17 left in the first half.

But the real back-breaker came after Rinehart's 42-yard punt was downed at the Franklin 1 by Thomas Davie. After Holland's sneak netted one yard, he threw to Cabe out of his own end zone for the 98-yard score. Cabe caught the pass near midfield by outjumping Davie and then outracing and breaking a tackle attempt by Cameron McGlenn near the South Point 20.

"They made big plays," Devine said. "And on plays where we felt we were in position. You've got to give it to them. They made plays and we didn't."

Franklin added another first-

half touchdown to go into the intermission ahead 22-7 after a half in which South Point's usually-potent offense was limited to three yards in 12 plays.

Still, Devine said his team felt confident of a comeback after making halftime adjustments.

"Everybody coming out of that locker room felt like we could win when we came back onto the field," Devine said. "We just couldn't get it going. Their ability to stop the run and our inability to execute really hurt us."

The Red Raiders briefly gave the partisan crowd signs of life when, after the teams traded possessions, Rinehart's deep lob to McGlenn on the right sideline resulted in a 76-yard touchdown pass with 7:11 left in the third quarter. The play also marked South Point's initial first down of the night.

And the Red Raiders clearly seemed to have the game's momentum when Jordon Gilmore bulled in on the ensuing two-pointer to cut the Panthers' lead to 22-15. But Franklin would respond with another efficient scoring drive.

After Franklin recovered Rinehart's onside kick at its own 42, Holland found Cabe for a 38-yard scoring pass over the outstretched arms of Davie to cap a 5-play, 58-yard drive that put the Panthers up by 14 again.

Neither team would score again, though both would threaten.

F 6 16 7 0 — 29
SP 7 0 8 0 — 15

F — Bryan Bell 9 pass from Chase Holland (kick failed)

SP — Josh Robinson 86 kickoff return (Andrew Rinehart kick)

F — Matt Corbin 26 FG

F — Dustin Cabe 98 pass from Holland (kick failed)

F — Alex Crouteau 7 run (Corbin kick)

SP — Cameron McGlenn 76 pass from Rinehart (Jordon Gilmore run)

F — Cabe 38 pass from Holland (Corbin kick)

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