

# Raiders can't hold late lead, end season in first round again

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WADESBORO — South Point's special teams made all the big plays in Friday's first-round 3A state playoff matchup against Anson — until the end.

Trailing by two points with two minutes remaining, Anson recovered a pooch kick, scored five plays later for its first lead of the game and held on for a 31-27 home victory.

South Point ends its season at 7-5 with its second consecutive first-round exit after winning the 2003 state title. But, clinging to a 27-25 lead with 2:04 remaining, all the Red Raiders had to do to advance was recover a kick and run out the clock.

Expecting an onside kick, South Point sent its hands team onto the field.

But Quentin Caple booted the ball 35 yards into an area where there were no South Point players.

Anson's Mario Campbell raced down the Bearcats sideline and dove on the ball before any South Point player could arrive, giving Anson possession on the South Point 23.

"We would have liked to have got on that one play," South Point coach John Devine said. "It probably would have won the ballgame for us, but to define that ballgame by one play, I just don't believe you can do it."

Anson had two timeouts remaining at the time. Coach Jody Grooms said the original plan was to kick it deep and force South Point to punt.

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"They're a running team. We felt like if we could use our timeouts and get a three-and-out situation, they'd have to punt it to us and we'd get it at about our 40," he said. "We felt like we'd get the ball back with about a minute left, and you never know. We were going to have to pray."

South Point looked as if it might hold Anson out of the end zone, but Cameron McGlenn was flagged for pass interference in the end zone on third-and-12. Two plays later, on second-and-14 from the 16, Chance English connected with 6-foot-2 Marshall Little on a fade pattern for the go-ahead touchdown.

After the two-point conversion failed, South Point returned the ensuing kickoff to the 30 and had 40 seconds to overcome a four-point deficit.

Aided by pass interference

and offside penalties, the Red Raiders advanced to their own 47 before stalling. Tyler Lemons' final desperation heave resulted in an interception at the 11.

South Point, which ended on a three-game losing streak for the first time since 1997, had lost its previous two games by one point each. The 17-16 loss to North Gaston came down to a missed extra point, and last week's 21-20 defeat by Crest was decided by a blocked extra point.

"It's kind of been going like that for us all year, just one play away," senior linebacker/fullback Jordon Gilmore said. "We played our hearts out, did all we could do. It just doesn't go your way sometimes."

South Point never trailed until the final minute thanks in large part to its defense and special teams.

Matthew Mitchell connected for his eighth and ninth field goals — a 43-yarder in the first quarter and a 35-yarder in the fourth. A 26-yard punt return by McGlenn set up the Red Raiders' first score; in all, four of his punt returns or fair catches gave South Point possession in Anson territory.

The Red Raiders also forced two fumbles, including one that McGlenn returned 36 yards to the end zone for a 17-6 lead early in the third quarter.

But the Red Raiders had trouble wrapping up Anson's speedy running backs. The Bearcats (8-4) rushed for 218 yards, led by Michael Bowman's 86 yards. Freshman Patrick Polk gained 66 yards and scored twice on just seven carries.

Little, a sophomore, was making his first varsity appearance but performed like a veteran, hauling in nine catches — mostly screens — for 76 yards.

"Our lives are not going to be defined by one ballgame," Devine said. "This team is not going to be defined by one play tonight. We came a long way from (team camp at) Mars Hill."

Lemons led South Point offensively with 52 yards on 14 carries.

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**SP** 3 7 14 3 — 27

**A** 0 6 6 19 — 31

SP—FG Matthew Mitchell 43

SP—Tyler Lemons 5 run (Mitchell kick)

A—Michael Bowman 26 run (kick failed)

SP—Cameron McGlenn 36 fumble return (Mitchell kick)

A—Patrick Polk 27 run (run failed)

SP—McGlenn 28 pass from Lemons (Mitchell kick)

A—Polk 38 run (Dakota Martinez kick)

SP—FG Mitchell 35

A—Polk 7 run (pass failed)

A—Marshall Little 16 pass from Chance English (pass failed)