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North Gaston's Princeton Brooks, bottom, fights for yardage at the goal line as the South Point defense piles on Friday.

Cats Take To Water

North Gaston buries South Point playoff hopes under pile of mud

By PHILLIP GARDNER
Gazette Sports Reporter

BELMONT — On a night the rest of the county postponed its games due to forecasted heavy rain, North Gaston players took offense to South Point's decision to play their game as scheduled.

"We thought they were challenging us, saying that we couldn't play them in the rain," linebacker Chris Robinson said. "So we were eager to come play."

It was North Gaston that took advantage of the wet conditions, scoring two

early touchdowns on fumble returns and coasting to a 49-7 rout Friday at Lineberger Stadium.

South Point (3-7, 2-3 Big South 3A/4A Conference) struggled mightily in the rain — they fumbled 11 times and lost five of them. Meanwhile, North Gaston (8-3, 3-3) fumbled just once.

The theme of the night became apparent early.

North Gaston's Willie Kennedy returned a fumble by Raiders quarterback Desmond Lowery 30 yards for a score on

the game's third play.

Three plays later, Wildcat linebacker Chavis Thompson scooped up a bad pitch and took it 29 yards to the house. Suddenly, North Gaston had a 14-0 lead before their offense could touch the ball.

"When you don't take care of the football, you get your butt spanked," South Point coach John Devine said. "And that's exactly what happened."



North Gaston's
Gevin Allison
streaks downfield
after a catch as
South Point's Stan
Wilson gives chase.

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▼ Wildcats

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If the Red Raiders thought the rain and mud would slow down North Gaston's potent offense, they were wrong. Although the Wildcats were forced to punt on their first possession, they scored touchdowns on their next four series for a commanding 42-0 lead with 5:47 remaining in the second quarter.

The rain also didn't keep North Gaston from airing it out. A.J. Blue threw a deep pass, though incomplete, on the first offensive play as the Wildcats demonstrated they weren't going to deviate from their usual gameplan.

Blue finished with only 94 yards on 4-of-12 passing but the Wildcats hardly needed to throw with the way the running room opened up. Blue ran for 137 yards on 14 carries, including touchdown runs of 1 and 60 yards. Princeton Brooks piled up 127 yards on 21 carries and scored on runs of 28 and 19 yards.

As a team, North Gaston rushed for 278 yards, a shade over its average for the season.

South Point, meanwhile, managed only 141 yards on the ground and 97 passing. The Red Raiders were plagued with bad handoffs and bad pitches all night, and

North Gaston applied pressure in the backfield seemingly every play.

South Point didn't get on the board until the first play of the fourth quarter when Lowery hit Chris Lane on a 33-yard scoring completion. The Red Raiders had another chance to score on their last possession but Lowery fumbled at the 1-yard line and Kennedy recovered on a play that summed up the night.

"It was wet all night on both sides," Devine said. "It affected their passing game, I feel certain. But it didn't affect their ball handling. It shouldn't have affected ours. You've just got to execute. You can't control the conditions."

As for South Point's decision not to postpone the game, Devine offered no apologies.

"The field wasn't a factor," he said. "It turned out to be a pretty decent night. It rained. It was 56 degrees. I mean, you know, it rained. Football is a game you play in the rain."

Dakiem Johnson and Robinson recovered the other fumbles for North Gaston, which snapped a two-game losing streak.

Aside from the fumbles, South Point's offense took another hit early when fullback and leading rusher suffered a concussion at the 8:18 mark of the first quarter. He walked to the sideline on his power but didn't return.

South Point's hopes of continuing a streak of seven straight playoff appearances also took a serious hit. The Red Raiders need four wins to become playoff eligible and close out the regular season at powerhouse Crest next week.

North Gaston, on the other hand, boosted its chances of hosting a first-round home game on a night it also tied a school record for wins. Nothing is certain, however, until the pairings are released Nov. 4. With a bye next week, the Wildcats will have an extra week to prepare for the first-round matchup.

North Gaston 49, South Point 7

| | | | | | |
|--|----|----|---|---|----|
| Wildcats | 21 | 21 | 0 | 7 | 49 |
| Red Raiders | 0 | 0 | 0 | 7 | 7 |
| NG—Willie Kennedy 30 fumble return (Stephen Digh kick) | | | | | |
| NG—Chavis Thompson 29 fumble return (Digh kick) | | | | | |
| NG—Princeton Brooks 28 run (Digh kick) | | | | | |
| NG—A.J. Blue 1 run (Digh kick) | | | | | |
| NG—Blue 60 run (Digh kick) | | | | | |
| NG—Gevin Allison 11 run (Digh kick) | | | | | |
| SP—Chris Lane 33 pass from Desmond Lowery (Matt Mitchell kick) | | | | | |
| NG—Brooks 19 run (Digh kick) | | | | | |

| | NG | SP |
|-----------------|--------|--------|
| First downs | 13 | 11 |
| Rushes yards | 39 278 | 41 141 |
| Passing yards | 94 | 97 |
| Comp-Att-Int | 4 12 0 | 4 12 0 |
| Fumbles-lost | 1 1 | 11 5 |
| Penalties-yards | 5-55 | 2 19 |

Individual statistics

RUSHING—North Gaston, Blue 14-137, Brooks 21-127, Allison 1-11, Chris Robinson 1-3, Team 2-0. South Point, Matt Hudspeth 2-5, Lowery 26-21, Jesse McGaha 4-8, Stan Wilson 6-105, Curtis English 1-9, James Justice 1-(-10), Marcus Duckworth 1-3.

PASSING—North Gaston, Blue 4-12-0, 94 South Point, Lowery 4-12-0, 97.

RECEIVING—North Gaston, Paris Benton 1 13, Caleb Potter 1-19, Allison 1-46, Brooks 1 16. South Point, Wilson 1-6, Duckworth 2-58, Lane 1-33.