

South Point 42 ■ South Johnston 28

STATE CHAMPS

Second half turnaround key to Red Raiders win

By Kevin Ellis

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CHAPEL HILL — A Red Raider team many thought was rebuilding was in fact just re-loading, giving South Point its fourth football title and first since 2003.

But Saturday's 42-28 victory over South Johnston didn't come easy.

South Point fell victim to big plays early and found themselves in a 28-14 hole at halftime. But the 5,000 Red Raider Nation faithful who showed up at UNC Chapel Hill's Kenan Stadium dressed mostly in red never gave up, and neither did the players.

"We weren't in the best of moods at halftime," said Doc Lawing, father of freshman tight end Chuck Lawing, "but we weren't down and out by no means."

South Point proved itself a second half team once again in the biggest



Benjamin Patton/The Gazette

South Point's Aaron Crumbley (46) and Ryan McKinney (24) celebrate after winning the state 3AA N.C. High School Athletic Association football championship by beating South Johnston 42-28 on Saturday. Crumbley was named the game's most valuable player after scoring five touchdowns during the Red Raiders' state championship win.

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game of the year, said Harriet Fomey, the mother of South Point defensive player of the game Jordan Fomey, a sophomore linebacker.

"Every time at half—I don't know what coach (John) Devine says to them—but they come out and play better," said Harriet Fomey.

Father Eric Fomey shed a tear as he described his emotions after the come-from-behind win.

"All I can say is I'm very proud," said Eric Fomey.

Stars of the game were numerous. Aaron Crumbley scored South Point's first five touchdowns and Josh Justice added a 42-yard touchdown run with less than two minutes left to secure the win. Crumbley was the game's most valuable player; Justice, the game's outstanding offensive player for South Point, as voted on by the media.

"We're very excited for the players," fan Jeff Howard said after the game. "They worked long and hard for this."

South Point Principal Gary Ford said the team's character shined Saturday. They fell behind, but were never beaten.

"All year they gave 150 percent,"

Ford said. "These boys never gave up. They have heart like you wouldn't believe."

South Point's football team also has earned the state's "team scholar" designation for having a cumulative 3.1 grade point average, Ford said.

"Our coaches teach good character comes first and that you play hard," Ford said. "I just couldn't be more proud of a group of boys."

South Point fans outnumbered those from South Johnston by almost 2-to-1, which shows community support, said Scott Van Pelt, father of freshman player Camden Van Pelt.

"They're blessed," Van Pelt said of the team.

But many of the South Point faithful said they saw this state title day coming years ago, back when the youngsters played for the Belmont Braves Optimist team or the McAdenville Dolphins.

"These boys have been playing together since they were in the second and third grades," said Jasha Hunter, mother of junior linebacker Jeremy Hunter. "They've been winners their whole lives."

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Gazette photos by Benjamin Patton

ABOVE: South Point fans celebrate the state championship win Saturday. **FAR LEFT:** South Point cheerleaders cheer during the game. **LEFT:** South Point's band performs during the game.

3AA State Football Championship: South Point 42, South Johnston 28

Red Revival



Gazette photos by Benjamin Patton

South Point's Josh Hise breaks through the tackle attempt of South Johnston's Aaron Anderson on Saturday. The Red Raiders battled back from a deficit at the half to win the 3AA state championship.

Halftime 'chat' brings South Point to life

CHAPEL HILL— After one half of Saturday's N.C. Class 3AA state football title game at Kenan Stadium, South Point trailed 28-14 after committing four turnovers (three on fumbles) and wasting an early 7-0 lead.



RICHARD WALKER

In the second half, the Red Raiders scored 28 unanswered points with a dominating ball-control offense that led to a 42-28 victory over South Johnston.

So what was said at the half?

"I can assure you they didn't do any talking," South Point coach John Devine said of his players' mood at the half.

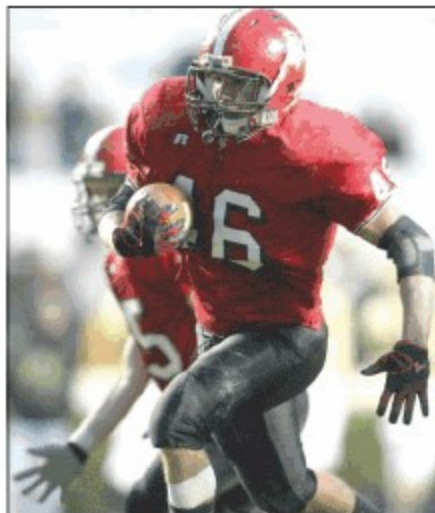
Clearly, the Red Raiders didn't play their best in the opening half. And clearly, Devine and his coaching staff were disappointed with the mistakes, most of them unforced.

But as South Point has done before, they responded.

And on this day, it may have been one of the Red Raiders' best efforts in the school's storied football history.

Not only did South Point outscore a talented South Johnston team 28-0 in the second half, but the Red Raiders outgained the Trojans 198 to 51 while controlling possession for 18 of the second half's 24 minutes.

The school's "Red Bone" spread option offense has often been highlighted by long scoring plays. But on this



South Point's Aaron Crumbley rushes for his fifth touchdown during his team's win Saturday. Crumbley capped one of the finest careers in Gaston County in his final Red Raider game.

Crumbley's 5 TDs pace wild comeback

By Phillip Gardner
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CHAPEL HILL— Every summer when South Point travels to Mars Hill for team camp, head coach John Devine talks to his players about winning the state championship.

This year, it was more than just talk.

Aaron Crumbley rushed for five touchdowns and South Point rallied from a 14-point deficit to beat South Johnston 42-28 for the 3AA state title Saturday at Kenan Stadium.

"It's a dream for everybody and we made a dream come true," senior quarterback Josh Justice said.

Crumbley, a senior fullback, rushed for 122 yards on 38 grueling carries and found the end zone three times after halftime as South Point, trailing 28-14 at the break, dominated the final 24 minutes. Justice added 107 yards on 23 carries and provided the exclamation point with a 42-yard rushing TD when South Point was trying to milk the clock with 38 seconds remaining.

South Point finishes the season with a 14-2 mark, completing its best three-year stretch in school history with 39 wins. Last year's team fell one game short of the state title game but the 2009 bunch advanced

But a starting lineup consisting of eight seniors, eight juniors and six sophomores played like grizzled veterans on a cold December afternoon in Chapel Hill.

And the biggest star was Crumbley, who capped one of the finest careers in Gaston County with his most stirring performance yet. The 6-foot, 210-pound senior didn't have many easy carries but kept pounding away and broke through for TD runs of 4, 5, 1, 1 and 11 yards.

"The thing about Aaron is he's a tough hard-nosed kid," Devine said. "He plays with his pads down and usually that first lick is not going to stop him."

The first touchdown gave Crumbley sole possession of the Gaston County career touchdown record and he wound up with 89 when all was said and done. Crumbley, likely headed to Navy next season, and Justice led a three-yards-and-a-cloud-of-dust offense that allowed South Point to dominate time of possession. The Red Raiders held the ball for 33 minutes, 47 seconds compared to South Johnston's 14:11.

South Point's 82 offensive plays marked the most by a team in a N.C. state championship game in the last 20 years, since the N.C. High School Athletic Association went to its current format.

"They have the best offensive line we saw this year and probably do the best job with the option as any high school team I've ever seen," South Johnston coach Joe Salas said.

Crumbley was featured heavily in South Point's triple-option offense especially after halftime, as South Point didn't abandon its gameplan despite falling behind by two touchdowns at the half. The Red Raiders scored on their first two possessions after halftime and held the ball for the first 7 minutes, 14 seconds of the third quarter thanks in part to an onside kick recovery between drives. The two scored tied it at 28.

South Point's defense, meanwhile, forced three consecutive three-and-outs and then the offense went back to work on a 16-play, 69-yard scoring drive that consumed 7 minutes, 18 seconds. The Red Raiders cashed in when Crumbley found his biggest opening of the night for an 11-yard TD, and Joey Mitchell's extra point gave South Point a 35-18 lead with 3:26 remaining.

The Red Raiders' defense held again, this time forcing a turnover on downs at the South Point 45 with 2:28 remaining. Moments later, when a first down would have sufficed, Justice found daylight down the left sideline and took it all the way, sending the South Point faithful into a frenzy.

South Johnston (14-2) was making its first state championship appearance but looked well on its way to the title. The Trojans withstood South Point's early charge by scoring three quick touchdowns for a 21-7 lead early in the second. Patrick Dunnigan tossed two TD passes to Shrine Bowl receiver Dee Williams and Anthony Crumity added

benefited from an onside kick.

Late in the second quarter, a 41-yard pass from Justice to Josh Hice set up Crumbley's second TD to put South Point back within one score at 21-14. But Williams returned the ensuing kickoff 87 yards for a 28-14 lead that South Johnston took into the locker room.

That lead soon withered once South Point took care of its turnover issues. South Point had three fumbles and an interception in the first half but only one turnover (a muffed punt catch) in the second half.

South Point outgained the Trojans 446-258. Scott McWhirter added 74 rushing yards on eight carries for South Point and Hice carried three times for 21 yards. Justice completed 5 of 8 passes, with one interception, for 111 yards. Hice caught two passes for 76 yards, Shane Merrill two for 21 and Ramon Costner one for 14.

Dunnigan finished with 154 passing yards and two TDs out of the Trojans' spread offense. Williams caught eight passes for 96 yards and two TDs. Crumity finished with 84 yards on 13 carries.

Rod Williams and Jordan Fomey led the Red Raiders' defense with seven tackles each. Josh Allman added six tackles and Troy Leeper five. Patrick Truesdale had three tackles and two pass breakups. Jalen Porter provided the game-sealing interception on South Johnston's final drive. Williams and Maurice Falls also had one quarterback hurry each.

South Point improved to 3-0 in N.C. High School Athletic Association state title appearances, having also won in 1979 and 2003. The Red Raiders also shared the 1971 Western N.C. High School Activities Association title.

The current Red Raiders wanted to uphold the strong tradition in Belmont, and the 10 seniors on the roster didn't leave their high school careers disappointed.

South Point 42, South Johnston 28

South Johnston 14 14 0 0 — 28
South Point 7 7 14 14 — 42

First quarter

SP—Aaron Crumbley 5 run (Joey Mitchell kick), 3:04.

SJ—Dee Williams 29 pass from Patrick Dunnigan (Edgar Herrera kick), 1:27.

SJ—Anthony Crumity 40 run (Herrera kick), 1:11.

Second quarter

SJ—Williams 33 pass from Dunnigan (Herrera kick), 10:58.

SP—Crumbley 5 run (Mitchell kick), 4:35.

SJ—Williams 87 kickoff return (Herrera kick), 4:21.

Third quarter

SP—Crumbley 1 run (Mitchell kick), 9:18.

SP—Crumbley 1 run (Mitchell kick), 4:46.

Fourth quarter

SP—Crumbley 11 run (Mitchell kick), 3:26.

SP—Josh Justice 42 run (Mitchell kick), 0:38.

	SJ	SP
First downs	9	27
Rushes-yards	16-104	74-335
Passing yards	154	111
Comp-Att-Int	14-32-1	5-8-1
Fumbles-lost	1-1	4-4
Penalties-yards	4-29	6-45

Individual statistics

RUSHING—South Johnston, Crumity 13-84, Dunnigan 3-20. South Point, Crumbley 38-122, Justice 23-107, Scott McWhirter 8-76, Josh Hice 3-21.

PASSING—South Johnston, Dunnigan 14-31-1 154; Williams 0-1-0. South Point, Justice 5-8-1 111.

a 40-yard TD rush during the stretch. The first two touchdowns came on back-to-back plays as South Johnston

RECEIVING—South Johnston, Williams 8-96, Mitch McLamb 3-33, Justin Sanders 3-25. South Point, Hice 2-76, Shane Merrill 2-21, Ramon Costner 1-14.

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Aaron Crumbley had 38 physical carries for a hard-earned 122 yards, his longest run of 11 yards coming on the last of his five touchdown runs.

Quarterback Josh Justice, who directed a 446-yard attack, picked up 107 yards rushing and one touchdown on 23 carries and threw only one pass in the second half.

In the end, the 82 offensive snaps by South Point were the most in a state title game since the games were moved to neutral site locations like the University of North Carolina's Kenan Stadium in 1988.

"There were so many times where it's third-and-three and we kept getting a first down, Justice said. "That seemed to take away their will a little."

Added Crumbley: "If you run our offense right, it can frustrate the other team."

But South Johnston's frustration in the second half is not what South Point players, coaches and fans will be talking about years from now when they tell stories about the Red Raiders' fourth state title.

The cool and calm of their comeback is what those folks will remember.

Devine knew his team would be getting the second half kickoff. His feeling was that the Red Raiders would score — which they did — then try to steal the game's momentum with an

onsides kick to further steal the game's momentum.

Devine didn't tell his players of the plan to onsides kick until Joey Mitchell perfectly executed a "pooch" kick that Maurice Falls recovered at the South Johnston 33.

Ten plays later, Crumbley was in the end zone. With Mitchell's extra point kick, the game was tied at 28 — and South Point had the game's momentum for good.

"Football's a game of momentum," Justice said. "As soon as we got the ball back there, we talked in the huddle about making sure we got the game's momentum."

Devine was pleased because he felt it showed character that his team could lose momentum in the early going, then reclaim it

the way the Red Raiders did. "We had the momentum early," Devine said. "We had them by the throat and let them get away. And we got it

back and we didn't let it go." You can reach Richard Walker at rwalker@gastongazette.com

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Forney, Justice, Crumbley take honors

By Phillip Gardner
and Richard Walker

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CHAPEL HILL — Two of the usual suspects and one of South Point's young bucks took postgame honors at Saturday's state championship game.

Senior fullback Aaron Crumbley was named the game's most valuable player after rushing for 122 yards and five touchdowns in the Red Raiders' 42-28 win.

Senior quarterback Josh Justice was named South Point's outstanding offensive player after rushing for 107 yards and a TD and passing for 111 yards. And sophomore linebacker Jordan Forney received South Point's defensive outstanding player award after tallying a team-high seven tackles and assisting on a tackle for loss. Rod Williams also had seven tackles.

Crumbley entered the game tied with North Gaston's Princeton Brooks (2004-07) for most career rushing TDs in Gaston County history but put himself way out in front, finishing his three-year career with 89 TDs.

"I don't like bragging about myself, so I really don't know what to say," Crumbley said.

Saturday marked Crumbley's second five-TD performance, the other one happening against South Rowan in the first round of last year's playoffs.

"Aaron's about as good as they get," South Point coach John Devine said. "You've just got to give it to him. You've got to give him opportunities and



South Point's Josh Justice eludes the tackle attempt of South Johnston's Jon Farmer during their game Saturday.

Benjamin Patton/The Gazette

Postgame awards

Most valuable player — Aaron Crumbley, RB, South Point
South Point
Outstanding offensive player — Josh Justice, QB
Outstanding defensive player — Jordan Forney, LB
South Johnston
Outstanding offensive player — Dee Williams, WR
Outstanding defensive player — Josh Barbour, LB

he certainly made the most of them tonight, and he has his whole career."

Crumbley carried 38 times, eight shy of the N.C. High School Athletic Association state title game record held by Thomasville's Quan Warley since 2006.

Go East, young man

Apparently, all South Point needs to do for a state title game is go east.

After all, each of the Red Raiders' state titles have come in a locale east of Belmont.

In 1971, when South Point shared the Western N.C. Activities Association title with Salisbury in a 14-all tie, the game was played at Catawba College.

In 1979, when South Point won the N.C. Class 3A title, they won 34-13 at Ahsoskie High School. And in 2003 and this year, the Red Raiders won N.C. Class 3A and N.C. Class 3AA titles, respectively, at the

Title gear on sale

Official South Point championship merchandise will be on sale today from 1-4 p.m. outside the school's football fieldhouse.

The merchandise is being sold by the Big Red Booster Club and proceeds benefit all of the school's athletic programs. This merchandise will also be available at Belmont Drug Store, beginning Monday.

University of North Carolina's Kenan Stadium. South Point downed Northeast Guilford 27-10 in the 2003 title game.

From the field to the stands

One year after quarterbacking South Point to the state semifinals, Desmond Lowery sat in the stands as he watched his Red Raiders win a state championship.

"It wasn't a rebuilding year," Lowery said. "Everybody thought it was going to be a rebuilding year. It was the same ol' team we had last year. We just lost a couple seniors."

Lowery was one of 13 starters to graduate from last year's team. He played this season at Dean College in Franklin, Mass. Saturday's was the first South Point game he had seen this year.

Amazing run

It's hard to understate just how far South Johnston came this season, given its woeful football history. While the school opened in 1969, it didn't record a winning season until 1984 and had made only five playoff berths in history until this year. The Trojans' only previous postseason victory before this season came in the old Division II playoff system in which only conference runners-up qualified.