

Weddington 23, South Point 17

NO. 1 AND THEY'RE DONE

Top-ranked South Point season over at 10-1, QB Horne injured

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BELMONT — For much of the season, South Point High fans, players and coaches talked about how valuable senior quarterback Patrick

Horne was to their team.

Unfortunately in Friday's N.C. Class 3A playoff opener, South Point found out just how valuable as the unbeaten Red Raiders were eliminated from the playoffs 23-17 by Weddington.

The No. 1 ranked team in the state most of the season, South Point (10-1) was held scoreless in the second half in front of many disbelieving fans at Lineberger Stadium.

"For some reason, tonight just wasn't our night," said coach Mickey Lineberger, whose first season as head coach had featured a sparkling run to the Big South 3A Conference title. "Wednesday was the best

practice we've had this season. But give them credit, they played well and we didn't.

"We had lots of chances. It's a game of inches and we came up short a couple of times. We just didn't get it done tonight. We just didn't get it done."

Perhaps the play of the game came late in the first half.

With the score tied at 14-all, South

Point had driven from its own 29 to the Weddington 11. Facing a second-and-three play, Horne rolled left and was about to execute a pitchout.

But Warriors' defender Darius Brower hit Horne as he was about to pitch and Horne never got up — at least not until he had to be helped from the field a few minutes later.

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Horne, a two-year senior starter, had suffered an ankle injury so severe he was carted from the sidelines and later returned to the bench on crutches.

With Horne through 10 games, South Point had rolled up an average of 421.3 yards and 51 points per game.

Without him, the Red Raiders used two quarterbacks and the offense managed only three more points.

"It really hurt us mentally, emotionally and every other way," Lineberger said of Horne's absence. "Nothing against the other two quarterbacks we used. They tried and played hard."

But Weddington's defense came up time and again with one big stop after another. South Point was stopped on downs three times in Weddington territory in the second half. On the other possessions, the Red Raiders missed a field goal and a punt — their only one of the contest — was blocked out of the end zone for a safety.

The safety put Weddington ahead 23-17 with 3:43 to play and appeared to seal South Point's fate.

But Red Raider kicker Dayton Rogers' onside kick on the free kick from the South Point 20 was recovered by Jordan Forney at the 31.

"I felt like we still had a good chance there," Lineberger said. "But they found a way to stop us."

South Point picked up one first down, but quarterback Derek Perry's option keeper was stopped two yards shy of a first down near midfield with 1:57 to play.

After forcing a three-and-out punt, South Point had possession one final time, starting at its own 9 with 1:21 left. Perry completed three passes to move the ball to the Red Raiders 23, but his final, desperation try with 2.5 seconds left was intercepted by Weddington's Jeremy Sergeant near midfield.

"Our kids just played hard," said Warriors coach Tim Carson, whose 7-4 team finished tied for third place in the Southern Piedmont 3A/4A Conference in the regular season. "We tried to look at this as a great opportunity. Anybody wants the opportunity to play somebody great. And these kids came in here, played hard and got a win they'll remember the rest of their lives."

South Point actually outgained the Warriors 373 to 310 led by Troy Leeper's 261 yards and one touchdown in 37 carries. Weddington was led by quarterback Drew Podrebarac, who completed 17 of 31 throws for 244 yards, one touchdown and one two-point conversion.

point conversion.

Widdington 6 8 72 - 23

South Point 7 18 0 0 - 17

First quarter

SP--Patrick Home 10 run

(Dayton Rogers kick), 5:42

W--Connor Gorham 1 run (Kick blocked), 1:45

Second quarter

SP--Troy Leeper 72 run (Rogers kick), 8:23

W--Ryan Black 66 pass from

Drew Podrebarac (Collin Lisa

pass from Podrebarac), 7:55

SP--Rogers 33 FG, 3:39

Third quarter

W--Podrebarac 2 run (Alex

Shuster kick), 8:04

Fourth quarter

W--Safety, punt blocked out of end zone, 3:43

Next week -- Widdington plays at

Friday's A.L. Brown Ladford winner in second round of 3AA playoffs.