



Photo by Tim Anderson/Special to The Gazette

South Point's Tanner Muse breaks away from East Rowan's defense to score a 73-yard touchdown in Friday night's state playoff game in Belmont. Muse led the Red Raider rushing attack with 157 yards on 12 carries as South Point advances to face Crest in next Friday's Western NC 3A final.

Hitting their stride

It's late November and Red Raiders are clicking; headed to Western final

By Richard Wadler
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BELMONT — South Point High's defenders spent most of Friday night pursuing East Rowan's elusive record-setting quarterback Samuel Wyrick.

Finally, junior linebacker Mike Hayes caught him — and his sack virtually assured the Red Raiders' hard-fought 42-32 win over the Mustangs.

The victory sends South Point (10-4) to the Western N.C. 3A final at unbeaten Crest (14-0) next Friday. It marks the second time the two perennial powers have played as Crest won 35-13 in Belmont in the Aug. 22 season-opener for both teams.

"It's just a great thing," said Hayes, whose 15-yard sack ended East Rowan's last drive with 2:08 to play. "My team needed a play and thankfully it was me that made it. We'd been chasing him around all night long."

Hayes' sack was the first and only sack of the night for South Point, which had five other tackles for a loss and put an end to East Rowan's determined 517-yard offensive effort. Wyrick led that charge with 388 yards passing and two touchdowns and 41



South Point's Jeffrey Pearson stiff-arms East Rowan's Willie McCree as he runs downfield during Friday's game. Pearson rushed for 84 yards and a touchdown on only two carries Friday night.

more rushing and another TD.

But after yielding 341 yards and a staggering 18 first downs in the opening half, Hayes said his coaching staff made adjustments and he and his teammates used them to their benefit in the second half.

"Our coaches told us to close down the pocket in the second half and we were able to do that," said Hayes, whose defense was on the field for 78 of the game's 142 snaps. In many ways, South Point's defense

outlasted the Mustangs in much the same way as the Red Raiders' offense wore their defense down.

How effective was South Point's "Red Bone" offense?

Three rushers had 100 or more yards, four had touchdowns and one of quarterback Jaquan Brooks' two pass completions went for another score.

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All told, the Red Raiders rolled up 556 yards total offense, including 520 yards rushing. It marks the seventh time in South Point's 46-year history that it has surpassed 500 yards rushing in a single game.

Tanner Muse led the way with 157 yards and one touchdown — a 72-yarder — in 12 carries. Workhorse fullback Ryland Etherton added 138 yards and two touchdowns in 29 carries. Brooks had 101 yards rushing in 10 carries and completed two of six passes for 36 yards and a 10-yard scoring toss to Nolan Wilson. Jeffrey Pearsall added 84 yards rushing and a touchdown in two carries. And Ben Washam had 41 yards and the other touchdown in four carries.

"They've got a fine football team," South Point coach Mickey Lineberger said of the Mustangs, who finished 7-6 after upsetting Freedom and West Henderson in their previous two football games. "Their quarterback is very elusive. We knew that if we could just get a couple of (defensive) stops, we could win this shootout."

Several defenders stood out for the Red Raiders' defense, as Yale Loucks led the way with 11 solo or first-hit tackles, Pearsall added nine, Donovan Stowe eight, Tyler Hall six and J.T. Starr and Muse five apiece. Starr also had a critical fourth quarter pass interception when South Point held a precarious 35-32 lead.

"The way this all started, you were hoping you would get the ball last or

would get the ball last or get a few key stops," Lineberger said.

South Point actually did both as Brooks kneeled out the victory eight plays after Hayes' quarterback sack.

"We're thrilled to have the opportunity we have now," Lineberger said. "I think Crest is a much improved but so are we. We're a different team now and I think we're playing our best football."

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South Point 42, East Rowan 32

East Rowan... 7 18 7 0—32

South Point... 14 14 7 7—42

First quarter

SP — Ryland Etherton 4 run
(Max Neisler kick), 8:40.

ER — Max Wall 3 run (Sal
Sanchez kick), 6:47.

SP — Tanner Muse 72 run
(Neisler kick), 5:22.

Second quarter

SP — Etherton 1 run (Neisler
kick), 11:55.

ER — Seth Wyrick 22 pass
from Samuel Wyrick (kick
blocked), 9:24.

ER — Wall 4 run (pass
failed), 5:25.

SP — Nolan Wilson 11 pass
from Jaquan Brooks (Neisler
kick), 1:07.

ER — Simon Soles 11 pass
from Samuel Wyrick (run
failed), 0:11.4.

Third quarter

SP — Jeffrey Pearsall 25 run
(Neisler kick), 6:23.

ER — Samuel Wyrick 1 run
(Sanchez kick), 2:42.

Fourth quarter

SP — Ben Washam 17 run
(Neisler kick), 4:38.

TEAM STATISTICS

	ER	SP
First downs	27	21
Rushes-yards	25-129	58-520
Passing yards	388	36
Total yards	517	556
Comp-Att-Int	34-53-1	2-6-0
Fumbles-lost	1-0	1-1
Penalties-yards	5-39	6-50
Punts-avg.	2-43.5	3-32.3

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

RUSHING — East Rowan, Wall
12-88, Samuel Wyrick 13-41.

South Point, Muse 12-157,
Etherton 29-138, Washam
4-41, Brooks 10-101, Pearsall
2-84, Team 1-minus 1.

PASSING — East Rowan,
Samuel Wyrick 34-53-1 388.
South Point, Brooks 2-6-0 36.

RECEIVING — East Rowan,
Seth Wyrick 14-190, Wall
6-73, Naquise Caldwell 5-59,
Tre Gillespie 2-1, Soles 2-27,
Chandler Smith 5-38. **South
Point**, Wilson 1-11, Muse
1-25.