

South Point 29, Kings Mountain 7



Gazette photos by John Clark

South Point's Ryland Elbertson heads to the end zone for a touchdown during Friday night's game against Kings Mountain in Belmont. The Red Raiders beat Kings Mountain, 29-7, and will seek their fifth state title Dec. 11 against Rocky Mount.

Chapel Hill bound

Raiders down KM, advance to 5th state championship

By Richard Walter
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South Point completed its turnaround from a 1-2 start Friday with a convincing 29-7 win over Kings Mountain that sends the Red Raiders to their fifth high school state football championship game next Friday.

South Point (13-2) will face Rocky Mount (13-2) at 7:35 p.m. Dec. 11 at the University of North Carolina's Kenan Stadium for the N.C. 3A state championship. The Red Raiders previously won state titles in 1971, 1979, 2001 and 2009, with the last two championships being played at the site of next week's title game.

"This bunch exemplifies the word 'team' as much as any team I've ever been associated with," South Point coach Mickey Linberger said of his Red Raiders, who were the coaches' preseason pick for third in the Big South 2A/3A Conference. "There's no



Kings Mountain quarterback Darren Burns is pressured by South Point's Matthew Robinson during their game Friday night.

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stars, just guys who surrender the 'I' part of themselves and play for their teammates."

South Point, which started 1-2 after losses to fellow Western N.C. champions Crest and Shelby, showed that all-around balance in Friday's victory as they survived two early turnovers before letting their spread option offense and gang-tackling defense take charge of the contest.

Ryland Etherton led the way for the Red Raiders with 175 yards and four touchdowns on 28 carries to lead South Point's 267-yard offense. On defense, 14 defenders made at least one stop — led by Tyler Hall's seven solo or first-hit tackles and J.T. Starr's two pass interceptions and three other pass break-ups — to limit Kings Mountain to 148 yards total offense.

"Their defense did a great job tonight," said Kings Mountain coach Greg Lloyd, whose team's lone touchdown came on a "hook and lateral" play just before half-time. "They played fast and they played really well."

In retrospect, the Mountaineers' best chance came early in the game when a Kings Mountain punt bounded off a South Point player and gave the Mountaineers possession at the South Point 26 just three minutes into the game.

But on fourth-and-one at the 17, the Red Raiders stopped Darren Burns on a quarterback sneak attempt.

"To miss that fourth and short after we got that break was tough for us," Lloyd said. "Give South Point credit: They made a play."

Said Lineberger: "Keeping them out of the end zone after that muffed punt was big."

South Point responded by driving 81 yards in 13 plays covering 6:39 before a



John Clark/The Gazette

South Point quarterback Diontree King looks for running room during their game against Kings Mountain on Friday night in Belmont.

fumble inside the 5 ended the drive.

But after yielding one first down, the Red Raiders forced a punt and Etherton went 50 yards on a pitchout from quarterback Diontree King to give South Point the lead for good with 10:52 left in the opening half.

Etherton's second score — an 11-yards run 4:05 before halftime — made it 14-0.

Kings Mountain gained some momentum on the perfectly executed trick play for a 43-yard touchdown just before halftime that made it 14-7. Burns threw to Jake Merchant for 7 yards and J'Air McCluney took Merchant's pitch and covered the remaining 36 yards for the score.

But the Red Raiders regained momentum with an eight-play, 59-yard drive to open the second half that ended with a 3-yard Etherton scoring run.

Thomas Lempereur's 32-yard field goal made it 23-7 late in the third quarter before Etherton's 28-yard run capped the scoring with 1:28 to play.

"We knew they had a good football team that was big and strong and had lots of weapons," Lineberger said of Kings Mountain. "But our defense held its ground against them."

For Kings Mountain, whose 12-3 finish marked the second-most wins in school history, the future is bright. The Mountaineers will lose 23 seniors but could return as many as 13 starters and its junior varsity and middle school teams are coming of championship seasons.

"These guys have worked really hard to get to this point," Lloyd said. "We'll just have to keep working again this offseason."

SOUTH POINT 29, KINGS MOUNTAIN 7

Kings Mountain 0 7 0 0 — 7

South Point 0 14 9 6 — 29

Second quarter

SP — Ryland Etherton 50 run (Thomas Lempereur kick), 10:52.

SP — Etherton 11 run (Lempereur kick), 4:05.

KM — J'Air McCluney 36 lateral off 7 pass from Darren Burns to Jake Merchant (Micah Randle kick), 1:30.

Third quarter

SP — Etherton 3 run (Kick failed), 8:01.

SP — Lempereur 32 FG, 1:16.

Fourth quarter

SP — Etherton 28 run (Kick failed), 1:26.

	KM	SP
First downs	12	13
Rushes-yards	21-33	51-253
Passing yards	115	14
Total yards	148	267
Comp-Att-Int	14-31-2	1-3-0
Fumbles-lost	0-0	2-2
Penalties-yards	6-50	4-50
Punts-avg.	5-36.0	3-41.0

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

RUSHING — **KM:** J'Air McCluney 7-14, Darren Burns 5-minus 8, Darian McClain 7-20, Shaun Grier 2-7.

SP: Nolan Wilson 3-24, Diontreea King 15-33, Ryland Etherton 28-175, Ometrick Leeper 4-2, Tyler Hall 1-19.

PASSING — **KM:** Burns 14-31-2 115. **SP:** King 1-3-0 14.

RECEIVING — **KM:** Jake Merchant 8-43, Madisyn Bolin 1-12, McCluney 1-40, Kavin Mosley 2-7, Chance Frederick 1-12, McClain 1-1. **SP:** Wilson 1-14.