

STATE 3A FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP | (No. 3 seed) Rocky Mount 24, (2) South Point 21 (OT)



South Point's Jake Alexander and Marlo Brandon react after Rocky Mount kicked a field goal in overtime for a 24-21 victory in the class 3A state championship game Friday night at Kenan Stadium on the University of North Carolina campus in Chapel Hill. South Point finished its season 12-3 after dropping its first state title game in school history. The Red Raiders had previously won state championship games in 1979, 2003 and 2009, and tied in a 1971 title game appearance.

Kick to the heart



John Clark/The Gazette

South Point quarterback Diontreea King runs past Rocky Mount's Deshaquon Fate for a big gain in the first half of Friday night's state championship game. King rushed for 139 yards and one touchdown on 25 carries.

King's scramble symbolizes Raiders' never-say-die attitude

By Jack Flagler

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CHAPEL HILL — In the third quarter of the 3A state championship football game Friday night, South Point's offense was stuck in the mud.

The Red Raiders had marched down the field and scored on their opening possession, but failed to score on their next three drives. In a game that did not feature many possessions, as both teams ran the ball on long drives, which led to a score-

the first half, stymieing drives that looked promising. After a huge defensive stop at the 1-yard-line to end the first half, South Point took the ball in the third quarter. However, the drive went nowhere.

A penalty and a sack knocked the Red Raiders back and led to a punt. By the time they got the ball back, they trailed 14-7 and were badly in need of a momentum change.

Once again, the offense ran into some trouble against a Rocky Mount defense that set

less drought of 24 minutes.

Rocky Mount stopped South
Point twice on fourth down in

Rocky Mount defense that set
the edge well, featured tough

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South Point's Ryland Etherton celebrates after his first-half touchdown run during their game against Rocky Mount in the class 3-A state championship game Friday night.

<< Scramble

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linebackers in the middle ready for fullback Ryland Etherton, and did not allow King many opportunities to get to the edge.

King dropped back to pass, a rarity for South Point, and appeared to be going down. Somehow, he spun out of a tackle, but he was still in trouble. He made another defender miss, caught a key block from Jacob Justice.

In the end, King ended up with a 24-yard gain on a play that should have been a major loss. Three plays later, Ryland Etherton was in for a 5-yard touchdown to make the score 14-14.

Ultimately, an 18-play, 89-yard clutch drive for the Gryphons provided Rocky Mount the difference in the game. Trailing by seven points early in the fourth quarter, Rocky Mount's Nick Bynum ran in a 4-yard touchdown to tie the score with 3:06 left.

South Point received the ball with a chance to win the game in the final seconds, and Thomas Lempereur got a

wide to the left, and Rocky Mount took the 24-21 win in overtime.

King ended the game with 139 yards on 25 carries and a touchdown. For his efforts, he was named the offensive MVP for South Point (13-3).

"He's a great football player," said Rocky Mount junior defensive end Artavious Richardson, who spent most of Friday night chasing after King.

"He runs hard, he never gives up, and you can't get frustrated. The other team is going to make big plays. We've just got to capitalize and make bigger plays."

Nick Muse earned defensive MVP honors for the Red Raiders.

In the fourth quarter, King again made multiple tacklers miss on a 17-yard touchdown run to the corner of the end zone.

After missing his junior year because he was academically ineligible, King ended his fantastic senior season with 1,770 yards and 24 touchdowns, averaging seven yards per carry and providing Red Raider fans with tons of highlight plays.

shot at a long 45-yard field goal attempt to win. The junior booted the ball with plenty of distance, but it barely sailed

played. In his varsity career, after playing wingback as a sophomore, he totaled 2,889 yards and 36 scores.

In game that had bit of everything, it's overtime boot that leaves South Point just short of crown

By Richard Walker
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CHAPEL HILL — Rocky Mount started and finished fast Friday night at the University of North Carolina's Kenan Stadium.

And it was enough to pin a heartbreaking 24-21 overtime defeat on South Point in the N.C. 3A championship game.

The Gryphons, who claimed their first state title since winning back-to-back N.C. 4A titles in 1962 and 1963 behind eventual UNC standout Danny Talbott, opened the contest by returning the game's opening kickoff 81 yards for a touchdown.

And Rocky Mount clinched the victory on Chase Miller's 20-yard field on the Gryphons' overtime possession after South Point had missed a field goal on its overtime possession.

South Point finished its season 12-3 after dropping its first state title game in school history. The Red Raiders previously won state championship games in 1979, 2003 and 2009, and tied a 1971 title appearance.

"We missed some blocks, we missed some tackles, but we didn't do it on purpose. We left it all out there on the field," South Point coach Mickey Lineberger said.

"I wouldn't trade anybody for my young men, my coaches. They busted their tail all year long and they gave it all they had. I'm very proud of our young men, proud of the character, proud of the class, proud of the work ethic, proud of their chemistry."

After falling behind 14-7 early in the second half, South Point scored touchdowns on back-to-back drives to take a 21-14 lead deep into the fourth quarter.

But Rocky Mount (13-2) converted a fourth-down play and two third-and-long plays on a 17-play, 89-yard drive that needed a 35-yard extra point conversion to the score at 21 with 3:06 left in regulation.

The Gryphons also survived a potential game-winning 44-yard Thomas Lempereur field goal try on the last play of regulation; Lempereur's attempt had the distance but was wide left.

In the overtime period, South Point picked up six yards on its three offensive plays — the last when highly touted Rocky Mount linebacker Sherrod Greene stopped a Diontreia King scramble at the 4. Then Lempereur's 22-yard field goal was wide left by less than a foot.

Rocky Mount picked up seven yards on its first



Brian Mayhew/Special to The Gazette

South Point fullback Ryland Etherton burst through the Rocky Mount defense on a carry during Friday's championship game.

With Gryphons quarterback Forrest Bell holding, Miller's 20-yard kick was true for the Rocky Mount victory.

Bell finished with 210 yards passing and 33 yards rushing and was chosen the game's overall most valuable player. But it was his scramble on fourth-and-two play from the South Point 14 in the closing minutes to keep Rocky Mount's drive alive that was the game's biggest play.

Bell didn't convert the first down. But he eluded a South Point pass rush and drew a face-mask penalty that gave the Gryphons a fourth-and-short play that offensive MVP Nick Bynum converted.

Bynum later scored on a 4-yard touchdown run to cap the game-changing drive for his second TD of the game.

But an unsportsmanlike penalty on that 4-yard TD run created a 35-yard extra point try for Mill-

two plays of overtime, then chose to give Miller the chance to kick the game-winner on third down.

er that he converted for a 21-all tie.

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Gazette photos by John Clark

South Point's Max Mead tackles Rocky Mount's Charlie Williams III for a loss during the Class 3-A state championship game Friday night in Chapel Hill.

<< South Point

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The Gryphons' late rally negated spectacular efforts from several South Point players, most notably offensive MVP Diontrea King, defensive MVP Nick Muse and hard-charging fullback Ryland Etherton.

King rushed for 139 yards and one touchdown 25 carries, including a highlight-reel 24-yard scramble on a third-and-11 play on what became a game-tying drive.

King later scored on an equally spectacular 27-yard TD run with 10:35 to play as South Point took its 21-14 lead before Rocky Mount's late-game heroics.

Muse had a game-high 14 tackles and Etherton had 99 yards rushing and two touchdowns on 21 carries for a Red Raiders' team that was picked to finish

third in the preseason Big South 2A/3A Conference coaches' poll.

"We all became a family and last year, when we lost in the western finals, all of us seniors got together and we talked about how we were going to get bigger, faster and stronger. We knew people were going to doubt us because we lost two key players, Jaquan Brooks and Tanner Muse," Etherton said.

"We all came together as a team. We played more as a team this year than we did last year I believe."

Rocky Mount, which outgained South Point 345 to 291, opened the game on B.J. Sanders' 81-yard kickoff return. Bynum led the Gryphons in rushing with 83 yards on 21 carries.

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Rocky Mount	7 0 7 7 3	24
South Point	7 0 7 7 0	21

First quarter

RM — BJ Sanders 81 kickoff return (Chase Miller kick), 11:44.
SP — Ryland Etherton 2 run (Thomas Lempereur kick), 8:32.

Third quarter

RM — Nick Bynum 15 run (Miller kick), 8:12.
SP — Etherton 5 run (Lempereur kick), 4:45.

Fourth quarter

SP — King 27 run (Lempereur kick), 10:35.
RM — Bynum 4 run (Miller kick), 3:06.

Overtime

RM — Miller 20-yard field goal.

	RM	SP
First downs	20	18
Rushes-yards	42-135	54-279
Passing yards	210	12
Total yards	345	291
Comp-Att-Int	15-21-0	1-2-0
Fumbles-lost	0-0	2-0
Penalties-yards	5-50	3-13
Punts-avg.	1-26	1-32

INDIVIDUAL STATS

RUSHING — Rocky Mount: Nick Bynum 21-83, Forrest Bell 7-33, Deangelo Collins 3-11, BJ Sanders 6-10, Tyrell Forbes 5-8. **South Point:** Diontrea King 25-139, Ryland Etherton 21-99, Nolan Wilson 8-41.

PASSING — Rocky Mount: Forrest Bell 15-21-0, 210. **South Point:** Diontrea King 1-2-0, 12.

RECEIVING — Rocky Mount: Jaclayton Freeman 7-68, Deangelo Collins 3-90, KK Edwards 3-29, Nick Bynum 1-12, Chris Richardson 1-11. **South Point:** Nathan Silver 1-12.