

Red Raiders bring home title



South Point players celebrate after their 16-7 win over Rocky Mount in the N.C. 3A State Championship game Saturday at Wake Forest University. PHOTOS BY JOHN CLARK/THE GAZETTE

South Point wins fifth title in school history

By Richard Walker
rwalker@gastongazette.com

WINSTON-SALEM — South Point High School got one for the thumb Saturday when the Red Raiders took their fifth state football championship in a 16-7 win over Rocky Mount for N.C. High School Athletic Association Class 3A at Wake Forest's BB&T Field.

"It's amazing what these guys did and what they accomplished," Red Raiders coach Mickey Lineberger said. "We lost 25 seniors from last year's team and had only 10 seniors coming

SEE TITLE, A3



Nick Muse celebrates with South Point students after the Red Raiders defeated Rocky Mount 16-7 to win the N.C. 3A State Championship Saturday at Wake Forest University.

MORE INSIDE

- See coverage of the N.C. 3A State Championship Game on **Page C1**.
- See box scores from the game on **Page C5**.

TITLE

Continued from A1

back. But we started off-season workouts on Jan. 17 and these guys have worked and worked and worked. I couldn't be more proud of them."

For South Point, the title completed a turnaround after losing three of its first four games and four of its first six games. That included a 24-0 shutout loss at eventual N.C. 2AA champion Shelby on Sept. 1 that ended the school's 264-game scoring streak that dated to 1998.

But after losing 21-16 at home on Sept. 30 to eventual Big South 2A/3A Conference champion Hunter Huss, the Red Raiders won their last 10 games to finish with a



South Point's Phillip Davis, center, celebrates with Max Mead and Nick Muse after the Red Raiders defeated Rocky Mount 16-7 to win the N.C. 3A State Championship Saturday at Wake Forest University. JOHN CLARK/THE GAZETTE

12-4 overall record and join the school's previous state championship teams of 1971, 1979, 2003 and 2009.

After winning the state title, South Point players and coaches talked about how the

school's lone championship game loss last year motivated this year's team; South Point lost a 24-21 overtime heart-breaker to Rocky Mount at the University of North Carolina's Kenan Stadium

in the 2015 N.C. Class 3A title game.

That disappointment clearly had an impact on South Point senior linebacker and tight end Nick Muse when he watched Rocky Mount receive its runner-up trophy on Saturday afternoon.

"I was looking at every one of the Rocky Mount's players faces and I could see the pain," Muse said after his final highschool football game. "We were there last year and I still can remember it."

"That's why it feels so much better this time around. We're the state champions this time."

— Richard Walker: 704-869-1841; twitter.com/jrwalk22



South Point kicker Thomas Lempereur watches his field goal go through the uprights to make it a two-possession game late during the Red Raiders' 16-7 victory over Rocky Mount to win the N.C. 3A State Championship on Saturday at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem. See Monday's edition of The Gazette for a roundup of the state championships and the Shrine Bowl of the Carolinas. PHOTOS BY JOHN CLARK/THE GAZETTE

Lempereur gets REDEMPTION

REDEMPTION

Kicker seals Red Raiders' state title win

By Jack Flagler

jflagler@gastongazette.com

WINSTON-SALEM — Thomas Lempereur tries to keep his mind blank when he goes out to kick a field goal. The senior South Point kicker thinks about something like fishing, and when his mind is clear, the rest is just muscle memory. Snap. Hold. Kick.

Sometimes, Lempereur finds it easy to keep the pressure off his mind. Sometimes, it's a challenge. When he came onto the field late in the fourth quarter Saturday with a chance to put South Point up by nine, Lempereur admits, it was one of the challenging times.

He had made two early field goals but missed a 24-yard attempt earlier in the quarter. Lempereur said he was thinking about last year's two misses against Rocky Mount in the Raiders' state championship loss, and he had to push all that out of his mind.

"It was pretty hard, I'm not going to lie. It was in my head when I missed that one, I was



South Point's Jerme Leeper, Nolan Cochran and Nick Muse tackle Rocky Mount's B.J. Daniels-Sanders for a loss during South Point's 16-7 win in the N.C. 3A State Championship game Saturday at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem.

really mad," he said. "When I came out on the last one, I had to leave it behind me."

The final attempt was flawless. The snap, hold and kick were perfect, and Lempereur's third field goal of the day went right down the middle.

Behind an excellent defensive effort, an offense that

picked up steam in the second half and those three kicks, the Red Raiders defeated Rocky Mount, 16-7, to win their fifth state title in school history, earning some retribution for last year's loss to the Gryphons.

SEE LEMPEREUR, C5

LEMPEREUR

Continued from C1

"I feel so much better this year, I finally got my redemption. Last year was really hard to overcome," Lempeur said. "This year, I made three, even missing one; that made me real happy."

Coach Mickey Lineberger's mantra all season to the team has been to be four points better than they were last year. He said the team took the message to heart, and put in the work when no one was paying attention in the weight room and the practice field.

"We made it happen today. I'm very proud of these young men and the accomplishments they made. They gave unbelievable effort and came every day to work hard," Lineberger said.

South Point's defense allowed just 118 yards of total offense to the Gryphons as the Red Raiders held their ninth straight opponent to a single-digit scoring total. But South Point entered the second half on the wrong side of the scoreboard as Rocky Mount scored its lone touchdown on a 25-yard pass from Shabios Lynch to Shyheim Battle with eight seconds to go before the break.

"We had to do things a little bit better. Rocky Mount's got a great football team. We just had to pick it up a little bit and had to start executing," Lineberger said.

The defense continued its strong effort through the second half, and the South Point offense found its rhythm. Junior Scottie Lee threw a 7-yard touchdown pass to freshman Ray Grier with 4:39 left in the third quarter to put the Red Raiders



South Point quarterback Scottie Lee celebrates after the Red Raiders made a first down that enabled them to run out the clock to defeat Rocky Mount, 16-7, in the N.C. 3A State Championship on Saturday at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem. PHOTOS BY JOHN CLARK/THE GAZETTE



South Point's Ray Grier just misses a pass as Rocky Mount's Isaac Edge defends during the Red Raiders' 16-7 win in the N.C. 3A State Championship game Saturday at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem.

forced two turnovers in moment, yes sir, I honestly the 2015 runner-up finish

ers ahead, 13-7. It was Lee's only completion of the game.

After Lempereur's missed field goal early in the fourth quarter, the South Point defense forced a turnover on downs and got the ball back in good position to set up the kicker again for his final attempt to make it 16-7. The Red Raiders

the game, their 16th consecutive with at least one takeaway, and got to Lynch for five sacks.

After the final whistle, senior left guard James Granson lingered near midfield while the rest of his teammates ran on from the sidelines.

"Definitely relishing the

couldn't believe it," Granson said. "I couldn't believe we did it. All the hard work in the weight room, practicing, it was just so unreal to me."

On the brick wall of the field house at South Point High School, there are five years commemorated: the 1971, 1979, 2003 and 2009 state championships, and

the 2015 runner-up finish. Muse said it's a huge honor for 2016 to go up on the wall without the "runner-up" letters attached.

"Knowing you're one of the five or six teams on the wall is incredible. Knowing that there's 40-year-olds that still come to your game because they wish they just got what we have," he said.

r
l
-

f
e
g
s
e
t
.

Alexander earns MVP

South Point ties five-game postseason defensive record, Rocky Mount coach defends late-game offensive strategy

By Richard Walker
rwalker@gastongazette.com

WINSTON-SALEM — Ever since South Point High School went to its lethal triple-option offense in 1998, its program has won title after title, and its fullback position has been an integral part to that success.

That was never truer than in South Point's 16-7 N.C. Class 3A state championship game victory over Rocky Mount on Saturday at Wake Forest University's BB&T Field.

Junior Jake Alexander accounted for nearly half the game's entire offensive output by rushing for 135 yards on 28 carries.

Seven of those running plays went for first downs, including three in the fourth quarter to help earn Alexander the game's most valuable player honors.

"Throughout the whole year, we've improved," said Alexander, who finished the season with a Gaston County-best 1,804 yards rushing. "This was the 16th game of the year, so it was do or die. We had to leave it all on the line. And we did."

Alexander finished the season with the 12th-highest single season rushing total in county

honors

history, and joined 2003 South Point fullback Joe Brown and 2009 South Point quarterback Josh Justice as one of the top 15 all-time Gaston County rushers who finished their seasons with state championships.

Brown racked up 1,775 yards in 2003 and Justice 1,910 in 2009 in their respective senior years.

Alexander, like quarterback Scottie Lee, is a junior and will have another chance at glory next season.

SEE ALEXANDER, C5

ALEXANDER

Continued from C1

"I have to thank the offensive line," Lee said. "If it wasn't for them, it wouldn't work."

That was certainly the case in the second half after South Point made some halftime adjustments, and the Red Raiders rolled for 121 yards after picking up 78 in an opening half in which they trailed 7-3.

"Our offense has to move people off the ball," South Point coach Mickey Lineberger said, "or we can't get any movement. A lot of that was (No.) 44 (Rocky Mount linebacker Sherrod Greene) because he's a great football player. But we did better in the second half and were able to control the line of scrimmage a little better."

In the fourth quarter, South Point picked up at least one first down on each of its three possessions. One drive resulted in a game-clinching 25-yard field goal from Thomas Lempereur, and the last one closed out the victory by forcing Rocky Mount to use up its timeouts and kill the clock.

Left tackle Larry Dowdy, left guard James Granson, center Ethan Jackson, right guards Wesley Barker and Victor Hernandez, right tackles Riley Nichols and J.R. Scipio, and tight ends Josh Bogen and Nick Muse led the blocking up front for the Raiders.

"They were doing exactly what we thought they'd do in the first

Curious strategy?

Trailing only 13-7 with seven minutes to go in Saturday's game, Rocky Mount surprised many by choosing to pursue a first down facing fourth-and-17 from its own 26 rather than punting it away.

Gryphons coach Jason Battle had two timeouts remaining when he made that decision.

But Battle felt giving his offense the opportunity for the long conversion was a better bet than allowing South Point a chance to move the football against his tiring defense.

"I felt like, at that point in time, they were going to chew the clock up anyway," said Battle, whose team edged South Point, 24-21, in overtime in last year's N.C. 3A title game. "Even though defensively we had been getting them off the field, we had bad or awful field position all day. At that moment, I felt like that was it — even though that put them back in another situation to kick the field goal."

Playoff records

Both of the area's conferences that played this weekend finished with state titles and allowed their respective leagues to finish among the state's best this postseason.

Shelby's win allowed the South Mountain Athletic Conference to finish with an 8-4 record, and South Point's win meant the Big South Conference finished 7-4 in this season's playoffs.

State finals excellence

The South Point and

half," Lee said. "We just weren't executing. We executed better in the second half."

Near-record defense for Raiders

South Point entered Saturday's state championship game with a chance to become the greatest postseason defense in N.C. high school football history.

The Red Raiders didn't accomplish that, but they came really close.

Three teams still are the standard for all-time best defenses as they yielded nine or less points: Robbinsville allowed six points in three 1981 1A games, Shelby allowed seven points in three 1976 Western N.C. Activities Association games and Richmond County allowed nine points in four 1979 4A games.

But South Point finishes the 2016 season in a tie for the best five-game playoff defense with West Charlotte's 1995 N.C. 4A effort.

Both teams yielded 13 points in their five postseason games.

Shelby victories also improved upon the already impressive records of teams from Gaston and Cleveland counties in state championship games.

Gaston County teams are now 11-11-1 in state championship games, with South Point (4-1-1) leading the way. Other previous state champions from the county are Ashbrook, Mount Holly, Cherryville, Gastonia and Highland Tech high schools.

Cleveland County teams are now 26-13-1 in state championship games, with Shelby (16-9-1) and Crest (6-3) leading the way. Cleveland, Burns and Kings Mountain high schools also have claimed state championships.

Lincolnton's loss last week left Lincoln County one win shy of advancing to a state title game, leaving that county's all-time state championship game record at 4-4.

— Richard Walker: 704-869-1841; www.Twitter.com/jrwalk22



South Point's Jake Alexander runs past a Rocky Mount defender on a long run during the Red Raiders' 16-7 win in the N.C. 3A State Championship game Saturday at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem. JOHN CLARK/THE GAZETTE



South Point team members pose for a photo after their 16-7 win over Rocky Mount in the N.C. 3A State Championship game Saturday at Wake Forest University. JOHN CLARK/THE GAZETTE

Box score: South Point vs. Rocky Mount

SOUTH POINT 16, ROCKY MOUNT 7

Score By Quarter:

	1	2	3	4	F
SOUTH POINT	3	0	7	3	16
ROCKY MOUNT	0	7	0	0	7

Scoring Summary:

First quarter

SP—Thomas Lempereur 29 field goal.
3:32

Second quarter

RM—Shyheim Battle 25 pass from Shabios Lynch (Chase Miller kick). 0:08

Third quarter

SP—Thomas Lempereur 36 field goal.
8:16

SP—Ray Grier 7 pass from Scottie Lee (Lempereur kick). 4:39

Fourth quarter

SP—Thomas Lempereur 25 field goal.
3:06

Team Stats:

SP RM

Player awards

MVP: Jake Alexander, South Point, Jr., FB

Offensive Player of the Game, South Point: Nick Farmer, Senior, WB

Defensive Player of the Game, South Point: Phillip Davis, Junior, DT

Offensive Player of the Game, Rocky Mount: Shabios Lynch, Senior, QB

Defensive Player of the Game, Rocky Mount: Sherrod Greene, Senior, LB

10-19-1

Fumbles-Lost

0-0

3-1

Penalties

6-35

2-19

SOUTH POINT INDIVIDUAL STATS:

Rushing

Name	Att	Yards	TDs
Jake Alexander	28	135	0
Nick Farmer	12	63	0
Scottie Lee	8	4	0
Max Mead	1	3	0
Mario Brandon	1	0	0
Team	3	-6	0

Passing

Name	Comp	Att	Yards	TD	Int
------	------	-----	-------	----	-----

ROCKY MOUNT INDIVIDUAL STATS

Rushing

Name	Att	Yards	TDs
Deangelo Collins	7	23	0
B.J. Daniels-Sanders	8	17	0
Sherrod Greene	2	4	0
Charlie Williams III	1	-3	0
Shabios Lynch	12	-14	0

Passing

Name	Comp	Att	Yards	TD	Int
Shabios Lynch	10	19	91	1	1

Receiving

Name	Rec	Yards	TDs
Kevjorick Edwards	4	30	0

First downs	9	6	Scottie Lee	1	6	7	1	1	Charlie Williams III	3	28	0
Rushes-yards	53-199	30-27							Shyheim Battle	1	25	1
Passing yards	7	91	Receiving						Rajah McCowan	1	6	0
Total yards	206	116	Name		Rec	Yards	TDs		Deangelo Collins	1	2	0
Comp-Att-Int	1-6-1		Ray Grier		1	7	1					



U

—

:

,

t

