

Game Recap

“Smackdown!...Red Raiders Hand Cavaliers First Loss, 35-24”

Although not written in any rulebook, thus not a hard and fast rule, the prevailing practice is for a HOME team to schedule a weak opponent at homecoming. The weaker, the better, in many cases, as it affords the host team the opportunity to showcase the program. Perhaps it's a way to pay tribute to the alumni base that walked the halls and were loyal to the colors in years past. Flip the coin. Although not written in any rulebook, thus not a hard and fast rule, the prevailing notion is that if you are the VISITING team that has been selected to play in a hosts' homecoming game, you are considered to be that weaker opponent. You are the team expected to allow the host to showcase the program and pay tribute to the alumni base that walked the halls and were loyal to the colors in years past. Realistically, the homecoming date may have been planned long before an official football schedule was approved. But that doesn't make for a very emotional, heartfelt, “rah-rah” motivational locker room speech! So, let's just leave it at the fact that is...East Rutherford scheduled homecoming and South Point was invited to the celebration. The undefeated Cavaliers, with their high scoring offense, fully expected the Red Raiders to be the next “notch on their saber” as they drove to take control of the Southwestern 2A Conference. East Rutherford was looking for a “Smackdown”. And South Point delivered! Twenty-eight second half points vaulted the Red Raiders to victory and sent the Cavaliers to their first loss of the season.

South Point won the toss and elected to give East Rutherford the first shot on offense. The Cavaliers managed two first downs before being forced to punt. The Raiders mustered one first down on their initial drive before turning the ball back over to the home team. Both squads followed this pattern as time wound down in the opening quarter. Finally, with 54 seconds remaining, and following a defensive stand by the Red ‘D’, East Rutherford booted a 26-yard field goal for the 3-0 lead. South Point carried their third possession of the game into the second quarter.

The Red Raiders continued to hit the line hard on offense and found some success on the ground picking up positive yardage. But the Cavaliers were equal to the challenge and were presumably motivated by the early lead and their intent to play well on the special night. An opportune moment to seize further control came in the form of an interception on a fourth and four play from the Cavaliers 32-yardline. With the Raiders driving, the turnover shifted momentum back to East Rutherford. The Cavaliers took advantage. Aided by a forty-seven yard, hail Mary-type pass completion, East Rutherford completed a drive with a seven yard run for the 10-0 lead. The Red Raiders fought back. Beginning from their forty, South Point put together a fourteen play drive that carried them to the Cavaliers' seven yardline. From there, RB Jamani Leeper cruised in for the score. The Raiders cut the advantage to 10-7 with just over a minute to go before halftime. The Red ‘D’ held East Rutherford on downs and South Point kneeled out the first half.

With the ball to begin the third, the Red Raiders were eager to take charge of the contest. The intent was admirable, and the effort followed, but the results would take a little longer to be realized. The Cavaliers turned the table by forcing a punt and driving 74 yards to go ahead 17-7.

The quick turn of events in the quarter (9:41 remaining) ignited the Big Red! The battle was waged and the Smackdown was on! The Red 'O' took advantage of good field position near midfield on the ensuing possession and drove to the East Rutherford 23 yardline. FB Naseem Jones did the rest. Bursting up the middle, Jones followed a massive 'O-line' push to rumble the necessary yardage to paydirt. South Point drew to within three at 17-14 and had no intention of giving up the momentum. In fact, the Raiders began to assert control in every phase of the game and would not let the Cavaliers see the endzone again until late in the contest. Meanwhile, the Red 'D' forced another East Rutherford punt, giving the ball back to their ground pounding offense. Once again, field position would be a key as the Raiders would, for the second consecutive possession, begin a drive near midfield. Burning 5:36 from the third quarter clock, South Point drove to the Cavaliers' one before Jones powered in to give the Raiders their first lead at 21-17. Sixteen seconds remained, forcing East Rutherford to carry their next possession into the final stanza.

The Cavaliers drove to the South Point fourteen yardline early in the quarter but would face a fourth and ten from that spot. Trailing by four, East Rutherford decided a field goal was not an option. And when the fourth down pass fell incomplete due to heavy Raiders pressure and solid coverage downfield, the ball went over on downs. South Point embarked on a drive that would send the message that they are not a suitable homecoming opponent! Bulling their way to their forty-six yardline, the Raiders put the Cavaliers on their heels. A fifty-four yard bomb from QB Keaton Hale was pulled down by SE Ray Grier. Grier turned, shed some would-be tacklers, and raced to the endzone. South Point opened up a two score advantage at 28-17 but were not done. The ensuing kick, if not the play of the game, proved to be the play that helped seal the victory. The game clock showed 5:23 to go in regulation when K Cade Ratliff lifted a pooch kick that sailed twenty yards before bouncing on the turf. The free ball was covered by kickoff specialist and DB Nick Gange to set the Raiders up at the Cavaliers' thirty-seven. The Red 'O' ate more clock before sending Jones across from 14 yards out for the 35-17 advantage. Under two minutes remained and the Smackdown was all but complete. East Rutherford managed a final score to appease the alumni base...but the damage was done. South Point claimed the determined victory, 35-24, to remain atop the conference standings.

An unwritten rule suggests that being scheduled for a hosts' homecoming game is akin to a disrespectful slap in the face. There's only one way to respond as a visiting team. And that way comes in the form of...Smackdown! Then again...next up for the Red Raiders is the 1-7 (0-2) R-S Central Hilltoppers. South Point homecoming!

Go Get 'Em, Red!

Notable Facts and Thoughts

Handing the Cavaliers of East Rutherford their first conference loss (and first season loss) does little more than allow the Raiders to take another step toward their Southwestern 2A Conference goal, a conference crown. Still work to be done!

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