

Game Recap

Game Management - South Point Outlasts Hickory, 27-25

When asked about managing a game, former NFL Coach Tony Dungy offered insights related to attitude and control over the course of a game in which situations routinely change. The coach stressed, "You can't always control circumstances. However, you can always control your attitude, approach, and response. Your options are to complain or to look ahead and figure out how to make the situation better." His words held true in the back-and-forth contest between the Red Raiders and Red Tornadoes last Friday night at Lineberger Stadium. Both squads were able to play to their strengths. South Point pounded out yardage on the ground, chewing away the clock, and keeping the ball out of the hands of their opponent. When Hickory did have the ball, they employed a passing attack that has served them well over the past two years. The Red Tornadoes won the state championship in 2023 and made it to the regional final last season. So they would prove a formidable challenge to the Red Raiders on opening night. Each team would have to overcome inopportune penalties throughout the hard-hitting contest, but neither flinched. Rather, as Coach Dungy pointed out, they looked ahead to the next play to try to make the situation better. In the end it was the Raiders that powered through to claim victory in game one of the 2025 season. Lessons from the 27-25 win will prove valuable going forward as the Raiders know they themselves can be a team of championship caliber. Keeping a winning attitude and maintaining control will be key to their success.

Hickory won the toss and deferred their option to the second half. It would be a decision they would seemingly regret 8 minutes and 2 seconds later as that was the time taken by the Raiders offense to cover 80 yards for the first score of the game. FB Kaveaun Pless plowed in from three yards out to put six on the board for South Point. Pless later expressed his gratitude for the O-line in what he described as a "dogfight out there". "Without the big guy's up-front blocking, we wouldn't be where we are," he said. Teammates Ashton Owenby, Andrew Wright, Reid Jefferies, Strat Triplett, Wilson London, and Landon Suttle each battled in the trenches to open lanes for South Point ball carriers. Their contribution kept with the ground-pounding, ball control standard for which the Big Red is known. With 3:58 on the first quarter clock, Hickory looked for the equalizer. Their mission was accomplished at the 0:38 mark on the strong, accurate arm of a rangy quarterback and the ability of tall, speedy receivers to find the open areas downfield. The Red Tornadoes would take their first, and last, lead of the game at 7-6 as the first stanza wound to a close.

With the ball to begin the second quarter of play, South Point engaged more ball control to complete their second drive of 80 yards in just over 5 minutes. Nearing the midway point of the second stanza, the Raiders' ability to manage the game was fully apparent. Pless ended South

Point's second drive with a dive from 1 yard out for six more points. QB Patrick Blee's keeper completed the 2-point conversion and put the Raiders up 14-7 with 7:24 before the half. On the ensuing Red Tornadoes possession, the Red 'D' took control. After an initial pass interference call on a pass that was underthrown, the South Point defenders dug in, choosing to control their response to the error and move on to the next play. With their bend but don't break attitude, the Red 'D' forced a 3rd and 10 from their 41-yard line. Hickory attempted a screen pass that was well covered by the Raiders. LB Lucas Conger and DB Jeremiah Holt read the play and met at the ball to stuff the drive. The play gained 2 yards, and the Red Tornadoes were forced to punt. The ball sailed out of bounds and was, to most of the Raiders faithful, inexplicably marked at the 3-yard line. Ninety-seven yards and 4:05 stood between South Point and a commanding halftime advantage. The Red 'O' went to work! Feeding off the momentum grabbed by their defensive teammates, the Raiders offense pounded their way out of the shadow of their endzone. And they plowed their way to the opponent's goal line. From the Hickory 19-yard line, Pless burst through a hole to cap the 11-play drive and give South Point the 20-7 advantage. Hickory ran out the final 23 seconds and the teams went to the intermission with the Raiders in control.

With the ball to begin the second half, Hickory managed to draw close on a quick drive that covered 59 yards in just over 2 minutes. Their 1-yard run cut South Point's lead to 20-13 early in the third quarter. The Red Tornadoes maintained the momentum that they quickly gained from their drive by forcing a Raiders punt on South Point's ensuing possession. The Raiders were able to work down the clock to try to reclaim a measure of momentum. And they were, in fact, able to slow the Hickory onslaught in spite of a Red Tornadoes touchdown at the quarter's end. Hickory put six more on the board and trailed 20-19 as the final stanza began.

With the ball resting at their 24-yard line and facing a 2nd and 7, South Point continued to grind up the yardage, grind out the clock, and grind down the opponent! A drive that carried over from the third quarter totaled 6:08 and ended with Pless' fourth touchdown of the game. From eight yards out, the fullback carried four would-be tacklers into the endzone to further the South Point lead. With 5:55 to go in the contest the Raiders advantage stood at 27-19. Hickory went back to the air where their success had been for most of the night. And with 1:16 remaining they punched in from two yards out to set up a conversion attempt that would tie the game. The Red 'D' coverage was equal to the task! South Point maintained the lead at 27-25 and the sideline quickly prepared for the expected onside kick. The Tornadoes kicker drilled the ball into the ground causing it to bounce and skip past South Point's front receiving line. The Raiders' Walker Spargo was backing up the front line and, with the skilled hands of a baseball infielder, he secured the ball. "I just fielded it like a ground ball and got down," said Spargo. His sure hands gave the Red 'O' the chance to clinch the victory. In four plays South Point managed the clock and two Hickory timeouts to kick off the season with a win.

Game management can take on so many meanings depending on a particular contest, but generally encompasses all aspects related to control. South Point controlled their attitudes and responses, focusing on the next play and what it would take for the teams to be successful on opening night. The end result was an impressive victory over a powerful former state champion and regional runner-up. The Big Red claimed the 27-25 win by executing South Point football in fine fashion. Ground-pounding, hard-hitting, and determined are all marks of the Red Raiders football tradition. And all were on display last Friday night. An early bye week follows but expect there to more to come and greater success for this Big Red squad!

Go Get 'Em, Red!

Notable Facts and Thoughts

Following the bye week, South Point travels to face TC Roberson in Asheville. The Rams opened with a 14-10 home victory over Hunter Huss. They will travel to Watauga and are expected to be on a roll heading into the contest with the Raiders. At that point, the roll STOPS!