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# **VARSITY REPORT**

*by Jamey Andrews*

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“Red Raiders Play Lights Out Against Wolves...Crush Lincolnton 59-6”

South Point went from dealing with lightning in an opening game victory over Crest, to literally “putting out the lights” in Lincolnton! The Raiders continued their early season winning ways with a high powered offense, stonewall defense, and flawless special teams play to easily cruise to a 59-6 win against Lincolnton. Stadium lighting issues caused a brief slowdown in play, although the delay amounted to little more than a routine Official’s timeout. With the game underway (and South Point having their way!) the lights on the visitor’s sidelines went dark. The field was noticeably darker yet the teams were allowed to play on as dusk approached. The Raiders never lost stride, but scored early and often while holding the Wolves to minimal offensive output. And when the lights returned, the onslaught continued! South Point moved to 2-0 on the season with both victories coming against historically formidable opponents. Regardless of whether those teams have lost a step and may be struggling to get off the blocks in the early going, the Red Raiders are taking advantage and taking positive steps toward achieving an ultimate team goal.

The Red Raiders won the toss and, as is their norm, decided to give Lincolnton the game’s first offensive possession. The Wolves had some early success running to the outside, but the Red D quickly caught up with the pace of play. From that opening drive, the South Point defense made gang tackling a habit! Taking charge, they forced a punt and Ray Grier put his offense in excellent position for the opening score. Grier’s vision downfield, matched by his speed, allowed the returner to follow some outstanding blocking all the way to the Lincolnton 2 yardline. Less than a minute later, Jake Alexander plunged through to notch the six. Cade Ratliff easily split the uprights on the PAT and the Raiders had the 7-0 advantage with 7:57 remaining in the first quarter. Special teams followed up the fine field position they awarded the offense with outstanding coverage to aid the South Point defense. The Wolves began their second drive from their own 12 yardline. On the second play of the drive, Mario Brandon tipped a short pass across the middle and Nick Gange snagged the interception. After a couple of plays, Scottie Lee faked a handoff and took off around the defensive end, racing once again to the Lincolnton two. Alexander then punched in the second touchdown for the Red Raiders. Ratliff was true once more and the lead grew to 14-0 at the 6:56 mark. Lincolnton, like South Point, boasts a proud football tradition and so it was unlikely that the Wolves would give up after the quick strikes by the Red Raiders. From the Lincolnton twenty, the Wolves chipped away with a six minute drive that carried them to the South Point 32 yardline. Their fourth and four pass was well defended by the Raiders and the Red O took over on downs. Fifty-one seconds remained in the quarter and that would be more than Lee, Grier and the offense would need! A quick pass to the flat and 62 yards later, Grier scored the third Raiders touchdown of the opening stanza. South Point carried the 21-0 lead into the second quarter.

To begin the second, Lincolnton faced a third and six from their 24 yardline. The possession, carried over from the first quarter marked the Wolves’ fourth offensive possession. Three of the four began inside the twenty yardline (12, 13, 9) and one began at the twenty

following a touchback. The Raiders special teams were making their mark on the game! Lincolnton failed on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6 play thanks to relentless pursuit of the Red defense. Sean Burns caught a scrambling quarterback to halt the drive and force a punt. With the ball back in the Raiders possession, Ty Tinker took a pitch and carried to the Lincolnton twenty-one, covering 33 yards on the run. South Point gained little more on the drive but added to their point total with a 34 yard field goal by Ratliff. The Raiders were in control, 24-0, early in the second. Another defensive stand led to another Lincolnton punt and South Point took possession in Wolves territory at the forty-one. Three plays later, Alexander was in for the score and a 31-0 Red Raiders lead. Halftime was 5:42 away and Lincolnton was desperate to slow the drubbing. From the Lincolnton eighteen, a scrambling quarterback bought time before heaving a pass down the sideline. As happens in high school football, sometimes the big plays fall right into fortunate hands. And fortunate hands emerged on this play. An 82 yard catch and run put the Wolves on the scoreboard. And Lincolnton seemed to be turning the tide by forcing South Point's first punt on the ensuing possession. But on a 2<sup>nd</sup> and 10 from their 41, the Wolves suffered more pain from the opportunistic Raiders defense. Defensive lineman Tyler Kotula stripped the ball from the Wolves running back and the big lineman rumbled to the Lincolnton twenty-seven. "He was going down and I just grabbed the ball", said Kotula. And when asked about the return added, "I wanted the touchdown!" The score came six plays later on another Alexander dive from the one. The Red Raiders took the commanding 38-6 lead into the half.

With the ball to begin the third quarter, Alexander burst through for a 54 yard touchdown run to continue to pad the South Point advantage. The play allowed for substitutions to come in and take part in the Raiders' dominating effort. Kicker David O'Hanlon spelled Ratliff and knocked through the extra point to put South Point ahead by a 45-6 score. Lincolnton managed some offense on the following drive but would face a 4<sup>th</sup> and 8 from the Raiders 34 yardline. A well defended pass deflection turned the ball back over to South Point. The Raiders bulled into Wolves territory and with the ball at the Lincolnton 39, Quarterback Keaton Hale took the helm. Hale wasted no time. A proper option read and a perfect fake pitch sent the quarterback off to the races! Hale covered the 39 yards for the score and O'Hanlon's kick put South Point up 52-6 with 5:11 remaining in the third. Asked about his focus and what was expected of him when he enters the game, Hale responded "to take care of the ball." Hale benefitted from solid offensive line blocking that had been the case throughout the contest. Center Ethan Jackson summed up the attitude of the line going into this and every game. "Preparation is the key", said Jackson. He added that extra motivation is often there (considering Cramer's dismantling of the Wolves a week ago), but not usually necessary. The center admitted, "We want to be ready for every game, no matter the opponent." His words were certainly validated in this contest as the Raiders never let up. On the next Lincolnton drive, defensive back Devon King picked off a Wolves' pass and Hale and Jackson led the offense back on to the field...but not for long! On 1<sup>st</sup> and 10 from the Lincolnton 22, Hale raced in for his second touchdown and the "lights out" 59-6 advantage! At that point the game clock mercifully became live and the fourth quarter finally arrived. It would be the light at the end of the tunnel that the Wolves sought...they had already been hit by the train!

The teams traded possessions in the fourth with South Point inserting more players from an impressively deep bench. The Red backups effectively protected the ball and the defense held the Wolves to preserve the final score.

After surviving the lightning delays during the first game of the season, South Point endured lighting issues against the Lincolnton Wolves. After all was left on the field, the Red Raiders had delivered a “lights out” knockout punch, crushing the Wolves, 59-6. In the aftermath of Friday’s contest, Coach Hodge emphasized the “work” mantra that is well known around South Point football. He pointed out that once the team reaches a goal, the coaching staff would ask “for a little more”. And when that “little more” is achieved, even more would be asked. The concept of team building and continuous improvement will lead to success. And at South Point, this is an expectation!

Go Get ‘Em, Red!

### **Notable Facts and Thoughts**

Forestview stands between the Raiders and a 3-0 start to the season. The Jaguars were punished by Clover, 41-5, and will be looking to get back on track with a win against a former conference rival. Reports suggest that the Clover defensive front won the line of scrimmage against the Forestview offensive line. The only sure thing is, controlling the line on both sides of the ball is key to success.

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