

Game Recap

Raiders Resilient, Down Redhawks 61-42

It's rare that a third-round playoff matchup would result in 103 points scored between the opponents. It's even more rare that one of those teams would need to display a level of resilience the likes of which they've never called upon! Within the first six minutes of last Friday's NCHSAA 5A 3rd Round Playoff game between South Point and Monroe, the Red Raiders were down by two touchdowns. In back-to-back possessions, the Raiders lost two fumbles and dug themselves an early hole. At that point, forty-two minutes remained in South Point's football season. Advancing became a tall order, one that would overwhelm many teams. But the Big Red dug in! And in those remaining forty-two minutes it could be argued that every ounce of heart and effort was left on the field. Former NFL running back Adrian Peterson once said, "When you don't give up, you cannot fail." Failure was not an option for South Point and the Big Red fought back for the victory in the high scoring affair!

Monroe won the toss and elected to receive the opening kick to start the game. In spite of a prolific passing attack, the Redhawks tried to establish a ground game from the outset. LB Jent Miller shot through the line for a 1-yard tackle for loss on the first play from scrimmage. It was the type of play that sets the tone for a ballgame. Only this time, it was just a great play early in the contest. Two plays later the Redhawks broke out of a pile and raced 51-yards for a touchdown. With the 6-0 lead, momentum was established for Monroe. And pressure was immediately placed on the Red 'O'. Then misfortune struck. On the second play from scrimmage for the Raiders' offense, a fumble gave the Redhawks the ball and good field position. The Red 'D' rose to the task by forcing a punt after a three-and-out series. But the shift in momentum was short-lived. Disaster struck! Another fumble on the first downplay was recovered by Monroe at the Raiders 12-yardline. Three plays later the Redhawks advantage grew to 14-0 with 6:21 remaining in the first quarter. South Point found themselves in a must score situation early in the contest. The Red 'O' delivered! FB Kaveaun Pless and QB Patrick Blee followed their O-line on a nine play, seventy-three-yard drive that ended with a Blee 3-yard push into the endzone. K Wilson London drilled the PAT to cut into the Redhawks lead, 14-7. South Point was not done. Another shutdown series by the Raiders defense forced another Monroe punt. Fifteen yards were added to an outstanding return by RS Cayden Rumph to set South Point up at the Redhawks 11-yard line. Blee broke off the left side on first down and evened the contest at 14-14 with 0:36 remaining in the opening quarter.

On a possession that carried over into the second stanza, the Redhawks went to the air for points. A forty-yard heave downfield was hauled in for a score to reclaim a 21-14 lead for Monroe. The Red 'D' had stalled the ground attack for the Redhawks but would need to adjust

to slow the passing attack. South Point matched the score on their ensuing drive. RB Jesse Ledford joined Pless and Blee to carry the Raiders into the redzone. Once again Blee punched in from 11-yards out to cut into the lead. A blocked PAT held the score at 21-20 in favor of the visitors, but South Point had not lost momentum. And the Raiders defense built on the success on the next Monroe drive. A DB Brody Crawford interception was returned to the Redhawks 43-yardline and brought the Red 'O' back onto the field. Asked about what the team needed to do to turn things around after the early miscues, Crawford said, "We just needed to stay calm and hold onto the ball." The Senior downplayed the significance of the interception, and return, saying he just made a play on an overthrown ball. But the turnover gave South Point their first opportunity to take a lead in the game. It was an opportunity the Raiders' offense seized! A pitch to RB Walker Spargo moved the ball to the Monroe 26-yardline. Pless then beat down the Redhawks D-line before Blee carried over from six yards out to give South Point their first lead at 27-21 with 1:50 to go before halftime. The Raiders had taken control and kept up the pressure. From his DB position, Rumph made a leaping interception on the next Redhawks possession and returned the ball to the Monroe 13-yard line. Blee needed one play to cover the yardage needed for his fourth touchdown of the first half to add to the South Point advantage. The Raiders carried the 33-21 lead into the intermission.

After battling through the early miscues of the first half, the Raiders worked their game plan that had proven unstoppable by the Monroe defense. The opening drive of the third quarter would continue South Point's dominance. A kick return by RS Gavin Smith to the Raiders 43-yardline turned out to put the Raiders in scoring position! Pless burst off left tackle, hitting the hole quick, and outran all defenders, 57-yards for the touchdown. South Point moved ahead 40-21 less than thirty seconds into the second half. The Redhawks were now fighting for their season. The Red 'D' matched the fight! DL Eddie Brach's pressure forced a fumble by the Redhawks quarterback. Miller was there to make the recovery at the Monroe 6-yardline. The Red 'O' ran two plays. Blee drove through from 1-yard out to increase the Raiders lead to 47-21 with 9:51 remaining in the quarter. The Redhawks tried to claw back. The ground game managed little success for Monroe but was a benefit to South Point for the time milked from the game clock. The passing attack, including bubble screens, was a different story. A 33-yard pass, catch and run cut into the Raiders advantage at 47-28 at the 6:34 mark. But the Big Red had the answer. Pless and Ledford were the showcase backs, leading the Raiders to the Redhawks 13-yardline. From there Pless burst through to move South Point up 54-28 as time wound down in the quarter. Monroe carried the ensuing possession into the final twelve minutes.

The Red 'D' put up a tremendous battle to stall the Redhawks drive early in the fourth quarter, forcing Monroe to run several plays before slamming the door. A leaping interception by DB Kham Crawford clipped the wings of the Redhawks. The emphatic statement had been made as to which team would be moving on in the post season. The following Raiders drive could have

been taken from the textbook of South Point football. Pless barreled through the line on consecutive plays, running through and over would-be tacklers to the Monroe 31-yardline. One final burst sent him into the endzone for South Point's 61-28 advantage. Later Pless and Blee credited the Red O-line for success in the run game. The pair also addressed the resiliency of the team to not fold after falling behind early. Pless said, "We didn't back down, we kept fighting for what we wanted." The Redhawks managed a couple of insignificant scores as the Raiders starters took on support roles from the sidelines. The final, 61-42, vaulted the Big Red into the next round while ending the season of the defending NCHSAA 2A State Champions.

In a rare display the third-round playoff game between South Point and the visiting Monroe Redhawks became a lesson in resiliency. The Raiders fell behind by two scores early and seemed out of sorts at the game's outset. But Blee later explained that the team believes in each other and is convinced of their potential for success. "We can go all the way," he exclaimed, indicating that state champions practice on Thanksgiving Day. Thanks to the resiliency and determination of the Red Raiders, the reward for the effort is a Big Red practice on Thanksgiving Day.

Go Get 'Em, Red!

Notable Facts and Thoughts

The most important game of the season is always the next one. The next one is a visit from conference rival Crest. What **can** be said about a Raiders/Chargers matchup with such significant implications? What **should** be said about a Raiders/Chargers matchup with such significant implications? What **needs to** be said about a Raiders/Chargers matchup with such significant implications?

NOTHING! Go Big Red!