

## **South Point Rout North Gaston, 70-14 - Remain On Track For Big South 3A Showdown**

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It is generally accepted in sports, often as a cliché, that upsets occur when a favorite looks past an underdog to a "more important" contest ahead. South Point risked falling into such a trap as they faced the struggling North Gaston Wildcats Friday night at Trudnak Field in Dallas. The Red Raiders were heavily favored against the Wildcats while Crest, the Big South 3A Conference's undefeated co-leader, waits in the wings. South Point, determined to remain focused, displayed a level of discipline that guided them to a 70-14 trouncing of North Gaston. The Red Raiders used the game, to the extent possible, as a tune-up for the potent Chargers. With Crest's victory over Kings Mountain, the matchup at Lineberger stadium will be for the outright regular season conference championship...a storyline not uncommon between the two powerhouses! But first, South Point had to make a statement in Dallas!

North Gaston won the toss and deferred the option to the second half, electing to put the South Point offense on the field for the game's opening series. The Red Raiders obliged with a 56 yard drive that ended with an eleven yard Troy Leeper touchdown run and an early 7-0 lead. The South Point defense was eager to take part in the action as they would force and then recover a Wildcat fumble on North Gaston's first offensive play. Taking over at the 10 yard line, quarterback Patrick Horne would give again to Leeper who would burst through for his second touchdown to make the score 14-0 with 3:01 gone in the first quarter. The Red defense held the Wildcats on the next three possessions in the opening stanza and the offense would score with each opportunity. Tyler Bray completed a halfback option pass to Dan Johnson for 45 yards to the North Gaston seven yard line. Following a five yard false start penalty, Bray was rewarded for his passing precision. He was given the ball, and the opportunity, to carry over for South Point's third touchdown. Another defensive stand gave the ball to South Point again with time winding down in the quarter. Horne drove the Red Raiders to the Wildcat nine before racing in for the 28-0 advantage. Yet again did the South Point defense hold and yet again did the Red Raiders score. With 0:35 on the first quarter clock, the South Point ball rested in North Gaston territory at the forty-five. It didn't stay there for long as Leeper burst through the middle for his third score. The result was a five touchdown opening quarter and a 35 point beginning to an eventual drubbing.

North Gaston would stave off the total embarrassment of a shutout by scoring on a touchdown pass from a possession that carried over into the second quarter. The long pass play was aided by a slipping defender but was no less impressive given the accuracy of the throw. South Point quickly recovered, driving 70 yards for another Leeper score. The ten yard run made the score 42-7 with plenty of time on the clock before the half. The

Wildcats would use that time and some of the momentum they established with their first score to sustain a second drive. In impressive fashion the North Gaston offense opted to grind out yardage. They appeared intent to abandon the desire to heave the ball downfield in an effort to get back into the game. Of course, by this time, the outcome had likely been long since decided. The Wildcats burned 6:41 on the drive that led to their second and final score of the evening. The touchdown drew them to within 28 points at 42-14, but was immediately answered by the Red Raiders. Recovering an onside kick, South Point would begin with excellent field position at the North Gaston forty-six. The Red "O" drove to the thirty-two and was looking to take advantage of what the Wildcats had given them. Horne dropped back to pass and hit Bray who carried in for the touchdown that would end the first half scoring with South Point leading 49-14.

Throughout the first half, and in fact throughout the game, South Point players were encouraged to continue to play at "full speed." The coaching philosophy held that letting up invites injury and such would be unacceptable with season goals in sight. Asked how the team was able to stay focused and hungry in the lopsided contest, linebacker Jordan Forney admitted that they were aware of the big game coming up next week. He added, "We've just got to play against ourselves" to make sure the team will be ready for that "next game on the schedule." Forney echoed his coaches' comments emphasizing, "A couple of weeks from now, we'll be in the playoffs, and it'll be 'full speed' ahead from there!" The senior linebacker, and 2009 NCHSAA 3A Championship Defensive Player of the Game, helps to lead a defensive squad that has forcefully shutdown opponents this season. While the offense has rolled up points this year, the defense has held the opposition to an average of just over 12 points per game.

The third quarter began with a North Gaston possession and punt. South Point continued to pressure the Wildcats on defense and keep them on their heels on offense. The Red Raiders took advantage of good field position at the North Gaston forty-six on their first possession of the quarter. Textbook offensive line blocking moved South Point down the field and the drive ended with Leeper's fifth touchdown of the game, a nine yard run. Offensive lineman Jeffrey Lawing added to his teammate's (Forney) words when asked about the discipline required to play through a one-sided contest. Lawing described the determination of the team saying that "you have to win every play," and added that the team is aware of what's at stake with next week's matchup. South Point would score again in the third quarter after recovering another Wildcat fumble at the North Gaston twelve. Bray carried in for the touchdown and extended the lead to 63-14 with 4:04 remaining. The Wildcats would fumble again but in one of the few miscues of the evening for the Red Raiders, North Gaston would immediately reclaim possession on a South Point fumble. The quarter ended with the Wildcats possession and the final stanza began with a live clock.

Following a fourth quarter North Gaston punt, the Red Raiders completed the thrashing with a Devan Robbins 80 yard touchdown run. The scoreboard leaned heavily in South Point's favor by a 70-14 margin! Adam Andrew had taken over for Horne and the offense continued to dominate. Andrew described his responsibility when leading the offense saying, "I just got to keep the team going." The impressive showing eventually came to an

end as the rolling clock ran time off and limited South Point to one scoring possession in the fourth quarter. After forcing a final Wildcat punt, the Red Raiders took a knee to mercifully end the game.

South Point rolled into Dallas and rolled over the North Gaston Wildcats in devastating fashion, cruising to a 70-14 conference victory. The Red Raiders never let up in the contest, keeping pressure on the Wildcats and continuing to improve in all phases of the game. The discipline and determination exhibited by South Point are positive traits that should carry over to the "next game on the schedule." The Crest Chargers bring an unblemished conference record into Lineberger Stadium Friday night. The winner will be the outright Big South 3A Conference Champion. Take the reins and bust the broncos, Red!

Go Get 'Em, Red!

### **Notable Facts and Thoughts**

The Big South 3A Conference will send three representatives (players) to the Shrine Bowl in Spartanburg this year. Two of the three hail from Crest and one from Ashbrook. Coach Barnes (Crest), as a member of the North Carolina coaching staff, made the selections. Were there no others in the conference worthy of the honor?