
VARSITY REPORT

by Jamey Andrews

“Southwestern 2A Champions! Raiders ‘Protect The House’...Defeat Golden Lions, 35-15”

“No one, and I mean no one, comes into our house and pushes us around” – Dan Devine, Notre Dame Head Coach (1975-1980)

South Point protected the home field Friday night by handing perennial power and defending 2A state champion, Shelby Golden Lions, their second loss of the season. The convincing 35-15 Red Raider victory made conference champions of South Point, their first year in the Southwestern 2A Conference. The win capped an undefeated (11-0) regular season for the Red Raiders and assures the #1 seed in the NCHSAA State Playoffs along with homefield advantage throughout the postseason. The story lines surrounding the matchup were endless as the two rivals have a long history of thrilling wins and crushing losses the likes of which have defined their seasons. Naturally, every angle mattered on Friday night, the conference championship, the undefeated season, the avenging of last year’s shutout, playoff seeding, and so on. But at the base of all those objectives was the common goal to protect the tradition and pride of South Point football. And by protecting the ‘house’ the Red Raiders have proven themselves to be worthy Champions! Four games stand between South Point and a trip to Chapel Hill. And a fifth game would add a well-deserved trophy to the trophy case. The accomplishments are remarkable but the Raiders admit and agree there’s room for improvement. A “little bit more” will be the theme as the first round kicks off.

Winning the toss, South Point deferred the option and gave Shelby the ball for the first offensive possession. The three-and-out defensive stop was impressive, but the series stand was quickly upstaged on the ensuing punt. Blasting through the line, six Raiders had shots at the ball and when Matthew Robinson smothered the kick the excitement of the crowd was further ignited! Robinson scooped up the ball and raced into the endzone! Kicker Cade Ratliff was perfect on the PAT and South Point had the early and defining 7-0 advantage. The no huddle, spread offense of the Golden Lions garnered some success in positive yards, but most passes were in front of the sticks and the Raiders made quick hits to stop momentum. Shelby was forced to punt on their second possession and the Red offense took the field for their first drive. Quarterback Scottie Lee handed the ball to fullback Jake Alexander on the 1st down play and Alexander fought for 4 tough yards before being stood up by a host of Golden Lion tacklers. The ball was advanced to the South Point 44 and on the next play Alexander increased the South Point lead! Running off left tackle, Alexander followed sealing blocks by Larry Dowdy and Ty Tinker and ran untouched 56 yards for the touchdown. The Raiders had the early 14-0 lead and in the process sent a message to the faithful from Cleveland County. The first quarter clock was nearing the halfway point, so plenty of time remained. A runback on the ensuing kickoff gave Shelby good field position at their forty-five. It would mark one of only a couple kickoff returns that would benefit the Golden Lions as most of kickoff specialist David O’Hanlon’s boots reached the endzone for touchbacks. The positive field position was erased by the Red ‘D’ when defensive lineman Lawrence Haley sacked the Shelby quarterback for a 10 yard loss. The Golden Lions would punt to end the drive and the benefit of the possession was a flip in field

position. Neither team mustered another scoring threat, rather trading possessions to bring the quarter to an end with South Point in the lead.

On a drive that carried over from the first, the Raiders faced a 2nd and 10 from the Shelby 36 when Ray Grier took a Lee pitch and perfectly followed his blocks. Weaving his way, Grier reached the endzone to put South Point up 21-0 with just ten seconds gone from the second quarter clock. The Golden Lions continued to struggle against the hard hitting Red defense, their productivity generally coming from a scrambling quarterback. It seemed their hope for success would depend on a Raider mistake. A Shelby punt gave South Point good field position near midfield. The Raiders advanced but faced a 4th and 9 from the Golden Lions forty. A pass on a fake punt was overthrown and Shelby took over on downs. The Golden Lions took advantage and drove to the Raiders ten yardline. The Red 'D' stiffened and Shelby would settle for a field goal attempt to put points on the board. The 27 yarder was good and so the scoreboard read 21-3 in favor of the home team. With the small measure of momentum, the Shelby defense was able to force a South Point punt on the ensuing drive but had little time remaining to mount a scoring threat. The Golden Lions moved to the Raiders 49 yardline with seconds remaining. From the shotgun, the Shelby quarterback launched a bomb toward the endzone. The impressive throw traveled over 58 yards in the air before Jake Alexander picked it off near the end line. Alexander returned the interception to the South Point 35 yardline to run out the clock. The Raiders carried momentum and a 21-3 lead into the locker room.

To begin the third quarter, the Red Raiders began a drive from their twenty-seven. Lee carried across the 30 yardline and a penalty on Shelby moved the ball to the Raiders forty seven. The Red quarterback once again called his own number, made a head fake, and cut back toward the middle through an open hole. Lee raced 53 yards for the score. South Point had taken a 28-3 lead and backed the defending 2A champs into a position of desperation. Shelby's next drive began at their twenty yardline. The Golden Lions picked their way to the forty-seven, where on 1st and 10 they executed a screen pass that covered 57 yards and a touchdown. The extra point try was backed up 5 yards for a false start. Bursting through the middle of the line, Sean Burns blocked the kick, denying the point and putting a charge back into the Raider sideline. For the remainder of the quarter the teams traded possessions. South Point maintained the 28-9 lead heading into the final 12 minutes of regulation.

Intent to put the finishing touch on the conference championship drive, the Red Raiders went with the traditional, ball control, ground-pounding attack for which the successful program is known. A thirteen play drive that carried over from the third and began at the South Point sixteen left 6:50 on the 4th quarter clock. Keaton Hale ended the drive with a 14 yard touchdown run and a 35-9 Red Raiders advantage. Shelby took back the momentum by scoring on a 96 yard kickoff return and then covered the ensuing onside kick, but the turn of events served only to put the victory into the hands of the Red defense. In the final 6:35, Haley and Robinson collected separate sacks to end Golden Lions' threats and preserve the 35-15 victory. Asked about the quick start to the game, Matthew Robinson said "We planned a three-and-out on the first drive", that's how we wanted to set out to play." And concerning room for improvement, his teammate Lawrence Haley agreed that there's always room to improve. "We have a saying at South Point (that) the BEST is good enough", said Haley, adding, "If we play our best, we feel like nobody

can beat us.” Robinson also summed up the attitude and mentality of the Red Raiders heading into the playoffs. “We’re chasing that perfect game and once we do that, we’ll be state champions” said the senior on defense.

Home field played a big part in South Point’s putting the exclamation point on a Southwestern 2A Conference championship. For their effort the Red Raiders will now host throughout the state playoffs. A potential for five games remain in the season. One team will win all five and bring home the sports highest team honor. That team will be the one that improves with every game. That team will be the one determined to play the perfect game. That team will be the one that gives “a little bit more” when they think they have nothing more to give. That team will be...

Go Get ‘Em, Red!

Notable Facts and Thoughts

Shelby’s run of 4 consecutive state championships is impressive. Opponents are likely to be intimidated by such success. But those are the teams that are beat before they take the field. South Point plays “Red Raiders” football, a brand that makes the statement on the field. Set the ball, blow the whistle!

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