
VARSITY REPORT

by Jamey Andrews

“South Point Advance To Second Round...Roll West Iredell, 48-0”

South Point took the first step on their journey through the NCHSAA 2AA State Playoffs with a victory over West Iredell on Friday night at Lineberger Stadium. The decisive, 48-0, win marked the 400th victory in Red Raiders football history and sets up a rematch with rival Shelby in the second round. South Point dominated throughout the contest, playing the game at a level consistently higher than the opponent. The challenge for the Red Raiders, now as much as ever, is to continue to focus on the game at hand rather than be satisfied with past results. Former Head Coach Lou Holtz once remarked, “If what you did yesterday seems big, you haven’t done anything today.” A motivated week of practice will pay dividends during the “second season”. And this season’s squad has proven capable of intense focus and effort.

West Iredell won the toss and the Warriors elected to receive to begin the game. An opening return to the Raiders 43 yardline had the defense on their heels early. And following quick runs of 11 and 6 yards, South Point knew the Warriors were trying to bring the fight. But, as is their nature, the Big Red dug in, hit hard, and shifted the momentum. With the ball resting at the Raiders 25, the Red ‘D’ relentlessly pursued a scrambling West Iredell quarterback on 4th and short. While trying to elude tacklers the ball slipped from his grasp and into the hands of linebacker Nate Hamilton. The turnover gave the Raiders their first offensive possession at the 30 yardline. Quarterback Scottie Lee and Jake Alexander quickly moved the Raiders to midfield. The Red ‘O-Line’ of Larry Dowdy, Wesley Barker, Ethan Jackson, Victor Hernandez, and Riley Nichols smashed the Warriors defense, creating running lanes for positive gains. South Point hammered their way to the West Iredell 12 yardline where on 2nd and 7, Lee lofted a pass to Ray Grier in the corner of the endzone. Grier leaped and made the play on the ball, hauling in the catch for the first score of the game. Kicker Cade Ratliff drilled the PAT and the Raiders had the 7-0 lead at the 5:07 mark of the first quarter. David O’Hanlon booted the ensuing kickoff into the endzone to give the Warriors their second possession at the West Iredell 20 yardline. Led by linebacker Sean Burns, the Red defense halted progress before midfield, forcing an apparent punt. The ball was snapped to a Warrior up man who was looking for a quick pass completion. Perfect coverage downfield forced a scramble. South Point teammates Matthew Robinson, Tyler Kotula, and Nolan Cochran converged for the tackle for loss and turnover on downs. The Raiders took over at the West Iredell thirty-seven. They didn’t stay there for long! On first down, Alexander took a pitch from Lee around the left side and outran the opposition to the goalline. South Point, with under a minute left on the clock, took the 14-0 lead into the second quarter.

With the lead and momentum, the Red Raiders added consistency to their effort in the second stanza. They forced punts on each West Iredell drive in the quarter while scoring on each of their own possessions. Moving from the South Point 48, the Red ‘O’ drove to the Warriors 29 yardline. From there Alexander broke free for his second touchdown run and a 21-0 Red Raider advantage. The second West Iredell punt was short, giving South Point field position at the Warriors 34 yardline. The short field was too great an obstacle for the West Iredell defense to

overcome against the powerful Raiders offense. Driving to the eight, Lee hit Grier down the middle for the pair's second touchdown pass and catch. The halftime break was 7:04 away and the Raiders were in full command at 28-0. The Red 'D' forced another punt that seemed to flip the field for the Warriors. But from the Raiders' 29, Lee faked a pitch and blazed across midfield to the West Iredell thirty-one. Two plays later, Alexander tried the right side of the line and found success 31 yards downfield! Ratliff's fifth consecutive "center of the uprights" PAT moved the Raiders in front by a 35-0 count. The Warriors continued to do battle but the outcome was all but decided at the half.

With the ball to begin the third, Keaton Hale took over under center for South Point and Naseem Jones became the workhorse at fullback. The Raiders kept the pressure up on the initial second half drive as they would barrel from their 35 to the West Iredell 22 on Jones' first touch from scrimmage. Hale then carried tacklers inside the ten to set up a 1st and goal. Caleb Gibson moved the ball to the three where Jones would finish the drive and notch points for the Red Raiders. The South Point lead grew to 41-0 with 9:32 remaining in the third quarter. As is the "predictably unpredictable" nature of high school football, mistakes took a turn for both teams the rest of the way. A pair of South Point fumbles marred a near perfect game for the Red Raiders. And a Nate Hamilton interception halted a positive drive for the Warriors. The teams worked the clock into the final quarter of regulation.

With the ball and 7:28 remaining in the game, South Point put the finishing touches on the contest. Punting from their endzone, West Iredell could do no better than boot the ball out to the Warriors 37 yardline. The field position would once again doom the Warriors as the Red 'O' took advantage. Jamani Leeper stepped in at quarterback and engineered a drive that would culminate in more points for the Raiders. Leeper engaged his running backs Jones and Gibson to move the ball to the West Iredell two. From there, Jones carried over for the touchdown. South Point put the stamp on the 48-0 victory and ended the West Iredell football season while extending their own.

The Red Raiders moved ahead in the NCHSAA 2AA Playoffs. They did so in impressive fashion by dominating West Iredell. But the Big Red knows that trophies are not awarded for first round wins. Asked about the resolve of the Raiders going forward, Scottie Lee echoed the words of his coach, "If (we) don't play good this week, there is no next week." And with the rival Shelby Golden Lions coming in with a score to settle, now is NOT the time for the Red Raiders to be satisfied with accomplishments. There's still work to be done, games to win, and trophies to be raised.

Go Get 'Em, Red!

Notable Facts and Thoughts

Shelby has everything to gain by upsetting the Raiders in the second round. The Golden Lions would avenge a regular season loss to their rivals and keep their hopes on track for a fifth consecutive state title. From a motivation standpoint, the opponent may have the early

advantage. Expect that advantage to go away when the first whistle is blown next week! Red Raider Pride!

Jamey Andrews