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Tigers Blast Vikes

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GREENVILLE -- Emerald High School's football team had a number of reasons to think its rematch against Southside in the first round of the Class AA playoffs would be different than the first time around.

As it turns out, not a whole lot changed. The Vikings overcame three early fumbles to pull within 14 points of the Tigers at halftime, but Southside added 34 points in the second half to eliminate the Vikings in a disheartening 74-37 rout Friday night.

The Vikings had fallen to the Tigers 59-34 in Week 3, but Emerald had a number of defensive players missing and entered Friday's game having won three out of its final four regular season games. None of those X-factors mattered as Southside overpowered the Vikings with the same mixture of speed and offensive firepower.

Holding a 35-21 lead at halftime, the Tigers scored a touchdown off a 25-yard pass from quarterback Justin Goldsmith to Marlin Butler on Southside's first possession of the third quarter.

The Tigers put the game out of reach when on the next series a fumble by Dee Parks, the Vikings fourth of the game, allowed Southside to capitalize on the ensuing drive with a 5-yard touchdown run by Tyrell Butler, his first of two in the second half.

The victory for Southside, who was in the playoffs for the first time since 1995, was also its first victory in the postseason since 1984. "The biggest thing is I told the guys afterwards that the scoreboard doesn't dictate who we are," Emerald coach Mike Clowney said. "These kids had to fight to get here, and in my book they're winners. "We were in a tough situation tonight, and we didn't do what we needed to do."

Friday's game was the first trip to the postseason for Emerald in Clowney's three year tenure, but the loss was also the Vikings' most lopsided defeat of the season. Southside's 74 points are the most allowed by Emerald in school history.

The game took an ominous turn for the Vikings early in the first quarter when they fumbled the ball three times within the first five minutes of the game. Two of those turnovers directly resulted in touchdowns for the Tigers, spotting them an early 14-0 lead. "We gave them a couple turnovers and put them in position to make plays," Clowney said. "You just can't do that against good football teams. "On the same page, there were a couple times where we had opportunities to cut their lead."

Emerald quarterback Zane Newton scored twice in the first half on rushing touchdowns, and the Vikings had a chance to pull within a touchdown on the last drive of the half, but Newton threw an interception from Emerald's 46-yard line, one of two on the night, that ended the half. "I think that was big. You go in and you're down by one (touchdown) and you've got hope," Clowney said. "If you can come back out and get a stop (in the third quarter) we could've moved forward."

Playing with a 14-point deficit early also put some pressure on the Vikings' defense. "I mean, it put some pressure on us, but teams are always going to have pressure," Emerald linebacker A.J. Jones said. "We still should've been able to do more because teams always face adversity."