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Sports

Vikings Seek First Playoff Win of Clowney Era

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The Emerald High School football team suffered perhaps its worst loss of the season when it fell to Southside 59-34 on Sept. 12 in a defeat even Vikings coach Mike Clowney called "embarrassing."

Since that setback, which put Emerald at 0-3, the Vikings have gone 4-3 and will get another shot at 7:30 p.m. today against the Tigers when they travel to face Region 2-AA No. 2 Southside in the first round of the Class AA playoffs.

Emerald, the No. 3 team out of Region 1-AA, won three of its final four regular season games by a 103-14 margin to get Clowney into the postseason for the first time in his three-year tenure.

The Vikings last made the playoffs in 2005, when they made the Upper State finals behind coach Mac Bryan and quarterback Dan Wideman. Emerald's playoff drought bears no comparison to that of Southside, which dropped down from Class AAA in 2006 and hasn't had a playoff game since 1995. The Tigers haven't won a postseason contest since 1984, when they beat Batesburg-Leesville 13-12. "It is a step forward. (Southside) is kind of sitting in the same role we're in because they haven't been in the playoffs for a while," Clowney said. "Right now, the next step is to make sure you get a win and continuing to move forward from there."

Based on the 59 points they allowed against Southside, though, Clowney stopped short of saying the Vikings are capable of eliminating the Tigers. "The biggest thing for us is to go out and play the best that we can," Clowney said. When you go through and look at that (first) game, we made a lot of mistakes. "We didn't make a lot of plays and we had some breakdowns in coverages."

On top of the school-record 59 points allowed, Emerald also gave up 588

total offensive yards to Southside, leading Clowney to concede that sustaining long drives on offense will be the Vikings' best defense. "The big thing for us is making sure we keep the ball in front of us and attacking on defense so we can get the ball in good field position," Clowney said. "Hopefully, we'll get some good kickoffs and some touchbacks to keep them on the 20(-yard line) just so we can give them a short field since they've been so explosive."

Running out of the spread, the Tigers' offense is anchored by junior quarterback Justin Goldsmith, who has thrown for 2,276 yards and 30 touchdowns with prime wide receiver targets in Marlin Butler and Chris Rhodes, who combined for 226 receiving yards and two touchdown receptions against Emerald. "We're going to have to limit their snaps to as little as possible," Clowney said. "I think there are some things (to adjust from the first game), but more than anything we had some fundamental breakdowns. "So it's just kind of going back working on some fundamental things, making sure we keep the ball in front of us."