

SPORTS

KM At East Rutherford Friday

Playoff Picture Is Still Unclear

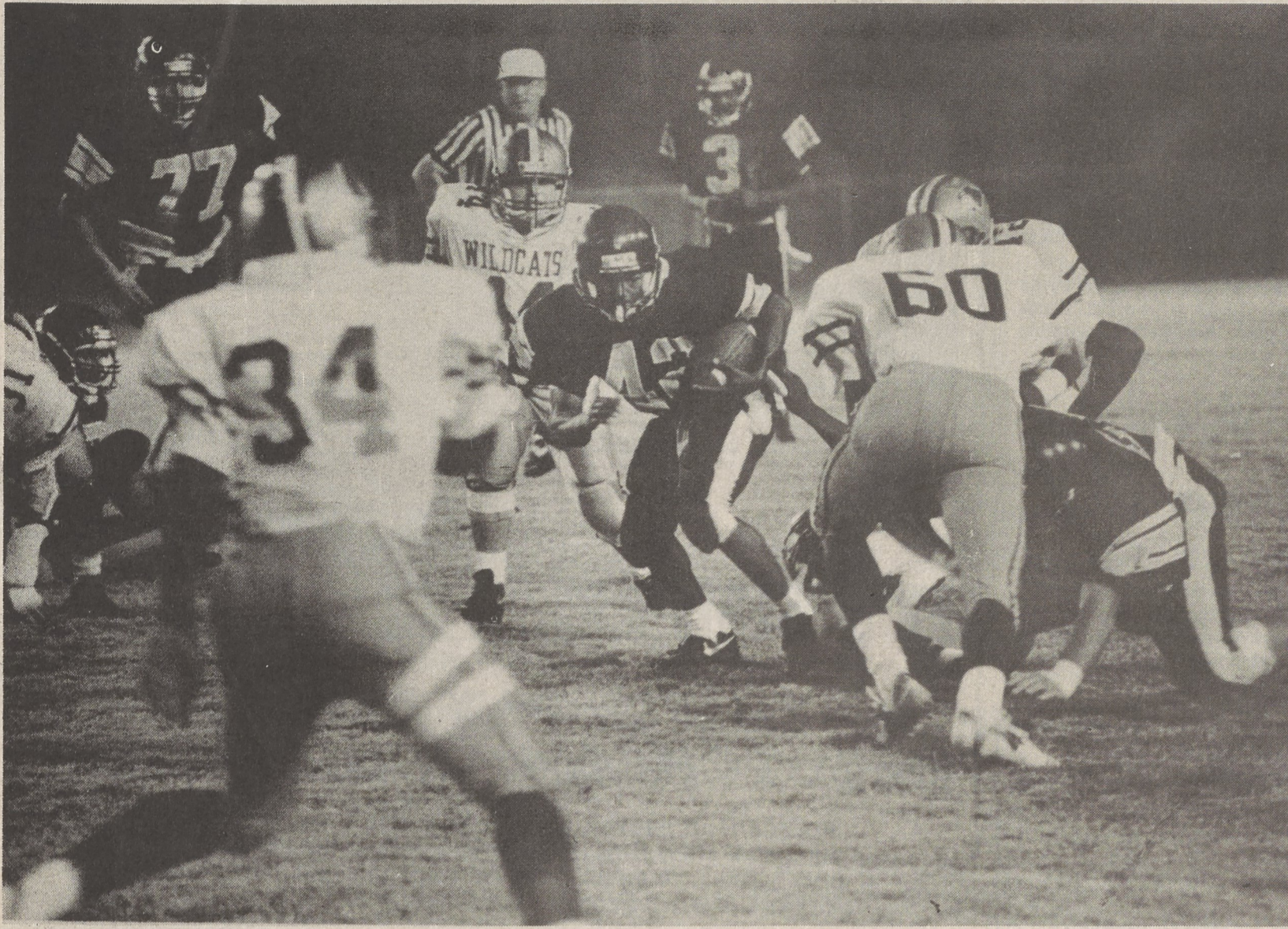


Photo by Gary Stewart

KM'S LEADING RUSHER - Kings Mountain tailback D.J. Williams (42) picks his way through the North Gaston defense for some of his 107 yards rushing in last Friday's Southwestern 3-A

Conference football game at Gamble Stadium. Kings Mountain was sluggish but was still able to win 27-0 and maintain a share of first place with Shelby.

Kings Mountain's Mountaineers could face their toughest test of the season Friday when they travel to East Rutherford for their final regular season game.

The Cavaliers, 2-3 in the Southwestern Conference and 6-3 overall, probably are the most physical team in the league and could easily be unbeaten at this point. Their losses have been to Burns 12-7, South Point 3-0 in the rain, and Shelby 14-13 in overtime.

On the line for the Mountaineers is a share of the SWC title and possibly the top seed for the upcoming state 3-A playoffs. If Kings Mountain beats East and Shelby loses to South Point, the Mountaineers would be the SWC champions and play at home in the first round of the playoffs. If KM loses and Shelby wins, Shelby will win the conference and KM will get the number two playoff seed because of its regular season win over Burns, which has already completed its regular season with a 4-2 conference and 8-2 overall record.

There's also a possibility of a four-way tie for the SWC championship but if that happens Kings Mountain will not advance to the state playoffs. For that to happen, both KM and Shelby would have to lose. That would give KM, Shelby, South Point and Burns 4-2 conference marks. KM Coach Denny Hicks said the way he inter-

prets the tie-breaking rules of the North Carolina High School Athletic Association, KM should go to the playoffs because the Mountaineers fared better against the other teams involved in the tie in head-to-head competition. However, he said, the state rules committee has ruled that the tie could not be broken by the head-to-head method and that the three playoff berths would be decided by the way the three teams did against "common" opponents. In that case, Shelby, South Point and Burns have all beaten East Rutherford and KM would be eliminated from the playoffs if it loses to East.

So, the Mountaineers' fate is in their own hands and they can assure themselves of a playoff berth by defeating East Rutherford.

Hicks and his assistants remember 1986, when the Mountaineers had the conference title all but locked up but lost to East Rutherford 6-0 in the last game of the season.

"Obviously, we don't want that to happen again," he said. "So the best thing for us to do is beat East Rutherford and not worry about what someone else is doing."

Beating East won't be easy, but Hicks says the Mountaineers have the talent to do it if they return to the mid-season form, when they knocked off R-S Central, South Point and Burns in succession.

"Going into the season I said Burns should win the conference," Coach Hicks said. "But based on early games and after talking to some other teams that have played them, I'd say that, physically, East Rutherford is definitely the best team in the conference. They lost three close games and with a break here and there they could be undefeated."

"They've got a tremendous amount of talent," he added. "Their size is above average. They're the second largest team in the conference behind Burns. They have great speed and get on the perimeter as fast as any team I've seen in a long time."

The Cavaliers have another outstanding defense (the most points they've given up were 14 in overtime against Shelby) and their offensive backs, although not as large as in past years, are quick and talented. Fullback Robert Gray ranks as one of the leading rushers in the conference.

"We can play with East Rutherford but our defensive line is going to have to do the best job it's ever done," Hicks said. "Our defensive line, ends and linebackers will have to have a heck of a game."

See East, 7-A

Mounties Blank Wildcats 27-0

It wasn't a pretty game, but Kings Mountain's Mountaineers pleased their fans by defeating North Gaston's Wildcats 27-0 in the final home game Friday night at John Gamble Stadium.

The victory moved the Mountaineers to 4-1 in the Southwestern 3-A Conference and 6-3 overall heading into Friday's final regular season game at East Rutherford.

The victory kept the Mountaineers tied with Shelby for first place in the SWC. Burns, which had been tied for the lead, lost to South Point 33-26 to drop into third place. Kings Mountain can clinch at least a tie for its first SWC title since 1986 with a victory Friday at East Rutherford but a loss to the Cavaliers would drop the Mountaineers out of the state 3-A playoffs if South Point beats Shelby.

Kings Mountain drove down field on its first possession and scored on a 23-yard field goal by Scottie Hopper for a 3-0 lead, and on their next possession the Mountaineers scored on a 34-yard touchdown pass from Timmy McClain to Darius Ross. Actually, the pass covered about five yards across the middle and the talented junior wide receiver used his excellent moves to avoid a couple North Gaston defenders and then our-ran everyone into the endzone.

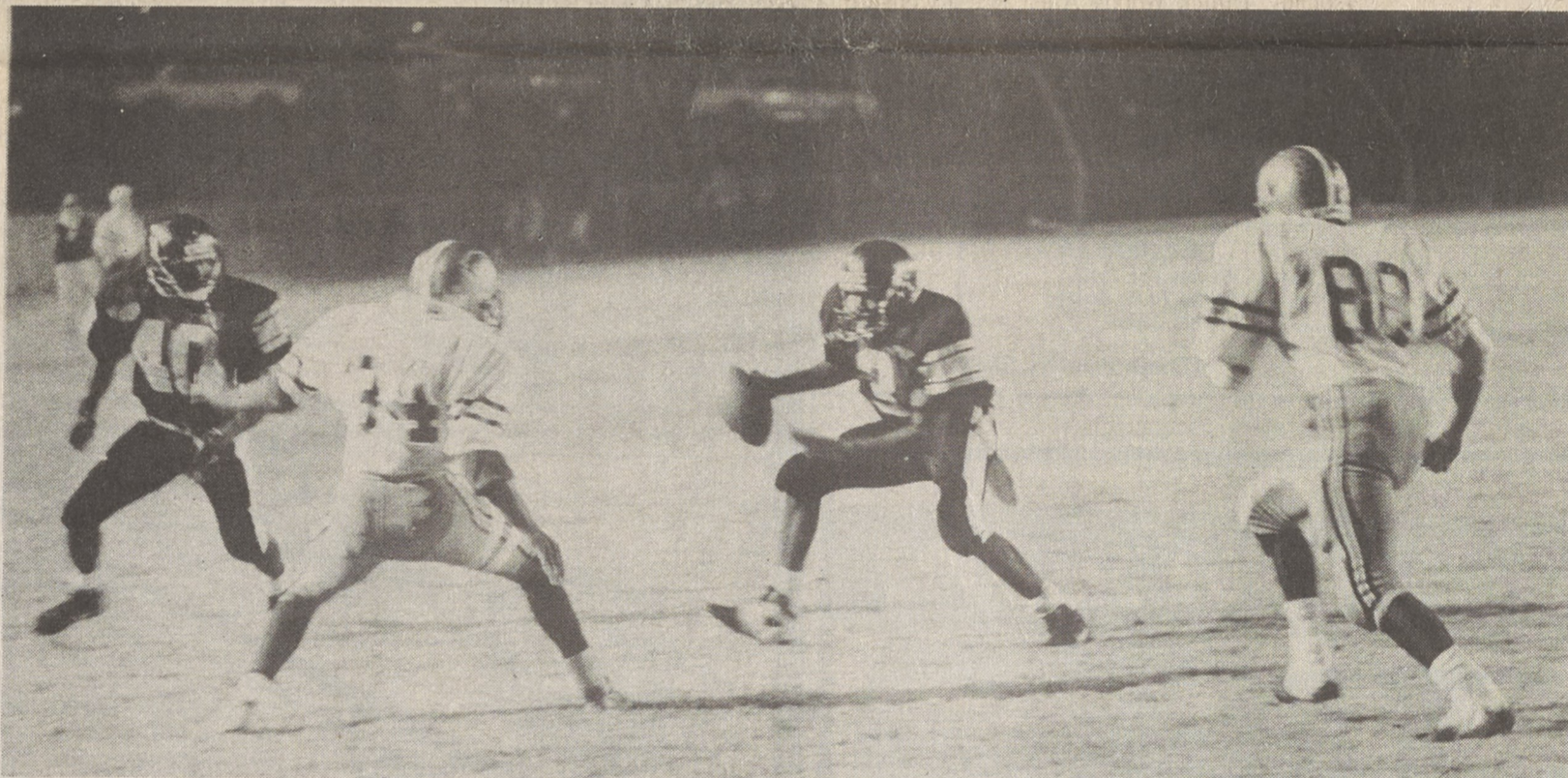
The extra point attempt failed and that left KM on top 9-0. The rest of the game, even though the Mountaineers scored three more touchdowns, was a ho-hum affair.

"We won, and that's the bottom line as far as Friday's game," said KMHS Coach Dennis Hicks. "It was not a well-played game but we did what we had to do in order to win. We did a few things that would have lost the game against a good team. We had a real letdown in concentration."

Shortly after grabbing the 9-0 lead, the Mountaineers drove to the North Gaston one-foot line and had two cracks to score, but on both attempts the North Gaston defense held.

Late in the game, the Mountaineers had a punt blocked deep in their own territory but North Gaston couldn't advance the ball against a strong KM defense and KM Brent Wilson picked off a Mike Patton pass and returned it to the one yard line.

"There's just really no excuse for



MOUNTAINEER OPTION - Kings Mountain quarterback Timmy McClain (3) has to try to decide whether to keep the ball himself or pitch back to running back Victor Bell (40) in Friday's

game with North Gaston at Gamble Stadium. McClain kept the ball and ran it inside the one yard line but the Mountaineers failed to score. KM won 27-0.

"We're going to have to do a better job as players and coaches to get back that intensity that will be necessary to carry us to the rest of the season."

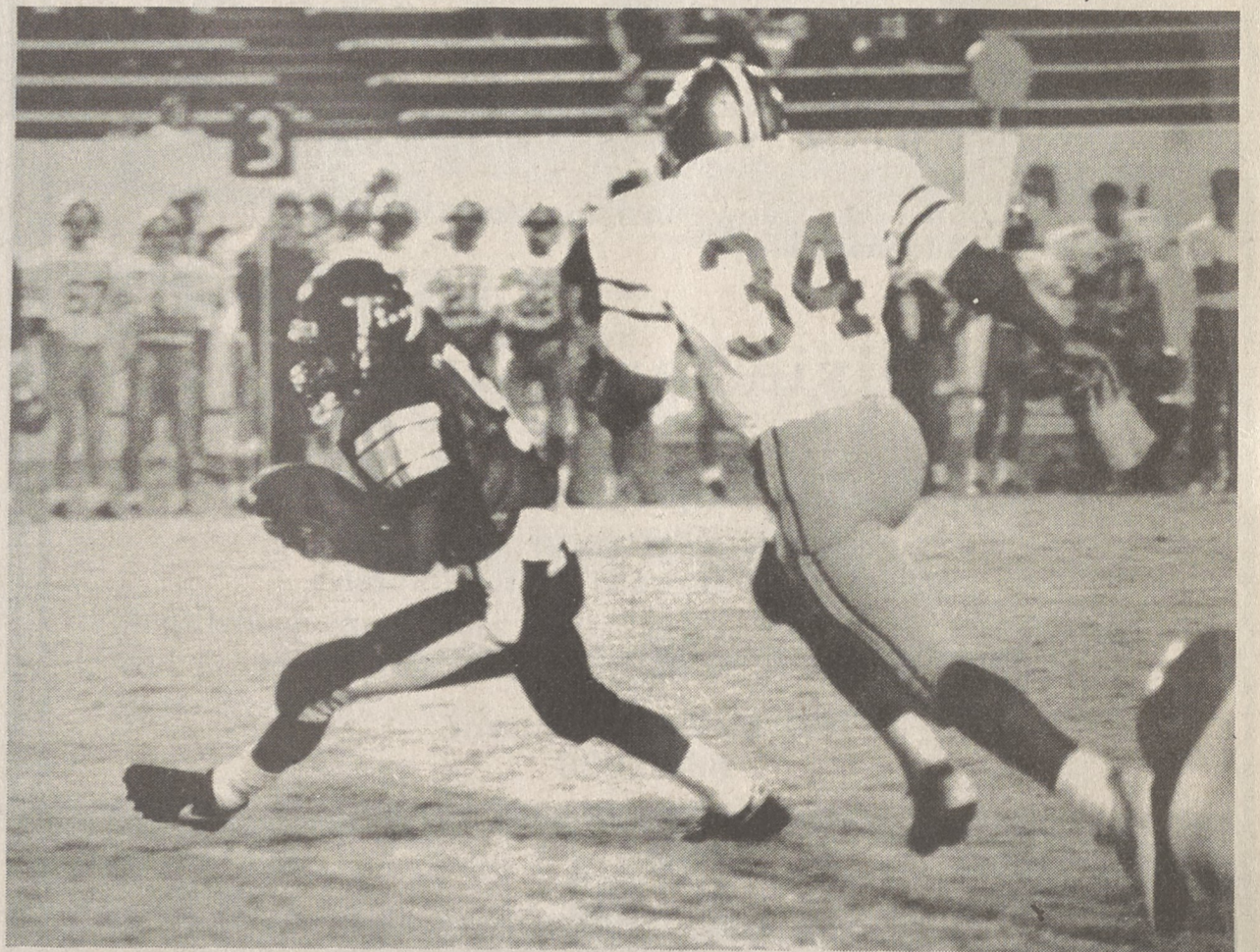
-DENNY HICKS

Lincoln, scored on a one-yard quarterback sneak on the last play of the game to make it 27-0. His touchdown was set-up when Wilson intercepted the North Gaston pass following its block of a KM punt and returned it 80 yards to the one.

Hicks said the fact that the Wildcats hadn't won a game in the SWC could have contributed to the poor Kings Mountain showing.

"We didn't have a real good week of practice," he said. "Athletes sometimes have the tendency to rank their opponents and decide themselves when they have to play hard and maybe when they don't. But a coach's biggest concern when that happens is that if a team happens to put everything together that night they can beat you. And, a lot of times when you don't play with intensity you start getting people hurt. We were very fortunate that didn't happen, but it could very well have happened if North Gaston had had a good night and everything had fallen into place for them. It could have been a tough situation."

"But," he went on, "we've got enough speed that if we just play a good solid football game, everything's going to be okay."



MOUNTAINEER TOUCHDOWN - Kings Mountain wide receiver Darius Ross (5) catches a short pass and turns it into a 34-yard touchdown play in first half of Friday's game with North Gaston at Gamble Stadium. The Mountaineers won 27-0. They close out regular season play Friday at East Rutherford needing a win to assure themselves a spot in the state playoffs.