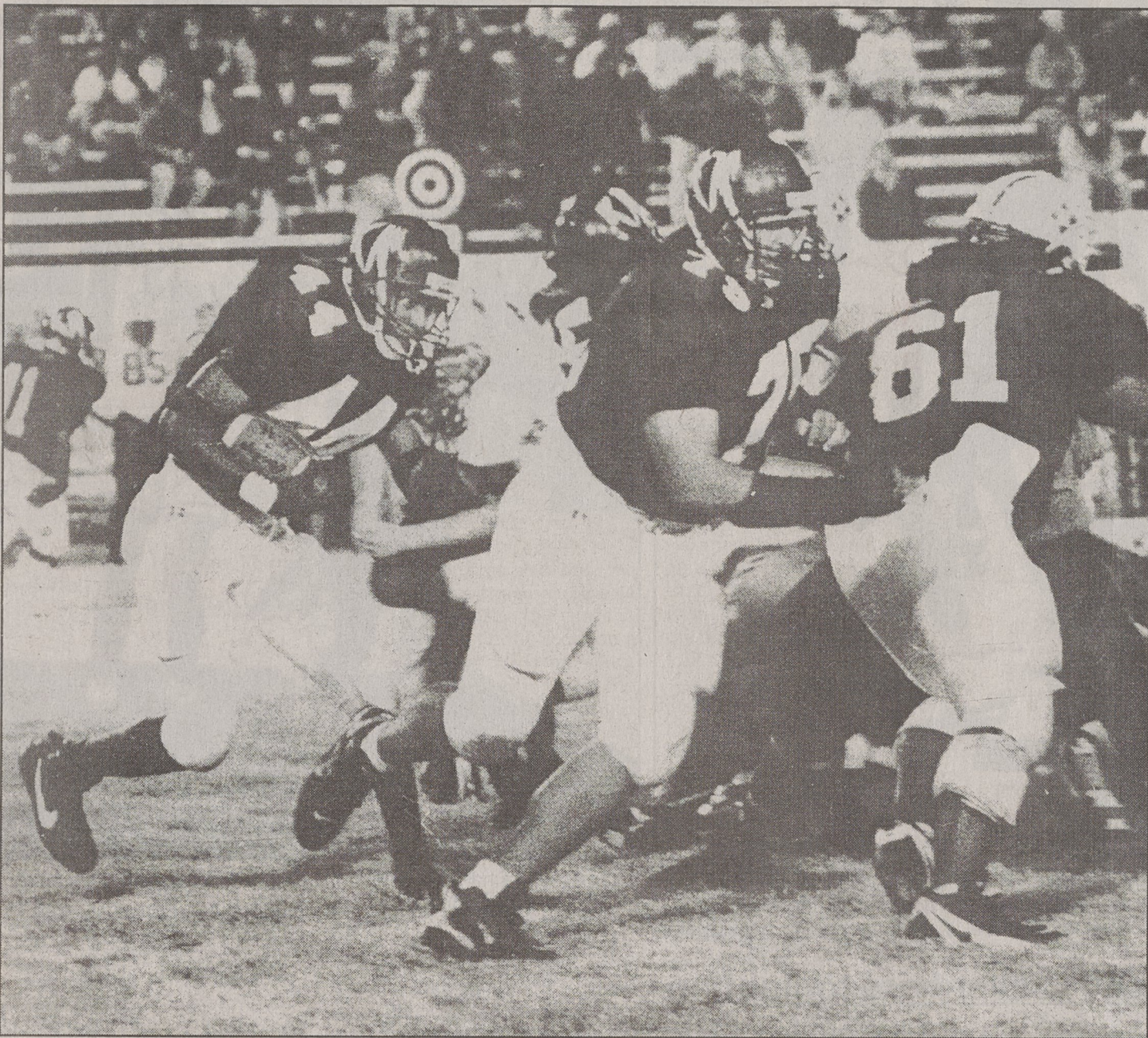


## Mountaineers at Kannapolis Friday for Western 3A Championship game



**GOOD BLOCKING** - Kings Mountain running back Joe Williamson (44) gets good blocking from Laymond Caldwell (75) and Julius Curry (61) in Friday's state playoff game with Ragsdale at John Gamble Stadium. The Mountaineers came from behind in the second half to win 28-21. They travel to Kannapolis Friday to play A.L. Brown's Little Wonders for the Western Regional championship.

### Winner will advance to state championship at Chapel Hill

Kings Mountain High football fans who were impressed with the running of Ragsdale back Darian Freeland last week probably haven't seen anything yet.

When the Mountaineers travel to Kannapolis Friday night to take on A.L. Brown for the Western Regional championship and the right to advance to the state title game at Chapel Hill they will face not one, but two of the best running backs in the state.

The Little Wonders, 13-1 overall and tri-champions of the South Piedmont Conference, have one of the best all-around backs in the state in junior Nick Maddox, who has rushed for 1,959 yards on 238 carries and 26 touchdowns and has also caught six touchdown passes and returned six kicks for touchdowns.

And when Maddox isn't creating excitement for the home fans, Coach Bruce Hardin can count on senior tailback Traun Brown who has 1,239 yards rushing on 208 carries and has scored 14 touchdowns.

"Offensively, they are very good and they are well coached," says KMHS Coach Ron Massey, whose club takes a 10-4 overall record and carries the banner of the Southwestern 3A Conference into the semifinals match-up. "They've got a lot of seniors. Maddox has tremendous speed, and he may be for just out and out speed the fastest kid we've played against. He plays some at tailback, and they put him in the slot also. He catches the ball, runs the ball, throws the ball...he is just a great athlete."

While Maddox, who gained over 1,200 yards as a sophomore last year, is a threat to score from anywhere on the field, Massey said he is also impressed with the inside running of Brown. Even though the Wonders' quarterback, William Craft, doesn't throw a lot, he does have talent and has

hit 31-of-67 passes for 529 yards and eight touchdowns.

"They've got good receivers who run very disciplined routes and catch the ball," Massey said. "If you load up to stop the run they can throw the ball. If you lay back and try to take the passing game away, they run the ball. They are well-rounded and well-coached."

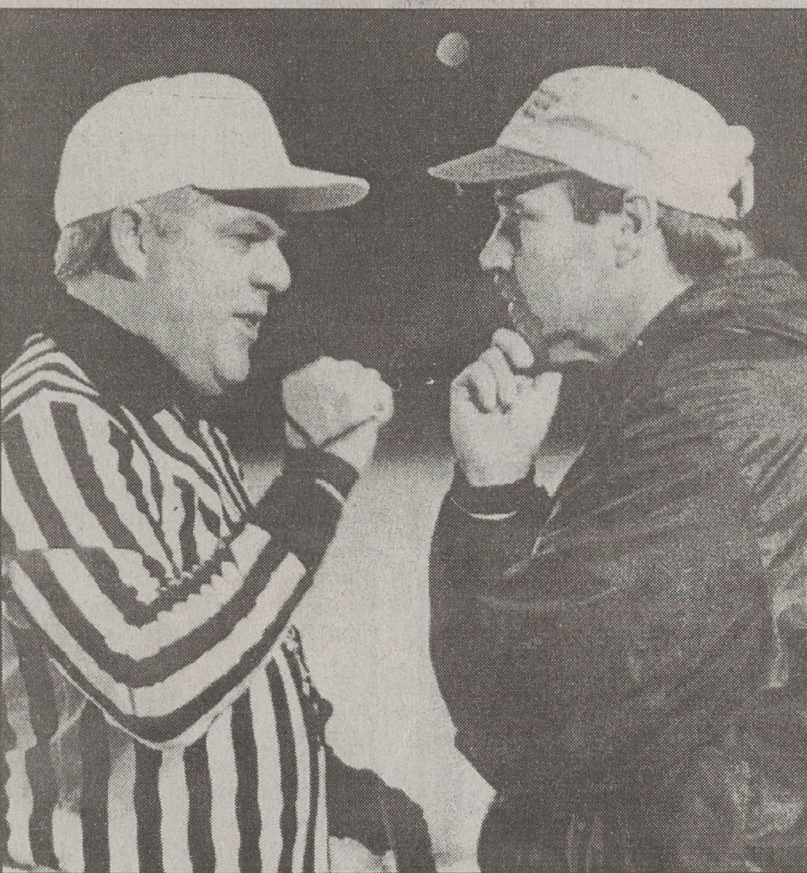
As impressive as the offense is, Massey is equally if not more impressed with the Wonders' defense. Many observers feel their defensive front is the best and the quickest in the state.

"Defensively, they have as much quickness as anybody we've played, including Shelby," Massey said. "They are probably just as quick man for man as Shelby was. The thing about it is that they have some big kids that can run. Their two ends, Desmond Miller, who is 6-1, 245, and Phillip Johnson (6-2, 225) run like a running back. Both of them are three-year starters and they solidify their defense."

Desmond, who has been selected to play in the Shrine Bowl, and Johnson also anchor the Wonders' offensive line.

Coach Bruce Hardin's Wonders, who won the state championship in 1989 and played for it in 1984 and 1991, won their first eight games before suffering their only loss of the season to East Rowan 26-21. The Wonders bounced back from that loss to defeat Northwest Cabarrus and Concord to throw the SPC into a three-way tie. In a draw for playoff berths, East Rowan drew first, Concord second and Brown third and the Wonders went into the playoffs with a 10-1 record and #13 seed in the West.

See Brown, 4B



**THIS IS WHAT HAPPENED** - One of the game officials explains a call to Kings Mountain High football coach Ron Massey during Friday's third round state 3A playoff game with Jamestown Ragsdale at KM's John Gamble Stadium. Massey's Mountaineers became the first KM team to make it past three rounds in the playoffs by defeating the Tigers 28-21.

## KM comeback clips Ragsdale

Kings Mountain's defense adjusted to shut down one of the state's top running backs and quarterbacks in the second half, and the offense came to life behind the running of quarterback Anthony Ash as the Mountaineers erased a 21-7 halftime deficit to defeat Ragsdale 28-21 in the third round of the state 3A playoffs Friday night at John Gamble Stadium.

The victory, just the second playoff victory ever on their home turf, sends the Mountaineers to Kannapolis Friday for a state semifinals matchup with perennial South Piedmont power A.L. Brown. The winner will face the Eastern N.C. champion for the state title on Friday, Dec. 12 in Chapel Hill's Kenan Stadium.

Kings Mountain, which improved to 10-4 overall, saw why Ragsdale's 185-pound senior tailback Darian Freeland had 1,500 yards rushing coming into the contest. He gained an even 100 yards in the first half and scored on touchdown runs of

two and four yards to give the Tigers a 21-7 halftime lead.

In addition, Ragsdale's heralded senior quarterback Joey Casazza, who has passed for over 3,000 yards the past two seasons, hit 6-of-11 passes for 96 yards during the first half assault.

But the Mountaineers played some of their best defense of the year in the second half and used a solid second half running performance to get their crowd into the game, and Ragsdale's offense wilted under the pressure.

Freeland managed just nine yards rushing on five second half carries, and the defense held Casazza to 5-of-15 for 44 yards. In all, the Tigers had just 34 yards rushing in the second half and 23 of those came on a scramble by Casazza in a last-ditch effort to tie the game in the fourth quarter. In fact, the Mountaineers held the Tigers without a second half first down until the 2:40 mark of the fourth quarter, and it came on a pass interference penalty.

Kings Mountain Coach Ron Massey, whose team is the first to make it four rounds into the state playoffs, was extremely proud of his players and their tremendous second half effort.

"I was real proud of them," he said. "In a situation like that it's a lot different than coming back in a regular season game."

Kings Mountain, which was held to 34 yards rushing in the first half, had its defense spread apart by the quick Ragsdale offense but made some key adjustments at intermission.

"I was extremely proud of the effort that we gave in the second half," Massey said. "I don't know if we read too many papers and listened too much to people telling us how good we were, but we just didn't play in the first half. Hopefully we'll come out a lot better this week, because if we play like that in the first half against A.L. Brown we'll never see the other side of it."

Ragsdale used Freeland's quickness and some excellent play calling to roll to a 14-0 lead

after its first two possessions. The Tigers took the opening kickoff 76 yards in 12 plays with Casazza hitting Bosaye Jeffires with a 13-yard touchdown pass and a 7-0 lead. Freeland had six carries for 48 yards during the march, including first down runs of 16, 10 and 18 yards.

After a KM punt, Ragsdale drove 46 yards in five plays with Freeland scoring from three yards out for a 14-0 lead. The big play in the drive was a screen pass to Jeffires, who appeared to have his knee touching the ground when he made the catch but sprang up and raced 37 yards to the Mountaineer six yard line.

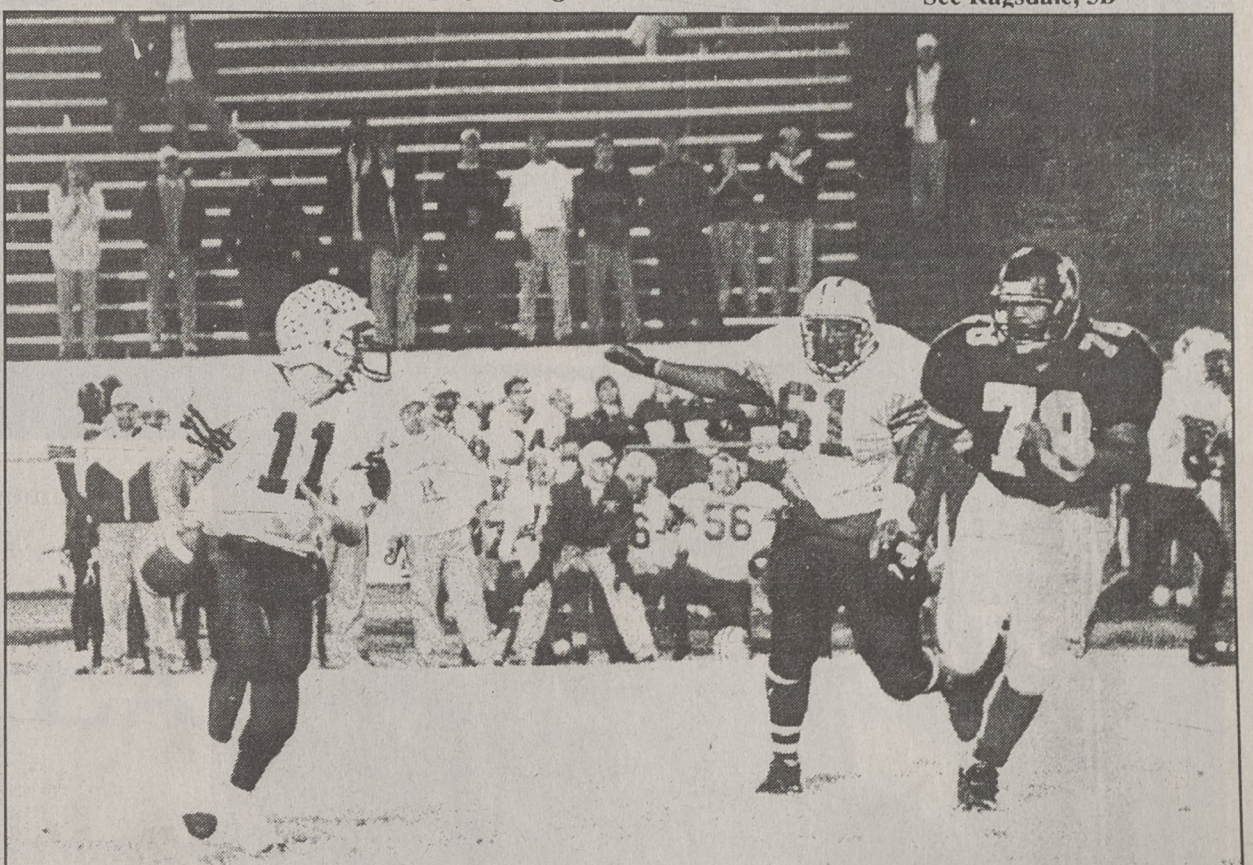
The Tigers had an apparent 34-yard scoring pass erased on a chop block early in the second quarter, and the Mountaineers drove 88 yards in nine plays to cut the score to 14-7.

Anthony Ash hit Chad Jones on a 13-yard pass, and then Joe Williamson took a short pass out in the flat and turned it into

See Ragsdale, 3B



**ASH ON THE RUN** - Kings Mountain quarterback Anthony Ash (12) picks up some big yards in second half of Friday's playoff game with Ragsdale at John Gamble Stadium. #13 for the Tigers is linebacker Steve Edwards. Mountaineers won 28-21.



**RAGSDALE ON A ROLL** - Ragsdale quarterback Joey Casazza (11) scrambles and looks for a receiver in Friday's state 3A playoff game with Kings Mountain at KM's John Gamble Stadium. Closing in to make the stop for the Mountaineers is defensive lineman Frank Hopper (78).