



April 21, 2021

By Dennis Garcia
SportsTone.net

Playing on the road in the state high school football playoffs against a higher-seeded team is difficult no matter what the circumstances. Eastern Randolph High School, which was given the No. 7 seed for this year's 2-A playoffs, went on the road and upended No. 2 Clinton last week in a thrilling 42-40 double-overtime win.

Now the Wildcats will be asked to jump on a bus and head out of town for a second straight week as the Wildcats travel to No. 3 Northeastern in Elizabeth City Friday night in second round action.

ER coach Burton Cates and the Wildcats proved last week that road victories can be achieved against any caliber of opponent. Clinton was the second-ranked team in the state heading into last week's playoff opening game, but it was the Wildcats who advanced.

"Since we were so far down in Clinton, we celebrated until Saturday afternoon," Cates said before his attention turned toward No. 3 Northeastern, which defeated No. 6 Kinston 48-39 in a shootout to advance. "This was a win the coaches needed, the players needed and the school needed. We hadn't had one like that in a while."

ER was an 18-point underdog last week to the Dark Horses, but rallied in the final quarter to tie the game after being down by 13 points.

This was the first action for the Wildcats since two weeks prior when Randleman pinned a 17-0 defeat on the Wildcats.

"Our kids left about 2:15 p.m. or so for Clinton and they were focused the whole way down," Cates said. "I knew they were going to play hard. I didn't know how well they would play, but I knew they would play hard."

The Wildcats, like a lot of high school teams, have had to battle through plenty of roadblocks along the way.

"We were out two weeks in quarantine after the first practice," Cates said. "Then we had three games in nine days. Then we had two games in a month. A lot of things went against us. No excuses but it's Covid. It's been against a lot of teams."

A long day of traveling before a game is tough, but the Wildcats already proved that can be overcome. Cates said he expects the Wildcats to meet that challenge this week as well.

"Going four hours will be another challenge," Cates said. "But there are only four teams left in the East and we are one of them."