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RANDLEMAN - Shane Handy has always been a coach who likes to see his offense balanced between running plays and throwing plays. But with an experienced and talented offensive line and an explosive backfield for his Randleman High School varsity football team the past few years, even Handy himself said it wouldn't be wise to go away from the running game.



Naheim Lilly (#14). Photo by PJ Ward-Brown/PJ Ward-Brown Photography

The Tigers have used another stout rushing attack this season to finish the regular season undefeated and as Piedmont Athletic Conference champions. RHS then rushed for five touchdowns in a 42-0 win over Eden-Morehead in the opening round of the state playoffs and Handy will be looking for another strong rushing effort Friday night when the Tigers (11-0) host East Duplin (7-5) in the second round at Charles R. Gregory Stadium.

"The past two years, we have been more of a run team," Handy said.

"Two years ago, Tanner (McGee) threw the ball a little more and last year with Jaquan (Snipes) and Naheim (Lilly), they did a great job

of running. Still, Timmy (York) could throw when we needed to. He threw it well. This year, we have struggled throwing the ball some, but we can still throw it. The main thing is to be successful. If running the ball is going to make us successful, we will run the ball."

In the 2017 season, the Tigers averaged 199.8 yards per game rushing and 196.3 passing. Last year, that number began to sway toward the rushing game with 182 yards per game on the ground and 151 threw the air. This year, those numbers are heavily dominated by a rushing game that is averaging 273 yards per outing.

With Lilly and Snipes, it was expected.

Snipes returned for his senior season after being named the county player of the year. Lilly, a sophomore, stepped in brilliantly when needed as a freshman, showing glimpses of greatness. The two were expected to be one of the top one-two running punches in the state this season and for six games, they have been. But Snipes missed the first part of the season after sustaining a broken arm in June and then was sidelined again after breaking that same arm late in the season.

"We are multiple on offense, so we have been able to adjust," Handy said. "We have had guys step in and contribute. Nate Green, Harrison Moffitt when he's not playing quarterback and Dawson Edwards have all stepped in and performed well."

In just six games, Snipes rushed for 650 yards and 12 touchdowns.

Lilly has been a mainstay all season, posting incredible numbers. The second-year performer has rushed for 1,838 yards on 190 carries, an average of 9.67 yards per carry. He has scored 26 rushing touchdowns, including two in the first-round playoff win over Eden-Morehead.

"He's having one of the best rushing campaigns I have seen in a long time, and to be a sophomore," Handy said. ""He has great balance and great vision. He sees the hole and he's a tough runner. He will juke and make cuts, but he's a downhill runner. He makes people miss in the hole and you can't teach that."

With Snipes out for the rest of the season, the rushing roles of Moffitt, Green and Edwards increase. Green scored twice last Friday night and Edwards added another.



Jaquan Snipes. PJ Ward-Brown/PJ Ward-Brown Photography



Randleman's offensive line in action. PJ Ward-Brown/PJ Ward-Brown Photography

Of course, everything starts up front and the Tigers are blessed with a number of experienced offensive linemen. Brandon Price, Steve Trim, Steven Smith and Juan Gonzalez have been around for awhile and freshman Riley Edwards has grown up quickly.

When the Tigers do have to throw, they have plenty of chemistry with quarterbacks Colby Price and Moffitt and

receivers Dominick Poole, Robbie Rich and Edwards.

But with Lilly, Snipes, Moffitt and the rest of the offensive backfield, the Tigers have switched from a balanced offense to one that relies heavily on the rush. And with the success the team has experienced on the ground, that's just fine with Handy.