

TIGER FLASHBACK CENTRAL GWINNETT 1961

The 1961 Tiger team was a fired up bunch in preparation for the Central Gwinnett game, for they had revenge in their hearts after the "Lights Out" game in 1960 in Lawrenceville which had been lost by a touchdown.

On this night in the third game of the season, both teams entered the contest undefeated. The Tigers were really ready on this night for they hammered the Black Knights armor relentlessly and primarily behind a tough defense and the air arm of quarterback Farris Gary and his bevy of fine receivers Commerce came out of the game victorious (19-7).

Commerce won the toss and elected to receive the kickoff. Fullback Ken Davis picked up four yards on the first play from scrimmage, but on the next play halfback Roger Love fumbled with CG claiming possession at the Tiger 25.

Four plays by the visitors picked up little yardage, as the Tigers held and took over at the Commerce 20.

The Tiger offense did not move the ball and Love punted out to the Black Knight 45. From here CG launched their only touchdown drive of the evening for the games' initial score of the night on a short scoring run from three yards out. The PAT was successful and Central held an early lead of (0-7), however, it was to be short-lived.

With four minutes remaining in the half, the Tigers came alive and began methodically moving the pigskin down the field behind the passing of Gary and the running of Davis, Love and Buford Howell.

Gary passed to Howell in the flat for 20 yards and a first down. A few plays later, Gary hooked up with Howell once more, as the fleet Tiger scat back caught a perfectly thrown pass from the Commerce signal-caller and raced untouched to pay dirt for the first of eventually three Tiger tallies on the night. HB Roger Love then ran around right end for the successful PAT, as the Tigers had tied the game just before the half at (7-7).

Gary had 158 yards passing on this eventful night. He threw one TD pass, caught a touchdown pass of his own and ran in for another, as he had his hand in all three Tiger scores.

Commerce came out of the half time dressing room with a determined heart, mind and soul, as they were about to stick a dagger through the Black Knights' armor and into their heart.

This group of Commerce lads, in the third quarter especially, ran their offense with precision in taking control of the game, as they posted two scores while the tough defense held the Black Knights at bay.

The 'Cats scored their first touchdown in the second half on a long pass from HB Davis to QB Gary who had sneaked out of the backfield after having made a handoff to Davis. Davis had to reverse his field and do some fancy running to get the pass off, a la Fran Tarkenton, the Bulldog and Viking scrambler.

Gary caught Davis' superbly lofted pass down the left side line and streaked into the end zone untouched. The pass play covered 50 yards and gave the Tigers a (13-7) lead following the missed PAT.

A short time later, the Tiger defense got the ball once more for the black clad offense and Gary and Company took little time in posting another score.

The young signal-caller barked out signals. He took the snap and rolled to his right and hit right end Robert "Runt" Smith with another on target pass that the big tight end gathered in the right flat. The dependable receiver also did some shifty running for 20 yards and another first down in enemy territory.

Two plays later Gary again spotted Smith who was open again on a similar pass pattern in the right flat. Smith snagged another aerial and lumbered 40 yards all the way down to the CG one yard line before being brought down from behind.

Gary then took things into his own hands, as he sneaked over from the one for the final TD of the night. After the unsuccessful PAT, the score remained (19-7) in favor of the Tigers as the third period came to a close shortly thereafter.

The fourth period was dominated by both defenses, and the game ended (19-7), as Commerce had avenged the 1960 defeat with a decisive victory over Central Gwinnett.

Credit has to go out to the superb play of the Tiger linemen who did a great job both offensively and defensively all night. They were: ends—Smith and Kenneth Lord an eventual All-State selection along with Davis, tackles—Toye Brown and Johnny Langston, guards—Jimmy Moss and Joseph Beauchamp and center-linebacker—Tommy Touchstone along with linebacker William McClure.

This 1961 team eventually won their first region championship, Region 4A, when they defeated Toccoa (19-6) in the region title game played at Stephens Co. High School.

The '61 team which posted a (9-3-0) season record also defeated Madison County, Winder-Barrow, Jefferson, Monroe Area, South Habersham, Stephens County, South Hall while losing only to Toccoa in the regular season game and St. Pius. The Tigers also were defeated by Carrollton (eventual state champion) in the semi-final playoff game.

Others on the 1961 team were: Buzzie Blalock, Jack Carlan, Steve Castellaw, Tim Childs, Jim Dickerson, Bob Harper, Larry Martin, Sammy Massey, Mike McClure, Russell McCollum, Roy "Doc" Savage, Hoyt Stowe and Rodney White.

Primarily compiled from *THE COMMERCE NEWS* reports

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