

TIGER FLASHBACK

DACULA

1991

The Dacula Falcons brought their flock of birds into Commerce with a 2-3 record for the 1991 season in an attempt to regain their old stranglehold on the Tigers who had posted a 3-2 mark during the season's football wars. Neither team had had their normal overpowering football year to this point, but a rivalry had begun to develop since the two had first met in 1988. Commerce went on to shoot down their fine feathered friends from Gwinnett County (28-13) in a hard-fought battle on this clear and mild evening

As the evening's festivities opened, neither team could muster a first down on their first possession as both defenses dominated.

Dacula was the first to right itself, as the next time the Falcons got their hands on the pigskin, they marched 61 yards in 7 plays to score. QB Matt Hickman hit a third-and-15 pass play of 35 yards to Carlos Tanner down the middle of the field to the Tiger 31. Three plays later Hickman found Steve Sims on another perfect aerial to the Commerce 11 from which Sims burst over left tackle from his running back position for the game's initial score at the 4:47 mark of the first stanza.

The PAT kick by Dusty Moss was true and the 'Birds were up by a 7-0 score.

The Dacula kickoff was a squibber with Tiger defender Gary Brown gathering in the elusive pigskin at the Commerce 47. Immediately, the Tiger wishbone came out clicking on all cylinders, as Commerce quarterback Jason Pittman ran around right end on the option keeper and raced down the sideline in front of the Dacula bench untouched for a 53-yard scamper to pay dirt at the 4:12 mark of the period. HB Jason West's attempt to plunge in over left guard for the PAT was stymied by the Falcon defense, but the Tigers had cut the visitors' lead to (7-6).

Dacula came right back down the field and drove 62 yards in 9 plays for their second score. Tanner returned the kickoff 52 yards to the Tiger 38 to set up the TD march. Tanner collected 11 yards and a first down at the 25 followed by Brian Dupree's 10 yard gain and another first down at the 15. Five plays later, Tanner scored as he bucked over left guard from the five with 11:04 remaining in the second quarter. The PAT kick by Moss was wide and the score remained (13-6) with the Falcons on top.

Later, following a Tiger punt, Dacula flew into Tiger territory to the Commerce 36, but two incomplete passes and a penalty forced the Falcons to punt.

Safetyman Jason Pittman gathered in the kick at the 11 and squirmed his way 37 yards to the Tiger 48 yard line setting up a go ahead TD just before the half.

The Tigers faced 52 yards of real estate with only 4:37 on the clock with which to work. However, the Commerce offense was not to be denied, as halfback Jason West bolted over right guard behind the blocks of Phillip Cox and Michael Brown for 19 yards to the Falcon 33. On fourth-and-one at the 24, Pittman sneaked for four more yards and a first down at the 20.

Three plays later, Commerce faced a fourth-and-four situation again at the 14. Pittman kept the ball on the option around right end and squeaked out enough for the first down just inside the 10 giving the Tigers first and goal.

Two plays later, a clipping penalty moved Commerce back to the 18. Pittman faded back to pass and found end Adam Wilson in the end zone for the touchdown with only 15 seconds remaining in the half. Pittman's two-point conversion pass was also good to Wilson and Commerce had snatched a (14-13) lead from Dacula at the mid point of the game.

At the half, statistics showed that Dacula held an advantage with 179 total yards in 29 plays and 10 first downs to Commerce's 128 total yards in 19 plays and only 5 first downs. But, the Tigers held a one point lead on the all important scoreboard.

The second half was a different story for the Tiger defense, as they totally destroyed any semblance of a Falcon offense limiting the Falcons to 37 total yards and only one first down. Dacula had five possessions in the second half four of which ended in punts while losing the other on an interception.

Neither team in the third quarter could muster anything offensively as both defenses dominated. But as the third quarter ended Adam Wilson punted the Falcons into a hole at their 16.

After a Michael Brown sack of quarterback Matt Hickman moved the Falcons deeper back to the nine, Danny Wilkins short punt of only 14 yards sailed out of bounds at the Falcon 23 giving the Tigers great field position.

Three plays later, Commerce squandered the opportunity when Pittman's pass into the end zone was picked off by Steve Sims ending the Tiger threat.

But, the Tiger defense rose up again and after three plays by the Dacula offense netted one yard, Wilkins hit another short punt that fell out of bounds this time at the Falcon 37 yard stripe.

The Tigers would not be denied this time, as the Commerce offense found the pay station in only three plays.

On third down at the 35, Pittman dropped back to pass. After first glancing to his right, he then looked left and found split end Kevin Neely five yards behind any defender and lofted a pass that the Tiger receiver gathered in as he waltzed into glory land untouched for the score.

Pittman's two-point conversion pass fell short of the mark and the score remained at 20-13 with 6:02 remaining in the game.

After three plays and another Dacula punt, Commerce gained possession of the pigskin at its own 34 which set up a bizarre ending to the game.

After punching out one first down, the Tigers faced a second-and-8 situation at the Tiger 46. HB Vernard Gillespie skirted right end, was hit near the Dacula sideline and fumbled where the alert fellow halfback Jason West plucked the elusive pigskin from the turf and raced 54 yards into the end zone before astonished players, coaches and fans could figure out what had transpired.

Pittman's pass to Wilson for the two-point conversion was successful, and with 1:46 remaining the Tigers had blown open the game to take a commanding lead of (28-13).

To cap off the zany fourth quarter, Chuck Thompson recovered the elusive squib kickoff by Michael Brown at the Dacula 34 from where the Tigers twice fell on the ball to run out the clock giving Commerce its fourth victory of the year and their second in a row over the Falcons.

Commerce went on to end the 1991 season with a 6-5-0 record also defeating Oconee County, Dawson County, Jefferson, Banks County and Monticello. However, the Tigers lost five contests during the season to Madison County, Oglethorpe County, Social Circle, Athens Academy and Oglethorpe County in the first playoff game of the season.

Other members of the 1991 Tiger team were: Corey Wood, Will Golden, Kenyatta Smith, Russell Shore, Bobby Carroll, Bryan Shore, Michael Ward, Phillip Seabolt, Jeff Phillips, Corey Jackson, Richard Vickery, Michael Reynolds, Kiah McWilliams, Joe Ewing, Jeff Davis, Brad Daves, Keith Savage, Johnny Morris, Clifton Bonds, Sammy Simmons, BuJhune Daniels, Marlon Huff, Steven Rogers, Ryan Wood, Stef Rucker, Si Gray, Lamar Bowles and Jeff Culpepper.

July 1991, Jeff Prickett