

TIGER FLASHBACK

JEFFERSON (2)

1995

In the final game of the 1995 regular season, the Jefferson Dragons came to Commerce and handily defeated the Tigers (21-7) for the first time in twenty years dating back to 1975.

However, as the playoffs unfolded the following week, the Tigers drew the Dragons again. They traveled across "The River" for the nine mile trek and won a see-saw donnybrook leaving the Dragons in the Memorial Stadium dust, as the Tiger faithful partied at midfield following the Tigers come-from-behind rally in a (22-18) victory.

This time the problems of the earlier game had been corrected, and all was right with the world again for Commerce Tiger fans. Commerce had won the 50th game of the series and the first ever playoff game between the two schools in "The River War". The win allowed the Tigers to continue into the playoffs and defeated Calhoun the next week.

The (9-2-0) Tigers controlled the clock and the ball (28:48 to 19:12) including 9:06 of the crucial fourth quarter. The Tiger defense came up with some big plays even though they gave up 271 total yards to the Dragons. Rob Sanders gathered in two crucial interceptions while linebackers Jody Rogers and Tony Allen harassed quarterback Jody Pollock in various blitz packages.

In the meantime, the Tiger offensive line stole the show and won the game, as they opened numerous holes for Tiger backs enabling Commerce runners and receivers to collect 390 yards in total offense. The effort was particularly obvious in the third quarter when Commerce had TD drives of 87 and 71 yards. The offensive line consisted of center-Joe Anderson, guards-Stevie Cotrell and Casey Westbrook, tackles-Matt Stephenson and Craig Ellis and tight end-Greg Sorrow.

The offensive line enabled the Tigers to control the ball for the game's final 6:54 after the Dragons drove 99 yards in only five plays to grab the momentum and cut the Tiger advantage to (22-18). Steven David collected 190 yards rushing, while QB Kevin Poe added 77. Poe was three of four passing for 100 yards and two touchdown strikes to Russ Gregg.

Memorial Stadium was filled to capacity by the kickoff. The Dragons won the toss and elected to receive with Darien Rakestraw returning Brandon Bruce's kick back to the

Commerce 49 yard line. Jefferson scored in seven plays culminated by Pollock's seven yard option keeper around right end for the score. This touchdown followed a 24-yard pass from Pollock to D.J. O'Claire to the seven setting up the initial tally of the game.

O'Claire's PAT kick was wide, but the Dragons had jumped out front (6-0). This game proved to be only the fifth time in the 50 game series that the team that scored first did not win other than the five ties, as the Tigers rallied for the victory in the second half.

Behind the running of Poe and David and a 13-yard pass to Gregg, Commerce moved to the Jefferson 47. Two plays later Poe hit Gregg with a scoring strike up the right sideline in front of the Tiger bench for a touchdown. Bruce's PAT kick was good and the Tigers led (7-6) with 4:03 left in the first period.

On the Tigers next possession, David fumbled at the Commerce 30 giving Jefferson a great scoring opportunity. Pollock kept the ball on the option around right end and injured his ankle, as he was tackled from behind by linebacker Craig Mathis. However, two plays later the Jefferson signal-caller scored on a keeper from six yards out. Pollock's two point conversion pass then fell incomplete, but the Dragons had regained the lead at (12-7).

On the Dragons next possession, they marched to the Commerce 37 before turning the ball over on downs as Pollock's fourth and 14 pass was broken up by Kevin Poe.

After a short Tiger drive, a Poe fumble at the Dragon 33 gave the ball back to Jefferson. The Dragons quickly marched to the Tiger 29 where the halftime horn sounded after Pollock's desperation pass into the end zone failed, but Jefferson had the lead at intermission (12-7).

Reverend Steve Savage then gave one of his halftime sermons, and the Tigers came out of the halftime locker room determined to remedy the situation and not go down in history as the only Tiger team to lose to Jefferson twice in one year, as the vaunted Tiger offense scored on its first two possessions of the third quarter.

The Tigers came out in the second half and immediately drove 87 yards in five plays to take the lead for good.

A twenty yard run on the option pitch to Steven David put the ball on the Tiger 49, whereupon Poe connected with split end Gregg again along the right hash mark for a 51-yard scoring pass over the out-stretched arms of Dragon safetyman Brandon Anglin. Gregg raced into the end zone untouched unimpeded by any Jefferson player.

Following an offside penalty on the Dragons, David scored the two-point conversion as he ran around left end after receiving the pitch from Poe to put the Tigers up (15-12) at the 9:31 mark of the third period.

Assisted by some stellar defensive play by Rogers and Allen, Scott Sanders ended the Dragon's first drive of the second half with the first of his two interceptions in the game. The senior Tiger defender stepped in front of the Dragon receiver just before stepping out of bounds at the Commerce 29 to squelch a Dragon drive and set up the Tigers third and deciding touchdown.

Commerce then put together a 6-play, 71-yard scoring drive to give the Tigers a much needed 10-point advantage. David burst for 21 yards and a first down at midfield. Fullback Michael Fitzpatrick rumbled up the middle for 15 yards to the 35, as the Commerce offensive line took complete control of the line of scrimmage.

Three plays later, Poe rambled on the option keeper around right end for 21 yards before being tackled down at the Dragon one yard line.

Poe's one-yard keeper around the right side for the score and Bruce's kick gave the Tigers a (22-12) lead with five minutes left in the third period.

The Dragons roared back down the field intent on cutting into the Tiger lead, but it was Sanders again stepping up to show his stuff, as he leaped and split two Dragon receivers along the Tiger sideline for his second interception to end the Jefferson threat at the Commerce 25.

Commerce then ran off ten plays before the drive stalled, and Stevie Cotrell's superb punt pinned the Dragons inside their one yard line.

However, the Dragons were far from ready to surrender, as Pollock used five plays to cover the needed real estate for a score. The big play was a 43-yard scoring pass from Pollock to a wide-open Matt Childress over the middle. The Dragon receiver side-stepped a Tiger defender and sprinted into the end zone for the touchdown.

Again the PAT kick was low and bad, and Commerce now held on to a slim four point lead at (22-18) with 6:54 left in the game.

The Tiger offense of Poe and David then kept the ball behind the outstanding Commerce offensive line for 46 yards in 13 snaps to seal the Tiger victory. The Tigers were helped by an offside call on Jefferson with the Tigers facing a fourth-and-two at the Commerce 42 while knocking out three first downs in the sustained march all by way of the ground game.

As the final seconds ticked off the scoreboard clock, hundreds of jubilant Tiger fans raced onto the field to mob their team and to repay a week-old debt by celebrating on the hallowed turf of the Dragons, their arch-rivals.

The 1995 Tigers went on to post a (10-3-0) record also defeating Madison County, Oconee County, Oglethorpe County, Rabun County, Monticello, Athens Academy,

Social Circle, Union County, Jefferson (2) and Calhoun while losing to Buford, Jefferson (1) and Manchester in the third playoff game of the season.

Others on the 1995 squad were: Dustin Allen, Chad Ashley, J.P. Barone, Terrell Beasley, Josh Billew, Terry Brown, Reggie Collins, Jake Epps, Chad Eubanks, Brad Fleeman, Mark Ivara, Josh Kesler, Nick Ladd, Jason Lord, Will Massey, Tommy Morgan, Matthew Moulton, Brent Nichols, Matt Perry, Mickey Pittman, Rob Sanders, Josh Smith and Chad Wheeler.

Primarily compiled from *THE COMMERCE NEWS* reports

July 2002, Jeff Prickett