

TIGER FLASHBACK

JONESBORO

1947

The Commerce Tigers in their seventh game of the season traveled south of Atlanta to do battle as underdogs with a highly touted Jonesboro team. This night would have been good for hogs, ducks and frogs, for it was one in which the game was played on a cold night in torrents of rain with few in the stands to watch the Tigers slish their way to a (14-0) victory. However it was a hard-fought game by both teams of gladiators and the Tigers came out with a well-deserved and soggy victory.

The final score did not indicate the Tigers superiority. With two exceptions the game was wholly played near midfield or in Jonesboro territory. Jonesboro was able to garner only two first downs in the entire contest to eleven for Commerce.

The Tigers won the toss of the coin and received the opening kickoff.

Operating from a wicked single wing set, Commerce began a touchdown march on its first possession. Tailback Herman Smallwood, at the Tiger 35, rifled a 25-yard pass to Hayward Tarpley who snared the aerial amidst two red and white clad defenders at the Red Devil 40-yard line.

The Jonesboro defenders seemed to be spread out to watch for the Tiger passing game. However, Commerce switched to the running game with the damage being done by Curtis Elliott, Smallwood and C.W. Crawford. At the Red Devil 40 yard stripe, Crawford bucked up the middle for eight, Elliott and Tarpley then hit the Jonesboro defensive wall for four and three yards respectively before Crawford bolted for 12 yards around right end to the Jonesboro 13 and a first down.

Smallwood took the next handoff from Crawford and skirted right end for seven yards behind great blocking and interference by the offensive line and backs. Tarpley then blasted for three and a first down at the three yard line.

Crawford failed to get any further than the two on successive attempts into the line, as the Red Devils showed their grit.

However, on the third down play Smallwood scored on a two-yard cut back off right tackle for the first Tiger tally of the evening at the seven minute mark of the first period. On the PAT end Howell Little made a diving catch of a Smallwood pass in the end zone

to put the 'Cats up (7-0).

Following the kickoff, the Red Devils were held to only one yard in three snaps by the Commerce defensive line led by Sidney Waters, Buddy Harber, Charlie Ray Stephenson and Don Burchett. The Jonesboro punter then booted the ball out of bounds at the Tiger 40 yard line. But, to the Tigers dismay the Commerce lads gave it right back to the home team, as a Commerce ball carrier, struggling to gain yardage in the mud, fumbled on the second play thereafter at the Tiger 32 as the first quarter ended.

At this point the hard charging Tiger defensive wall played with a vengeance and smeared Jonesboro's next four plays for virtually no gain and Commerce took over at their 30 yard stripe.

The Tigers themselves could only gain five yards in three bucks into the line and were forced to punt. A Red Devil lineman bolted through to block Tarpley's punt and Jonesboro now had great field position for a possible tying score at the Tiger 25.

However, on a great instinctive play, cornerback Tommie Syfan intercepted a pass out in the flat on the next play and raced down the sideline untouched for a 70-yard touchdown return for the second Tiger score of the night. A pass from Smallwood to Tarpley netted the successful PAT and Commerce had built a (14-0) lead midway through the second stanza.

Shortly thereafter Smallwood was injured and was unable to return to the contest, but the Tiger team rallied and continued to play outstanding football especially on defense.

Then the rains which had come down in torrents before the game on this cold night began again but this time at a slower rate. With the field getting more sloppy, the rest of the half was uneventful for neither team was able to mount an offensive threat on the slippery field.

At the start of the second half, the sky opened up once more as the downpour began again. After receiving a Jonesboro punt following the second half kickoff, Commerce gave it right back to the Red Devils, as one of the Tiger backs dropped the waterlogged pigskin and Jonesboro recovered at the Tiger nine.

Again the Tiger defense, which seemed to reach its season peak in this game, rose to the occasion and stopped the Jonesboro offensive attack by smothering Red Devil running backs for losses on three successive snaps. The Tiger defense was led by Tarpley, Stephenson, Burchett, Harber, "Iron Man" Sidney Waters, Little and Richard "Dickie" Alexander.

On fourth down, defensive back Roy Fruit intercepted a pass by the Jonesboro tailback and raced 35 yards to the Tiger 40 to squelch only the second real scoring threat for the Red Devils on this wet and miserable night for high school football.

Shortly thereafter the third quarter ended with the field having become a quagmire. Neither team could muster much of a scoring threat in the final stanza, and the game ended with a Tiger victory over the Red Devils, as the triumphant Tigers rode home to Commerce with a (14-0) won basically by the tough and determined Tiger defense as well as the opportunistic Commerce offense.

In gaining their fifth victory against two season defeats, Coach Howard Chambers' men in gold and black played one of their better games of the season, and they went on to post a 6-3-0 season record also defeating Elijay, Eastanollee, Jefferson on two occasions (32-0 and 13-0) both of which were also played in the rain. The Tigers also posted a win versus Cornelia while losing only to Toccoa, Washington and Buford.

The 1947 team was the first to play at the new field and stadium built behind the old Commerce High School on Shankle Heights Road where Ridling Field is presently located. This Commerce team of 1947 was also the first to play a game against Jefferson which at this time was nicknamed the Mud Turtles.

Others on the 1947 squad were: Gene Baird, Bradley Caudell, Verne Davis, Otho Dodd, Ray Fruit, Ralph Green, Waymond Ingram, Ebb Kilpatrick, Richard Kirby, Dewoodie Martin, Gerald McClellan, Curtis Stowe, Thomas Sweetser, Warren Toney, Amory Williams and manager Terrell Tanner.

Primarily compiled from *THE COMMERCE NEWS* reports

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