

TIGER FLASHBACK

LINCOLN COUNTY

2000 (1)

Mighty Lincoln County paraded their Red Devils into Commerce in 2000 having won all five games that Commerce and Lincoln County had played dating back to the first one, a (13-6) LC win in Commerce in 1986.

In 2000, this group of demons through three quarters had built a (15-0) advantage, however the determined and never-say-die Tigers played like gangbusters in the final stanza to snatch a (16-15) victory away from defeat with a two minute drive and a last second field goal with no time left on the clock to shock the devils and thrill the exuberant Tiger supporters.

Early in the contest Lincoln County had built a (7-0) lead following the recovery of a Twion Shealer fumble at the LC 35 when two plays later, wide receiver turned quarterback Ricky Stokes took a naked bootleg around left end and outraced the Tiger defense 57 yards to pay dirt with 6:20 to play in the initial period. The PAT kick was good and the Red Devils had jumped out front of the Tigers once more, as they had in the previous five games with Commerce.

The Tiger offense could muster only 66 yards of total offense in the first half, as the dogged Red Devil defense stymied and shut down Monte' Williams, Michael Collins and Company at every turn.

With 1:22 left in the first half, Lincoln County capped a three-play drive for its second and final TD of the evening when Stokes passed to Casey Colvin over the middle for a 39-yard touchdown. Darien Freeman's two-point conversion run increased the Red Devil lead to (15-0) at the half, as the hopes of Tiger fans began to fade.

Lincoln County then took the second half kickoff and methodically marched from the LC 20 to the Commerce seven yard line. Three holding penalties against the Red Devils on the drive, two of which occurred at the Commerce thirteen and six yard stripes eventually forced three passes by LC to fail with the Tigers taking over at the Commerce 17. This drive had consumed 9:09 of the third period in 19 plays.

However, the Commerce defense had risen to the occasion to give the offense one more opportunity to get into gear if it was going to have an opportunity to get back into the game. Get back into the game the Commerce Tigers did, as they scored on each of their final three possessions of the contest.

Williams, on the first play of the fourth quarter, climaxed a 7-play, 83-yard drive with a fabulous 22-yard run around left end on an acrobatic effort, as he weaved in and out of LC defenders and was able to balance himself on the ground with his hand before straightening himself at the 15-yard line and streaking into the end zone for the Tigers' first tally of the night. The option pitch on the two-point conversion was bad and the score remained at (15-6) with 11:52 left in this CLASSIC BOUT between these two Class A football powers.

Five plays following the kickoff, LC punted dead at the Tiger 49 with 9:03 left in the contest. Highlighted by Williams' runs of 12 and 23 yards, the latter a dandy around right end to the LC four set up Collins one-yard run over right tackle to put Commerce a touchdown closer. Casey Gary's PAT was good and with 5:42 remaining the resurgent Tigers had cut the Red Devil lead to (15-13).

Lincoln County then punched out two first downs all on the ground and used up 3:11 on the clock, before the Tiger defensive end Gary stuffed a third and three run for no gain at the Tiger 48 forcing the LC kicker to punt 29 yards out of bounds at the Tiger 19. Commerce now faced 81 yards of real estate to cover with only 2:31 of clock to manage. Tiger faithful were in a fever pitch and nerves were raw.

With Collins and Company facing third and nine at the Commerce 20, the senior signal caller faded to pass then found a seam in the LC defense and scrambled up the middle for 20 yards and a first down at the Commerce 40 as Tiger hopes began to rise.

Two plays later, a face mask penalty on Collins option keeper around left end moved the ball to the Red Devil 39. Williams then pounded left end for eight and blockers led him over right end for nine more to the 22 with only 31 ticks left on the clock.

However, two plays thereafter, Collins was sacked for an eight-yard loss forcing him to go under center and spike the ball to stop the clock with only 9 seconds left setting up Casey Gary's fourth down do-or-die 47-yard field goal. The stadium was now in an uproar and at a fever pitch on both sides. Drama the likes of this had not been seen at Tiger Stadium in many a year.

Rob Brown snapped the ball to Lee Sorrow who placed it on the tee. Gary's toe hit the ball but it fell 15 yards shy and a fearful sigh was heard in the Tiger stands. The rally had fallen just short.

But NO, NO!! Gary had been roughed by a charging defender from the left side of the LC defense. Cheers abounded from the Tiger faithful. Lincoln County was penalized 15 yards for roughing the kicker down to the Red Devil 15 giving Gary one more shot at glory with 2.3 seconds left on the clock.

The snap was true, the placement was perfect, and as toe met leather this time, Gary boomed the 36-yard kick high and long through the uprights with no time left on the

clock giving Commerce the victory in what will go down as the GREATEST TIGER COMEBACK VICTORY in the 61-year history of Commerce football.

Gary's kick into the night capped a furious Commerce fourth quarter rally, as the Tigers had roared back from a (15-0) deficit in the final quarter for the win. A (16-15) victory in glorious fashion had come to Tigertown and left the city's residents talking for weeks to come. It was a CLASSIC!!!

Williams, held to 35 yards in the first half, rallied for 102 in the final half with 82 yards coming in the furious fourth quarter, and he also scored the first Tiger touchdown of the evening. Collins added 54 yards on fourteen carries for the night and one TD.

The Tiger offensive line played a fantastic second half. They were: center--Adam Stephenson, guards--Tommy Eason and Taylor Massey, tackles--Kenny Flint and Chris Wilkie and tight end Rob Brown. They blew the LC defenders off the ball in the fourth quarter, as the larger Red Devils began to tire.

The defense also played in fabulous fashion especially in the second half. Nicholas Cox had nine tackles, Casha Daniels added ten, while Collins and Gary had 17 each in one of their greatest defensive efforts in their four year careers as Tiger starters.

Evan Crawford, Scott White, and Justin David also played well in the interior defensive line. Defensive backs Kyle Moore, Lee Sorrow and Charlie Epps also accounted themselves well. It was indeed a team effort.

In what would later be a state championship year in 2000. Commerce later would defeat LC again in the Georgia Dome and also Buford twice, first for the region title and the final win coming in Commerce enabling the Tigers to wear the Class A state football crown en route to a (13-2) record.

In the 2000 football campaign the Tigers also defeated Franklin County, Morgan County, Walhalla, S.C., Athens Academy, Wesleyan, Jefferson, Warren County, Trion and Johnson County while losing only to Forsyth Central and Washington-Wilkes.

Partially compiled from *ATHENS DAILY NEWS* reports

July 2004, Jeff Prickett