

TIGER FLASHBACK MADISON COUNTY 2002

Madison County brought its Class AAAA Red Raider football team over Highway 98 to Commerce for the 43rd meeting, the Tigers 2nd longest series, between the football neighbors.

Wow!! This was a breathtaking battle that will be long remembered for “The Drive”. Down (28-21) in the fourth quarter, Commerce marched 66 yards in 9 plays and made the successful two-point conversion for a heart-stopping (29-28) victory. At the 2:52 mark of the final stanza at the Tiger 34 yard line, Quarterback Josh Haynes threw a screen pass to tailback Dennis Wilder in the left flat. The junior maneuvered his way down the sideline in front of the Madison Co. bench for 34 yards to the Raider 32 where he was dragged down.

Six plays later, Commerce successfully converted a fourth and inches play when Haynes squirmed his way for a yard at the 10. Wilder burst for eight to the two as the clock ticked down to 0:55, before Haynes darted over right tackle for two yards and the touchdown behind the fine blocking of Casha Daniels, Kenny Flint, Taylor Massey and Adam Cochran to put the Tigers in position to win at the 0:33 mark on the clock.

The stage was now set for the game-winning two-point conversion. Haynes set his charges and ran the option right. He pitched beautifully to Wilder who gathered in the pigskin and easily stepped into the end zone for the score. The Tigers had come flying down the field and had snatched victory away from a looming defeat in one of the great gut-checks in Tiger history, as they managed the clock beautifully to leap into a (29-28) lead.

However, the game was not over for the Raiders knocked out one first down at the Commerce 49 with a 17-yard pass from QB Michael Allen to halfback Richard Stowers with only nine seconds remaining. Allen’s last gasp desperation pass down near the goal line was picked off by cornerback Wilder who sealed the Tiger victory with his effort. Haynes and Wilder and Company shook a lot of hands following this 30th victory over one of their ancient rivals, as the team was mobbed with Tiger faithful.

Wilder collected 183 yards in 20 attempts and one touchdown for the evening, while Raider running back Richard Stowers was a one man wrecking crew against the Tigers especially in the first half (26 atts.-129 yds.), while carrying 40 times for 198 yards and 2 TD’s in the contest. These two young men put on a show that Barnum and Bailey

would be proud of.

Stowers final score to put the Raiders out front (28-21) had come with 2:52 remaining in the game on a 3-yard run. The score came after Red Raider head coach Tom Hybl elected to take a 22-yard field goal by Scott Dills off the scoreboard after Commerce was flagged for roughing the kicker moments before. Hybl's gamble had paid off, but the Red Raider defense was unable to stave off the Tigers' late desperation and game-winning drive.

Commerce took the games' opening kickoff and drove 77 yards in 11 plays to score. The drive was capped off when Haynes scampered in from seven yards out on the option keeper. Tommy Eason's PAT was true at the 6:56 mark of the opening period for a (7-0) lead.

Madison County, primarily using their power running attack, rumbled back down the field into Tiger territory but then used some surprise passing trickery. Allen hit split end Tony Tittle over the middle and behind the Commerce secondary for the TD on a 31-yard beauty. Dills then tacked on the PAT for a (7-7) tie score.

The Red Raiders subsequently vaulted into the lead at the 8:24 mark of the second period when they methodically marched into the lead. Completely by way of the ground game and behind the power running of Stowers, Madison Co. drove for 80 yards and a TD in 14 plays with Stowers bulling over from the five. The successful kick gave MC the lead at (14-7).

Two plays later, the game was tied once more when Wilder went on a 58-yard jaunt to pay dirt as he out ran the Raider secondary down the sideline in front of the Tiger bench with just 53 seconds having elapsed from the previous score. The PAT was kicked true by Eason.

However, here came Stowers and the Red Raider bull dozing crew with another long march to score, as this drive covered 60 yards in 12 plays and again entirely by way of the ground game to the Tiger seven.

At this point Hybl's forces pulled a surprise with 1:14 left in the half when Allen dropped back to throw and hit running back Tony Freeman with a screen pass in the right flat. He scored standing from seven yards out. However, a key play occurred when Dill's kick hit the right upright and bounced away for a (20-14) halftime lead.

The Tiger defense was finally able to stop the Raiders on their first possession of the second half when Tiger linebacker Nick Cox nailed Stowers at the Commerce 23 on fourth and two.

The Commerce I-Bone then set sail on a long drive of its own, as the Tigers went 75 yards in 13 plays all by way of the infantry for not a pass was thrown. Wilder set up the

score with a 23-yard gallop to the five yard line.

Haynes climaxed the march two plays later with a two-yard TD on an option keeper around the right side with 1:58 to go in the third period. Eason tacked on the successful PAT and the Tigers now had a one point lead at (21-20).

Then came these two teams' fourth quarter dramatics, as the lead and the contest teetered back and forth in this heavyweight slugfest. This (29-28) "Rumble in the Jungle" was the greatest game ever played between the two schools in the 42 game history of the series.

Commerce in 2002 also defeated Franklin Co., Banks Co., Morgan Co., Lincoln Co., Athens Christian, Towns Co., Jefferson, Social Circle, Bowdon and Trion and lost only to Athens Academy and Dooly County.

Others on the 2002 team were: Jonathan Beasley, Caleb Jordan, Tristan Daniels, Mitch Redmond, Tyler Ledbetter, Hank Tiller, Justin Beauchamp, Josh Jordan, Kyle Gillespie, David Evans, Jesse Smith, Sam Cutler, Daniel Taylor, James Rucker, Kevin Wiley, Justin Howell, Teo Smith, Scott Burns, Michael Sailors, Saeed Beituni, Brandon Jennings, Casha Daniels, Eric Redmon, Nick Slayton, Justin Cotton, David Bray, Edris Reevey, Wayne Abbs, Dusty Vaughn, Michael Housworth, Evan Crawford, Royale Goodwin, Matthew Dean, Greg Gamble, Matthew Shirley, Ben Wilson, Cody Cook, Justin David, Hunter Roop, John David and Steven Brock.

Partially compiled from *THE COMMERCE NEWS* and *ATHENS BANNER-HERALD* reports

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