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TIGER FLASHBACK LAVONIA 1954

The 1954 fighting Tigers of Commerce having lost the season opener to Hartwell by one point and having won the second contest of the year by defeating Tallulah Falls by two TD's took the Commerce boosters multi-cared motorcade which were decked out with black and gold streamers up Highway 59 to Lavonia for the third game of the season.

The Tigers had previously in 1952 and 1953 lost the last two hard-fought encounters with the Bulldogs by one touchdown in each contest and were out for some revenge against this north Georgia railroad town.

Indeed, the Tigers were successful on this night, as they came from behind to defeat their neighbors from the north by a (20-13) score.

After a scoreless first quarter to open the game, the second period found Lavonia score the first touchdown of the night on a 70-yard run around left end by Bulldog halfback Sam Crisco to put the hosts out front. The PAT kick attempt was blocked by Tiger defensive lineman Billy Dean Thomas leaving Lavonia with a precarious lead of (6-0).

Commerce received the ensuing kickoff and responded with a touchdown of their own when fullback Daniel Ford burst over tackle from three yards out to knot the score at six. On the PAT effort by Commerce, the Tigers used the same play, as Ford went off tackle once more to tack on the successful extra point giving the Tigers a (7-6) lead and one they would never surrender. This also was the halftime score as well.

In the third quarter after receiving the kickoff, Tiger quarterback Jimmy Wheeler faded back in the pocket to pass and found a wide open receiver in the form of end Willard Epps. The young tight end was streaking down the right sideline, and Wheeler hit him in stride with a perfect bomb. Epps gathered in the aerial and streaked into the end zone untouched. The play covered 50 yards. It was indeed a thing of beauty.

The PAT attempt failed, but Commerce had now increased their lead to (13-6).

Commerce then kicked off to Lavonia, whereupon the kick receiver took the pigskin and burst down the field, but he was hit by a host of Tiger tacklers and fumbled with Commerce recovering the bounding pigskin deep in Bulldog territory.

Commerce Running back Leonard Bolton was Johnny-on-the-spot as he recovered this loose football and gave the Tigers great field position for another possible scoring opportunity.

A short time later, Commerce climaxed the short drive by putting another touchdown on the board when Wheeler pitched the ball on a sweep to halfback Charles "Bootsey" White who scampered into the end zone around right end from a short distance out for the TD. This score increased the Tiger lead to two touchdowns, as Commerce now had produced three unanswered tallies.

Ford once more was called upon to blast over right tackle for the PAT. He was successful, and the Tiger lead had now mounted to (20-6).

In the fourth stanza, Bulldog signal caller Bill Whitlow went over for a touchdown on a quarterback sneak from just a few inches away from the goal line to finish out a long TD drive for Lavonia.

For the PAT, Crisco was given the pigskin, and he burst over right tackle for the successful extra point. Lavonia had now cut the Tiger lead in half, and the scoreboard read (20-13) with the Commerce lads out front.

The remainder of the game was uneventful, and Commerce won (20-13) as the young lads from Tigertown had avenged the heartbreaking loses to Lavonia from the two previous seasons.

Wheeler, White and halfback Richard Crocker each were noted to have made several good runs during the contest in the Tiger victory effort.

The line of scrimmage was also especially good on this night, as Armand De La Perriere, John Wells-who later won AJC All-State honors for the season, Willard Epps and center Jere Nunn each performed especially well against the Bulldogs.

Additionally, Daniel Ford, Bootsey White and Billy Dean Thomas were especially noted for their outstanding play on defense.

The 1954 Tigers of Coach Graham Hixon went on to post a season record of (5-3-2). They also defeated during the season four other opponents in Tallulah Falls, North Habersham, Oglethorpe County and Rabun County while playing two very tough tie games versus Jefferson and Winder. Their only losses came against Hartwell in the first

contest of the year. The final two games saw the Tigers fall to South Habersham and Toccoa.

Others on the 1954 squad were: Pete Allen, Kenneth Bridges, Benny Crawford, Jim Crawley, Ernie Erwin, Walter Eubanks, Jimmy Faulkner, Ronald Gardner, Charlie Gary, James Hardman, Cecil Hix, Jimmy Jarrell, Larry Lord, Jimmy McClure, John McEver, Tommy Miller, Von Pardue, Kenneth Smith, Jerry Wade, W.L. Weldon, Darwin Wiley, Benny Wilson, Howard Winn and Willard Wofford.

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