

TIGER FLASHBACK

MONTICELLO

1991

The (6-3) Monticello Purple Hurricanes blew into Tiger Stadium with the intent on storming through the Tigers. The (5-4) Tigers had their backs to the wall in that they were in a must win situation in order to make the playoffs for the eleventh consecutive season. Commerce, with Chuck Thompson at the controls, snatched victory from defeat on a last second pass to defeat Monticello (16-15). Starting Tiger quarterback Jason Pittman was unavailable for the game and was replaced by second stringer Chuck Thompson for this contest.

On their opening drive of the game, Monticello drove 63 yards in 11 plays primarily behind the running of Terrance Davis and Dewayne Standifer to score. The drive was capped off when QB Davis Thomason hit end Shawan Stewart with a pass down the right sideline for the first TD of the night at the 2:37 mark of the initial period.

Radregas Jacobs PAT kick was successful giving the Hurricanes an early 7-0 lead.

After punching out two first downs, the next Tiger drive stalled. Adam Wilson's punt pinned Monticello back in their own territory at the 31.

Knocking out five first downs with their deliberate wishbone attack, the Purple Hurricanes drove to the Tiger 14 where a fourth down pass fell incomplete with the Tigers taking possession at the 5:29 mark of the second period.

Commerce then cranked up its passing attack to drive 86 yards for the TD with 79 yards coming on three complete aerals.

The first completion was from Thompson to split end Kevin Neely of 17 yards on a slant over the middle to the Commerce 43. Two plays later, Thompson hit tight end Adam Wilson on a short down and out pattern in front of the Monticello bench. After two defenders failed to bump Wilson out of bounds, the nifty receiver bolted down the sideline before being knocked out of bounds by Shawan Stewart at the visitors' 8 yard line and giving the Tigers an excellent scoring opportunity.

Vernard Gillespie skirted right end to the two, but Commerce was assessed 10 yards for holding back to the 12. Thompson then dropped to pass. He first looked to the left for his swing back whom he found covered, then showing poise and patience looked back over the middle and hit Wilson with a perfect strike at the two where the tight end dove

into the end zone for the Tigers' first score of the evening with only 55 seconds remaining before intermission.

On the PAT attempt, Thompson pitched on the option to Gillespie who scampered around right end untouched for the successful conversion giving the Tigers an 8-7 lead.

Midway through the third period, an errant Thompson pass was intercepted by Dewayne Standifer at the Commerce 36 setting up Monticello's second score.

Following a clipping penalty against the Hurricanes, QB Ben Thomason rifled a pass to Stewart who made a dazzling catch as he fell to the ground at the Tiger 26. Another penalty later drove Monticello back to the 33 before Ben Thomason hit Kenny Ross with a pass over the middle who then got to the eight before being pushed out of bounds by a Tiger defender.

Three plays later Terrance Davis swept right end and into pay dirt for the score at 3:21 of the third period.

Thomason found Ross all alone in the end zone for the successful PAT pass to give the Hurricanes a 15-8 lead.

Three series later, Monticello drove at the Tiger 24 before being stopped on fourth-and-six when a mass of Commerce defenders stopped Ben Thomason for a one-yard gain on an option keeper around right end.

Commerce immediately moved quickly into Monticello territory behind a 19-yard run by Gillespie on the option around right end and a 12-yard burst up the middle by West. But the drive came to a halt when Eric Barger intercepted a twice tipped pass. Barger streaked down the field with his prize for an apparent TD, but the play had been blown dead, and the Hurricanes were given possession at their 10 yard line with 3:51 remaining in the contest.

Pushed back to their 8 because of penalties, the Hurricane coaching staff decided to take a safety. In punt formation, Barger received the snap and ran out of the back of the end zone for a safety with only 0:56 left in the game cutting the Tiger deficit to 15-10.

"Under the circumstances I'd probably have done the same thing," commented Coach Steve Savage. "They were pinned deep and their starting punter was hurt. I thought it was a good call."

It surely was a good call for the Tigers as Corey Wood returned the ensuing kickoff to the Monticello 49 yard line from which the Tigers began their "miracle drive" which ended in victory and calmed the invading storm.

On first and 10, Thompson threw out of bounds to stop the clock.

On second and 10, the Tigers used the "flea-flicker." Thompson took the snap from center Andre Pattman, pitched to Gillespie who in turn handed the ball back to flanker Corey Wood on the reverse.

Wood then pitched back to Thompson who threw 24-yards downfield to Kevin Neely at the Hurricane 25.

With 36 seconds left, Thompson once again stopped the clock by throwing out of bounds, then completed an eleven-yard toss to Adam Wilson near the right sideline to the Monticello 14.

Thompson was then sacked for a one yard loss on the next play, but the Tigers quickly lined up and Thompson once more threw out of bounds to kill the clock with only 0:06 left to play.

The Tigers had time for one play. The opportunity to win the game and go to the playoffs rested on ONE PLAY.

"MIRACLE." Thompson dropped back into the pocket and dodged a player as protection broke down. As he veered to his left, he spotted a wide open Gillespie. Thompson running to his left lofted a pass into the end zone where Gillespie jumped to catch the ball, as he was hit by another receiver as well as a defender but held on as he hit the ground for a 15-yard TD pass with 0:00 on the scoreboard clock.

It was an unbelievable climax to the game. A "MIRACLE FINISH" was the thought.

"I got a little pressure, but I just threw the ball and he (Gillespie) went up and got it. Somebody hit me in the back, and all I knew was we had won," stated Thompson.

"It was a miracle!" shouted CHS head coach Steve Savage afterward. "A dog gone miracle!"

"It was a total team effort," commented Savage. "They all rallied around Thompson who showed a lot of poise with his performance. I'm real proud of him and the job he did."

This is surely one that will be remembered and talked about for years to come by Tiger faithful.

The Tigers ended the game with 253 total yards and 15 first downs to Monticello's 237 total yards and 14 first downs.

Thompson finished the game with 139 passing yards on 16 attempts and 7 completions with 2 interceptions. Adam Wilson caught three passes for 72 yards and one TD.

Commerce went on to finish the season with a 6-5-0 mark, as they also defeated Oconee County, Dawson County, Jefferson, Dacula and Banks County while losing to Madison County, Oglethorpe County, Social Circle, Athens Academy and a playoff game to Oglethorpe County in a second encounter between the two teams.

Partially compiled from *THE COMMERCE NEWS* reports

July 1992, Jeff Prickett