

TIGER FLASHBACK NORTH HABERSHAM 1955

The North Habersham Bobcats strolled out of the north Georgia hills with anticipation of avenging the exciting game in the 1954 season that they lost to the Tigers in a thriller of a contest by a (26-25) score.

However, the (1-3-0) Commerce Tigers who were off to a slow start hosted the visitors and played their best game to date in the 1955 campaign, as they clawed the mountain felines to death in a (19-0) shellacking.

North Habersham won the toss and elected to receive. Tiger halfback Doug Baird kicked off down to the Bobcat 20 yard stripe where halfback B. Thrasher returned it out to the 30 before being tackled by a host of Tigers. The gang-tackling by the hard-hitting Tigers forced Thrasher to fumble, and the loose pigskin was recovered by Tiger lineman John Wells who later in year was awarded All-State honors by the *ATLANTA JOURNAL-CONSTITUTION* as an outstanding offensive and defensive lineman.

Calling upon fullback Leonard Bolton and halfbacks Gene Brake and Richard Crocker, quarterback Jimmy Wheeler moved the ball to a first down at the NH 10 yard line. Behind fine blocking by the Tiger offensive line, Crocker burst off left tackle before being knocked down at the three. There the Bobcats were penalized for off sides giving the Tigers second and goal to go just outside the one yard line.

Beautiful faking by Crocker on a dive play over the left offensive side of the Tiger line enabled Wheeler to scamper around left end and into the end zone untouched for the first Tiger tally of the night. Brake's attempt to kick the PAT was blocked but Commerce led (6-0) early in the first period.

The Commerce defensive line led by Charley Gary, Armand De la Perriere and John Wells held the Bobcats to only five yards in three snaps following the kickoff and thereby forced N. Habersham to punt. Behind beautiful blocking, Crocker took the punt on his own five and returned it to the Commerce 35 before being brought down.

On the first play from scrimmage, Brake skirted right end behind exceptional blocking by the Commerce offensive linemen and backs. The Tiger speedster turned on the afterburners and blew away the North Habersham secondary's pursuit, as he raced down the sideline for a 65-yard touchdown scamper. The PAT kick by Brake was successful and the Tiger lead had now mounted to (13-0) early in the second period.

John McEver, substituting for the injured Crocker put a fierce tackle on S. Hames, the North Habersham kickoff returner, at the Bobcat 30 yard stripe, as the NH team attempted to get its offense into gear. However, after two runs from scrimmage netted only one yard, the Bobcats quick-kicked 49 yards to the Commerce 20 in a surprise maneuver that caught the Tiger defense off guard.

Commerce dominated play on this wet night for the remainder of the half with three drives for touchdowns being halted by Tiger mistakes in North Habersham territory resulting in two fumbles and one rather long touchdown being called back because of a penalty.

De la Perriere, Bolton, Gary and Willard Epps as well as the entire unit of Tiger linemen performed excellently on defense holding the Bobcats to minus three yards on offense for the first half.

The Bobcats kicked off to Commerce to begin the second half. On the fourth play thereafter, the Tiger offense superbly blocked the North Habersham defenders, as Richard Crocker blasted through the left side of the visitor's defense and exploded down the middle of the field for 65 yards and the third Tiger touchdown.

The PAT kick by Brake was again blocked but the Commerce lead had now mounted to (19-0) early in the third stanza, and this margin was one they would not come close to surrendering for the remainder of the game.

The Commerce defense again dominated the second half limiting the Bobcat ground-gainers to only 33 yards for the game, while Commerce amassed 300 rushing yards on this miserable field. The hard rain caused many fumbles crippling North Habersham's offense but also thwarted sustained drives by the Tigers clad in gold and black. Commerce twice lost fumbles, both at crucial moments, while the Bobcats coughed up the wet pigskin three times to the Tigers.

Epps, Gary, De la Perriere, Wells, Pete Allen and Bolton were solid rocks on defense, as they time and again allowed the Bobcats little opportunity to get their offense started. Crocker and Brake furnished the big plays necessary to knock out North Habersham early in the game before the heavy rains came, while Bolton and Willard Wofford drove for those valuable short yards necessary for crucial first downs.

The 1955 Tigers had a disappointing year as a whole finishing with a mediocre (5-5-0) season after having great aspirations of challenging for the sub-region title before the season began.

The Tigers also defeated four other opponents: Tallulah Falls and Rabun County handily while winning close decisions over Oglethorpe County and Winder. On the other hand Commerce lost by one touchdown to Lavonia, South Habersham and Toccoa. The Tigers also were defeated at the hands of Hartwell by a wide margin and blew a two

touchdown lead just before the half to Jefferson and eventually lost for the first time ever to the Dragons in the cross-county series by a two touchdown margin.

Others that played on the 1955 team were: Lee Adams, Travis Benton, Bill Byrd, Otis Castellaw, Bill Davis-now Tiger football announcer, Ernie Ervin, Jerry Farmer, Jimmy Faulkner, Ronald Gardner, Donald Gary, Raymond Haggard, James Hardman, Darrell Hendrix, Cecil Hix, Jimmy Jarrell, Larry Lord, Jimmy McClure, Tommy McClure, John McEver, Von Pardue, Tim Pittman, David Reynolds, Joe Sims, Kenneth Smith, Paul Spencer, Roger Stancil, Gene Standridge, Terry Swindle, Billy Dean Thomas, Joe Thomas, Jerry Westmoreland, Darwin Wiley and Allen Wilson.

Primarily compiled from *THE COMMERCE NEWS* reports

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