

# TIGER FLASHBACK

## BRIARWOOD

### 1973

The undefeated (11-0-0) Commerce Tigers of Coach Ray Lamb hosted the Briarwood Buccaneers from metro Atlanta in the quarterfinal game of the state Class A playoffs in 1973 at Tiger Stadium before an overflow crowd, and the fans that packed the stadium saw a dandy with Commerce coming out on top by a (21-7) score.

Being behind 7-0 at halftime against Briarwood was a unique experience for the Tigers, as it was something that had not happened to them all year, as the Commerce offense had not yet found the answer to the Briarwood defense.

Midway through the first quarter, Briarwood drove 63 yards in 12 plays to the Tiger 17 before running back Steve Bourn fumbled. Four plays later Runt Moon's punt was returned 52 yards down the left sideline in front of the Buccaneer bench by Lance Bowen to the Tiger 25.

Seven plays later Bowen bucked in from two yards out for the game's initial score. The PAT kick was successful, and the Buccaneers had bolted out front by a 7-0 score with 9:37 left in the half.

That was all Briarwood could get in the first half. Commerce, meanwhile, was having difficulties of their own getting started. However, later in the half the Tigers had driven to the Briarwood 19, but that was as far as they could move before a clipping penalty moved the ball back to the 34.

Shortly thereafter, a third down pass from quarterback Abe Brown intended for Tiger split end Allen Lacey was intercepted at the six to snuff out the Tigers' main first half scoring opportunity.

Other miscues in the form of fumbles also plagued the wishbone machine, as the Tigers left for intermission with 110 total yards while Briarwood had garnered a meager 128.

For the first time in 10 regular season games and two additional playoff games, Commerce trailed at halftime by a 7-0 score.

However, after Lamb's halftime sermon, Commerce then came out of intermission and took complete control of the game in the second half, as they pirated the game from the Briarwood preps and handed the visitors a (21-7) beating forcing the Buccaneers to take their sinking ship back down I-85 to the Atlanta suburbs.

What did Coach Ray Lamb tell his troops at intermission? Not what you might expect.

"I told them that I thought we had the upper hand," he said amid the rejoicing in the Commerce dressing room. "Mainly, I just told them to keep sticking it at them. We also started trapping their ends."

"We fumbled the ball a couple of times in the first half, but I felt like we could move the ball against them. Our crowd was hitting them pretty good, and I thought we had the momentum even though we were down 7-0," stated Lamb.

Briarwood had thrown a 26-minute scare into the hearts of the Tigertown faithful before the Commerce Tigers fine tuned their wishbone engine to gain the victory in the North Georgia Class A semifinals.

The Tigers roared back in the second half, as the fabulous felines scored twice in the third period and once in the final stanza to get the win.

On the first play of the second half, Moon clobbered Buccaneer running back Jon Wolleat with a jarring tackle and the loose pigskin was recovered by Tiger middle guard Stanley Martin at the Briarwood 29. The fumble seemed to turn things in the Tigers favor, as four plays later Moon skirted right end behind superb blocking to score from the seven at the 9:38 mark of the third period. Randy Harris toed the PAT and the mighty Tigers had knotted the score at 7-7.

Three plays following the kickoff, Lance Bowen quick kicked 57 yards dead at the Commerce 23. From here the Tigers behind wishbone signal-caller Abe Brown, mounted the go ahead tally with a 12-play, 77-yard drive all by way of the ground attack.

Brown, Moon and Raymond Harris behind the great offensive line blocking of center-Kenny Hancock, guards-Rickey Smith and Joe Jones, tackles-Billy Pittman and Ronnie Savage and tight end-Don Watkins hammered the Buccaneer defensive front with Moon covering the final 22 yards on an outstanding run, as the fleet back broke numerous tackles and drove Buccaneer tacklers over the goal line and into the end zone on a phenomenal and powerful effort.

Randy Harris' PAT kick was again true, and the Tigers had taken the lead for good at 14-7 with 2:36 remaining in the third period.

With the fabulous Tiger defense forcing another three-and-out fourth down Buccaneer

punt to the Tiger 15, Ray Lamb's charges had the killer instinct and again had the wishbone machine in gear mounting the third successive Commerce scoring drive of the second half this time covering 85 yards in ten plays with left halfback Raymond Harris going in from 11 yards out around left end to cap the evenings scoring.

Raymond's twin brother Randy nailed another extra point at the 8:19 point of the fourth period to make the eventual final score read Tigers-21, Buccaneers-7.

Moon finished the night with 31 carries for 188 yards and two touchdowns, while running mate Raymond Harris had 19 carries for 83 yards and one touchdown.

Commerce punched out 313 total yards, 277 on the ground, while Briarwood managed 211 but only 83 in the final half.

Moon on the 1973 season had 33 TD's and scored 202 points, while Raymond Harris added 23 touchdowns for the dynamic duo.

Moon and guard Joe Jones were voted to the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* All-State team in 1973 for their performances for the black and gold clad Tigers.

The Tigers later defeated Carrollton 35-25 in the North Georgia title game only to lose to State Champion Mt. de Sales in the state final game en route to a (13-1-0) record for the 1973 season.

Others on the 1973 team were: Randy Butler, Jerry Farmer, Bob Griffeth, Jack Griffeth, Terry Hanley, Carl Hiland, David Kesler, Ricky Kitchens, Randall Miller, David Sanders, Hoy Lee Smith, Jim Sullivan, Ronnie "Snake" Vinson, Troy Walker and Jim Wood.

Partially compiled from *THE ATHENS DAILY NEWS* reports

July 2004, Jeff Prickett