

TIGER FLASHBACK

CARTERSVILLE

1972

In the first playoff game of the 1972 season and the first since the 1966 campaign, the Commerce Tigers met a new opponent from west Georgia, the Cartersville Purple Hurricanes, in the first game of what would become a new and toughly contested rivalry. The two teams would eventually square off eight times over the next ten years with six of the games being for the Region 8A or Region 8AA title.

On this night in Tigertown, the gold and black lads of Commerce would give Coach Ray Lamb his first region championship since becoming head master at the Tiger helm in 1967 with a stunning (26-7) victory over the purple and gold visitors.

After receiving the opening kickoff, Commerce took control of the game early with a dominating 9-play, 86-yard drive highlighted by right halfback Raymond Harris' 52-yard jaunt around left end with an option pitch from quarterback Ed Nelson out of the wishbone formation. The touchdown would vault the Tigers into a lead in this game that they would never surrender. Nelson's PAT kick was unsuccessful, but the Tigers led (6-0) early in the first period.

Following the ensuing kickoff, Hurricane tailback Hank Hatfield fumbled at the Cartersville 41 after having picked up sixteen yards on an end sweep and the Tigers recovered setting up their second tally of the night.

The Tigers' left halfback, Ronald "Runt" Moon, then bolted on a dive play through the middle of the Cartersville defense and had already streaked by the Cartersville safety man so quickly that the young defender saw nothing but the tail of the comet that had shot by him. The standout Tiger running back burst to pay dirt from 41 yards out putting the Tigers out front (12-0) midway through the first period. Nelson's two point conversion pass proved unsuccessful.

Three Cartersville possessions later after the defenses settled down to force four consecutive punts, the Purple Hurricanes drove from the Tiger 45 to the Commerce seven in six plays, before Hank Hatfield again lost the handle on the pigskin with the Commerce defense gaining possession with a recovery of the loose ball in the end zone.

From the twenty, Coach Lamb's forces marched the distance to glory land in nine snaps. The highlight of the drive was a Nelson aerial strike to split end Tommy Stephenson for

a 28-yard gain to the 26 yard line of the little zephyrs. Five plays later, Moon again rang the pay station with a three-yard plunge over right tackle with just a few seconds left in the half.

Harris' dive over right tackle for the two point conversion was unsuccessful. However, the Tigers entered the halftime dressing room with an (18-0) advantage, with both the Tiger offense and defense dominating the contest.

On Cartersville's first possession of the second half, the Hurricanes mounted their only touchdown drive of the game, as they methodically marched, primarily on the ground, 68 yards in 12 plays culminated by Hank Hatfield's one yard plunge for the score with four minutes left in the third stanza. The PAT kick was good, but Commerce still held a rather commanding lead at (18-7).

Lamb's Tigers then responded by thrusting a dagger in the heart of their foe with a ground attack of their own and bolted back down the field in eleven plays, as Moon led the 60 yard march with eight carries for 49 yards to set up Raymond Harris' five yard run touchdown run around left end. Lamb then sent Harris around left end on the identical play as the TD run for the successful two-point conversion to give the Tigers a commanding (26-7) advantage only two plays into the fourth period.

Great plaudits must go out to the Tiger offensive line which dominated the game in the trenches. They were: ends--Keith Bruce and Tommy Stephenson, tackles--Billy Pittman and Steve Savage, present head mentor of the Tigers now in this his 17th season, guards--Greg Wallace and Joe Jones along with center--Mike Overton. They all blocked and played superbly on offense.

The Hurricanes then hurriedly went to their passing game which got them to the Tiger 36 where a fourth and six pass play fell incomplete to end the desperation march.

Six plays later, Nelson on a sneak into the line squirmed away from Hurricane defenders, but a hand reached in and caused him to fumble 16 yards down field at the Cartersville 16 where the visitors recovered midway through the final period.

Cartersville's last ditch effort to put more points on the board was again denied by the Tiger defense when Harris leaped in front of a Cartersville bullet pass and intercepted the pigskin at the Tiger 48 yard line to seal the victory with two minutes remaining in the game. And a solid victory it was at (26-7), as the Tigers gained their first region crown since the 1965 team defeated Clarkston.

The 1972 Tigers went on to post a (12-1-0) record also defeating eleven other foes in a row: Banks County, Oconee County, Madison County, White County, Lumpkin County, Rabun County, North Hall, Pickens County, Jefferson, East Hall and Lithonia before losing to eventual state champion Carrollton in the north Georgia championship game.

Others on the 1972 squad were: Don Watkins, Tracy Minish, Ricky Smith, Guy Baker, Carl Hiland, Hoy Lee Smith, Randy Harris, Randall Miller, Kenny Hancock, Abe Brown, David Kesler, David Adams, Ricky Snipes and Keith Perry.

July 2005, Jeff Prickett