

TIGER FLASHBACK

CARTERSVILLE

1978

The (11-0-1) Tigers of Coach Ray Lamb rolled into west Georgia with anticipation of continuing their championship march by calming the Purple Hurricanes of Cartersville.

The Tiger defense and a pressure packed fourth quarter touchdown drive led Commerce to a (7-3) win over the Purple Hurricanes, their fifth consecutive win over their hosts all coming in region playoff action.

The win gave the Tigers their third consecutive region title and it was the Hurricanes who were the victim for the third consecutive season.

As in the two previous encounters, the Cartersville team led until the final quarter, but as in the past the little zephyrs were not able to hold off the onslaught of the patented fourth quarter Tiger rally.

The day's rain had ended shortly before the game began, but it left a rather muddy and slippery field on which the two titans had to tangle on this mild November night.

To say the game was a defensive battle would be an understatement. The Tigers had averaged over 27 points per game and almost 300 yards total offense. Cartersville had two 1000 yard rushers in Harvey Hatfield and Robert Lavette, the latter who was later of Georgia Tech fame.

However, the final totals revealed only 274 yards total offense and 10 points scored by both teams combined for their evenings work.

Field position and mistakes played a big part in the game. In the first half, Commerce had six offensive possessions and their best start was at the Tiger 20 yard line. On two occasions the Tigers began series inside the 10 and from one of these came the only Hurricane scoring threat of the night.

With Commerce continually in terrible field position and Cartersville repeatedly starting near midfield or better, both defenses rose to the occasion and both offenses were basically stymied causing seven consecutive punts and two Commerce lost fumbles in the first half.

The fumble came with 4:16 to go before halftime. The Tigers were backed up on their own seven yard line following a punt. The first play saw fullback Ricky Hill lose the wet pigskin giving Cartersville first and goal to go just inside the Tiger 10.

Three cracks into the line by Hatfield and Lavette only netted seven yards to the Commerce three, from where on fourth down Harvey Hatfield booted a 20-yard field goal with 2:01 left in the half giving the Purple Hurricanes a slim (3-0) advantage that they carried into the halftime dressing rooms.

The Tiger defense consisting of Charles Whitlock, Terry Elrod, Terry Canup, Chris Jones, Terry Nunn, Ricky Hill, Mike Mize, Carl Pittman, Maurice Martin, Lamar Hiland and Fred Martin repeatedly stifled and hammered the Cartersville offense.

Cartersville had its best offensive drive of the evening to begin the third quarter primarily through the airways. QB Chuck Ross hit on two key third down passes of 10 yards each to move the ball to the Tiger 39. However, he went to the well once too often when linebacker Terry Elrod picked off the next pass to give Commerce the ball at the Tiger 32.

Two series later in the third period, the Commerce offense began to show life with a good drive from their 48 to the Hurricane 24. Big runs by QB Brad Brown and Richard Beasley provided the yardage for the Tiger march, but on second and ten on the Cartersville 24 the ball squirted out again after Brown lost snap and loose ball rolled back to the 29.

Commerce was able to recover, but against the best defense they had faced all year, the Tigers were unable to overcome the error and Cartersville took over on downs early in the final stanza at the Cartersville 26 yard line.

However, this was where the cream rose to the top and the Tigers began to show their class. There was 11:34 left in the game at this point, and three running plays later by Hatfield and Lavette netted only three yards.

With 9:50 left in the game, Cartersville punted the ball back to the Tigers who took over at the Hurricane 49.

This was the drive of the year as far as the Tigers were concerned. Beasley got 4 and Hill shot into the middle of the Cartersville defense for 4 more on two carries. With a fourth and two from the Cartersville 41, Hill burst over right guard for five but a defender slapped his arm and the wet ball shot out in front of him. End Maurice Martin was Johnny-on-the-spot however, as he pounced on the loose pigskin to give the Tigers a first down on the host teams 32.

Hill, now the workhorse, had two more bursts of five and a first down at the 21 and the relentless wishbone machine was on a rampage. Cartersville stiffened here and limited Brown and Hill to four yards in two carries. With Commerce facing a third and six at the seventeen, Brown faded back to pass and threw what appeared to be a perfect strike to tight end Fred Martin on the Cartersville five yard line.

However, a Cartersville defender decided to grab Fred before Fred grabbed the ball. This resulted in a penalty and gave the Tigers a first down on the 8.

Two plays later, Commerce was faced with a third and goal situation from the 4 and a difficult task against the tough Cartersville defense. Then QB Brad Brown ran the option (what else is new) around right end, and as he maneuvered outside the end, he turned up field and dived into the end zone with a tackler clinging to him for the only touchdown of the game.

Richard Dills toed the successful PAT, and Commerce had wrestled a (7-3) lead away from Cartersville and one that they would not relinquish, as the scoreboard showed only 3:47 remaining in the game.

Cartersville made a last ditch effort to strike back, but the Tiger defense was just too tough. The Purple Hurricanes lived by the run all year, but they died by the pass when safetyman Richard Beasley intercepted Harvey Hatfield's halfback toss at the Tiger 33 with just 59 seconds left in the monumental struggle.

As the clock ticked down to 0:00, Tiger players and fans roared for they had snatched victory away from a looming loss in order to defeat Cartersville for the fifth consecutive time, although all, and especially this one, had been nerve-tingling and heart-wrenching warfare at its best.

Defensively Commerce was at its best. Lavette and Hatfield who had gained over 2600 yards in their previous 11 games were on this night limited to a mere 82 yards in 30 carries against the vaunted Tiger defense.

Ricky Hill led all rushers with 70 yards in 18 totes. Hill was also credited with 19 tackles on defense and Charles Whitlock added 12. Elrod and Beasley also came up with big interceptions to snuff out possible drives by the Hurricanes.

In 1978 the Tigers also defeated Habersham Central, Hart County, Madison County, White County, East Hall, Oconee County, North Gwinnett, Duluth, Loganville, Gilmer County and North Springs. The Tigers were tied by Jefferson and later lost the North Georgia Championship game to eventual state champion East Rome by one point.

Others on the 1978 Tiger team were: Dennis Strickland, Robin Jordan, Ricky Wood, Michael Fischer, Bob Finch, Phil Pittman, Keith Lord, Kevin Burchett, Danny Cook, Clay Hendrix, Paul Gholston, David Flint, Adam Stephenson, Bret Evans, Buddy Beauchamp, Todd Parham, Bobby Lamb, Taylor Rucker, Clark Williams, Dean Allen, Dean Shirley, Paul Guest, Tracy Milford, Terry Cook and Sonny Crawford.

Partially compiled from *THE COMMERCE NEWS* reports

July 1998, Jeff Prickett