

TIGER FLASHBACK CENTRAL GWINNETT 1969

The (4-5-0) Commerce Tigers, licking their wounds from two defeats at the hands of Monroe Area and South Gwinnett in the eighth and ninth games of the 1968 campaign, ventured southward to Lawrenceville to take on the Black Knights of Central Gwinnett in the final contest of the season for both teams.

The clock on the bank in the city read 17 degrees at 7:00 PM as spectators began to arrive for the game. The weather became even more bitter to withstand because of the strong northwesterly wind that blew fiercely during the contest. It had a terrific howl on this night.

But, the Tigers fought the elements and the black and gold clad Gwinnett young men of Medieval lore and ended the Commerce football season with a 5-5-0 record after coming away with a (21-7) victory in this frigid weather.

This was Coach Ray Lamb's first non-losing season after three years at the helm of the Tigers and was the preface of a great decade in the 1970's when Commerce posted a ten year record of (98-16-6).

The Tigers spotted the Knights with their only TD of the evening when on the second offensive play for the host team, CG quarterback Johnny Lovin kept the ball around left end on a sparkling 69 romp untouched and into the end zone.

Mike Martin kicked the PAT for the Knights for a 7-0 lead for Central Gwinnett. It seemed as if it would be another difficult night for the 'Cats.

However, the Tigers were not to be denied this night, as they stormed right back down the field on a touchdown drive of their own.

After swapping fumbles, the Tigers zeroed in on the end zone to knot the count. On third down and one at the CG 41, quarterback John Fleming fooled everyone as he dropped back to pass and lofted a perfect strike down the right sideline to end Keith Ariail who gathered in the spiral and sprinted to pay dirt.

Stanley Seagraves booted the point after and the game was tied (7-7) as the initial stanza came to an end.

On their next possession in the second period, Commerce jumped out front for good when tailback Dusty Brown raced 55 yards over left guard to ring up the pay station behind good offensive line blocking.

The PAT by Seagraves was unsuccessful, but the Tigers had taken a (13-7) advantage midway of the second stanza.

Central Gwinnett, however, was not through, as they relentlessly marched back down the field to the Tiger 4 yard line.

However, Tiger senior defensive halfback Mike Carlan picked off an errant Lovin pass in the end zone putting an end to the Black Knight scoring threat. Central Gwinnett would not get this close to scoring again on this Arctic night.

The Tigers came methodically driving back down the field with a scoring threat of their own. Behind the running of backs Brown, Fleming, Riley Harris and Keith Massey, Commerce moved from its 20 yard line to the Central Gwinnett 31, but the clock ran out to end the half before the 'Cats could put more points on the board.

The second half belonged to the Tigers as well, as they marched at will to put the game out of reach in the third quarter for the game's final tally.

This time the honor belonged to sophomore wingback Ed Nelson who bucked over from six yards out. The two point conversion was tacked on by Dusty Brown, as he scampered around right end to make the score (21-7).

The remainder of the game was a battle of field position through the use of the punting game with neither team mounting a successful drive into enemy territory.

As the game came to a close, Tiger players, coaches and faithful fans were jubilant of the victory but severely smitten by the weather and longing for the warmth of home, as they trekked back to Commerce a winner.

In 1969 Commerce also defeated South Habersham, Stone Mountain, Rockdale County and Madison County but lost to Norcross, Milton, Jefferson, Monroe Area and South Gwinnett.

Others on the 1969 Tiger squad were: Doug Bolton, George Wood, Ricky Vickery, Alfred Smith, Dennis Kesler, John Mize, Tony Barnett, Richard Hanley, Danny Cotrell, Steve Perry, Gene Jacobs, Tater Slater, Ricky Chandler, Ray Wood, Joe Booth and Johnny Kesler.

Primarily compiled from *THE COMMERCE NEWS* reports.

July 1993, Jeff Prickett

