

TIGER FLASHBACK

DACULA

1990

The Commerce Tigers ventured into Gwinnett County anticipating a big rumble with the Falcons of Dacula whom the Tigers had played twice a year for the previous two seasons, only to lose both regular season games and also twice in the region playoffs.

However, on this night the 'Cats had other plans like that of plucking their fine-feathered friends in front of their home folks.

The high-gear "Savage Attack" wishbone offense rolled up 385 yards total offense all on the ground, while giving up 313 to the 'Birds.

Commerce converted 9 of 13 third down conversions and was 3 of 3 on fourth down.

Perhaps the most telling statistic was Time of Possession: Commerce had the pigskin for 29:38 to Dacula's 19:22. It's hard to score if you haven't got the ball.

Against Dacula, QB Jason Pittman and halfbacks Wayland Rucker and Jason West accounted for 359 of the Tigers 385 yards and all of the Tigers' points. Pittman rushed eight times for 86 yards, 2 TD's, and three 2-point conversions. West carried 19 times for 89 yards and a seven yard scoring jaunt. It was Rucker, however, who was the main cog in the wishbone machine, gaining 184 yards and a TD in 21 totes.

"It was one of those games where if it was third-and-three, we'd get three yards and two inches," said Savage. "Everything fell exactly right. Our line and our backs really played well."

Following the KO, the Tigers took possession at their 29. Immediately Rucker burst over left tackle behind the blocks of linemen Chris Vickery, Andy Barnett, Kelly Slater, Philip Cox, Michael Brown, Chris Goodman and Eric Dorsey along with blocks by backs Lamar Bowles and West. Halfback Rucker went 47 yards before he was brought down by Falcon defenders at the Dacula 24.

With an eventual first down at the 11, Pittman exploded into the end zone untouched on an option keeper around right end at the 9:37 mark. Pittman ran the same play successfully for the two-point conversion and the Tigers held an early (8-0) lead.

The Tiger defense stymied the Falcons first offensive thrust and forced a punt with Commerce taking possession of the pigskin at the Commerce 41 yard line.

The Tiger offensive machine then rambled down into Falcon territory converting three third down plays and one on fourth down to put the ball on the Dacula one yard line with first and goal. On the next play, as Pittman pitched to Rucker around left end, the ball was not handled and the Tigers had squandered a golden opportunity to pad their lead, as Dacula took over deep in Falcon territory.

Falcon, quarterback Terry Harvey, who later was a signal caller for the NC State University football team, and Company instantly drove to the Tiger 20 in nine plays but gave up possession of the pigskin when Harvey's fourth and four keeper on the option was smothered for no gain by a host of Black and Gold clad Tigers.

With 4:19 left in the half, Commerce mounted a six-play, 80-yard drive with Rucker bursting over left tackle and bolting down the left sideline in front of the Tiger faithful for 49 beautiful yards and a TD at the 1:02 mark. Pittman tacked on the two-point conversion on another option keeper around right end to build the Commerce halftime lead to (16-0).

Dacula, being a well-coached Class A power for the past few years, came out hot to start the second half. QB Harvey marched the Falcons 77 yards in nine plays, with fullback Chris Strickland converting the last three yards up the middle for the score at 6:47 of the third period. Harvey passed to Wesley Wood for the 2-point PAT and the Tiger lead now was only (16-8).

The Savage Tigers led by QB Pittman continued their first half offensive brilliance, as they answered the Falcon tally with a march of 82 yards in 13 plays all on the ground converting on all three third down opportunities.

The zenith of the drive was a 28-yard burst around left end by Rucker with HB Jason West eventually tacking on six more points on a buck over right tackle from 7 yards out. Pittman again ran the same conversion option keeper play successfully, and the Tiger lead had reached 16 points once more with a (24-8) score late in the third quarter.

Dacula rebounded and mounted another drive into Commerce territory, but Falcon running back Strickland lost the handle when hit hard by a Tiger defender with Commerce claiming possession at the Tiger 19.

Pittman then led the Tigers on their third consecutive scoring thrust of the evening into Falcon Country. On third and seven from the Commerce 22, West collected 8 tough yards on the halfback counter play which set up Pittman's 61-yard scamper around right end on the option keeper.

Just past the line of scrimmage, the Tiger signal caller cut back across the grain to his left after a few yards down field and dashed down the left sideline in front of the Dacula

bench for yet another Tiger tally. The Tiger crowd and sideline were ecstatic. Jubilation filled every bone of the Tiger faithful. The Falcons finally stopped Pittman's option keeper run to the right on the PAT attempt, but the scoreboard now read Commerce-30, Dacula-8 with but 6:47 remaining in the contest.

Not to be denied, Harvey led his team back down the field 69 yards in 9 plays to score. Harvey scored himself on a Fran Tarkenton like scramble up the middle and into the end zone. The score remained at (30-14) with 4:11 to play when Harvey's PAT pass was dropped in the EZ by a wide open receiver.

Commerce kept possession for the remaining time in the quarter and was driving at the Dacula 32 when the game came to a close.

"They just whipped us," said Dacula Coach Mike Strickland. "They took us out behind the barn and gave us an old-fashioned country tail-whipping. They got off the bus ready to play football."

INDEED! -----WHAT A GAME!!

The 1990 Tiger team also defeated: Madison Co., Dawson Co., Jefferson, Social Circle, Athens Academy, Decatur, East Rome and Monticello-twice while losing only to Oconee Co., Oglethorpe Co., Banks Co. and eventually to Lincoln Co. in the fourth playoff game of the season.

Others on the 1990 Tiger team that finished the season with a 10-4-0 record and advanced to the final four were: Rod Wilson, Adam Wilson, Clay Eubanks, Josh Massey, Bobby Carroll, Michael Smith, Richard Vickery, Craig Davis, Jeff Davis, Miles Grogan, Chuck Thompson, Jeff Williams, Chad Crumley, Vernard Gillespie, Phillip Wood and Marlon Huff.

Primarily compiled from *ATHENS DAILY NEWS* and *GWINNETT DAILY NEWS* reports

July 2008, Jeff Prickett