

TIGER FLASHBACK

FRANKLIN COUNTY

1986

Coming off a record of 13-1-0 in the 1985 season, the talent-laden young men of Black and Gold looked with high expectations to the upcoming 1986 season and another shot at a state title, as the team ventured to Carnesville where another brand of cat prowled. The game had the makings of a great cat fight for jungle supremacy on this seemingly beautiful twilight evening.

However, mother nature was the first to show supremacy on this night, as a powerful thunderstorm moved in from the west, and football enthusiasts on both sides turned their attentions to the dark clouds that were approaching. Lightning and a tremendous deluge of rain delayed the opening kickoff for twenty minutes as spectators scurried for shelter. The game was eventually started by the officials, while the rains continued to engulf the stadium. Spectators finally left their vehicles and other friendly confines to brave the weather and get a glimpse of their young heroes.

Naturally this night was one of numerous miscues by the two teams due to the conditions, as Commerce lost three fumbles and a muffed PAT conversion snap. The Lions were victims as well to two interceptions by the alert Tiger defenders, one of which resulted in a TD and another was a poor punt snap that helped cause a blocked punt which resulted in another Tiger score enabling the Commerce lads to chalk up at this point their nineteenth consecutive opening game victory by a (14-0) score.

After the initial Tiger drive of the night stalled on fourth down at the Franklin 40, the Lions made their only sustained drive and one of only two scoring opportunities for the evening. Franklin County drove to the Commerce 22 behind Todd Peeples' 17-yard scamper and a 15 yard penalty against the Tigers. Faced with a fourth and six situation, Lion place kicker, Tom Jones attempted a 35 yard field goal that fell short of the mark at 4:22 of the initial period.

Commerce had dodged a bullet early in this wet contest.

The remainder of the half was one of caution by both teams on the soaked, although not muddy field in an attempt to take advantage of an opponents' error. Commerce wanted to deliver that much desired knockout blow, for it seemed that there would be few points scored on this evening.

However, the next five possessions by the two teams resulted in absolutely nothing. Late in the half, Tiger quarterback Scott Nunn punted the Lions dead at their 12 yard line. Facing a fourth and one situation at his 21 and a ten man Tiger rush, Lion punter

Ronnie Scogin fielded a low snap and hurriedly kicked the wet pigskin into the seat of his blocking back. The mass of Tiger humanity claimed possession at the Franklin 14 yard line with only 78 ticks left in the second stanza to set up the initial score of the game.

On second down, Nunn kept the ball on the option and bolted into the end zone from 13 yards out giving the Tigers a lead they would never relinquish. The PAT was foiled when the snap was bobbled, and Commerce took a precarious (6-0) lead into halftime as the rain now began to subside.

On the first play following the second half kickoff, Tiger halfback Rod Rucker fumbled with the Lions claiming possession of the wet pigskin at the Commerce 20 and giving the Lions their only other good scoring opportunity of this wet evening.

A holding penalty pushed the Lions back to the 29 and four straight plays resulted in only five more yards, as the staunch Tiger forward defensive wall of Keith Beasley, Ken Canup, Shane Brown, Ricky Arwood, Pat Tarpkins, Mark Hancock and Chip McClure forced Franklin Co. to give up possession at the Tiger 24.

The defenses of both teams again dominated play, as neither team could penetrate the opponents 45 yard line until midway through the final stanza when a pass from Lion QB Stacey Pittman was picked off by Tiger DB Pat Wood who bolted down the sideline 19 yards to the Lion 21 setting up the Tigers final tally of the evening.

RHB Pat Wood got seven yards over left tackle, and LHB Rod Rucker burst for four yards and a first down over right tackle to the 10. An encroachment penalty set the Lions back five more yards before Nunn ran the option keeper on two successive plays the last of which came from one yard out for the TD. Nunn used the same play for the successful PAT to give the Tigers a (14-0) lead that held up as the eventual final score.

Pat Wood ended the game as the leading rusher with 118 yards in 15 carries. The Tiger offense amassed 11 first downs and 192 total yards, while the tenacious Tiger defense yielded only three first downs and 63 total yards to the Lions on this damp night.

Commerce went on to win the Region 8A crown in 1986 and post an 11-3-0 record. During the campaign, the Tigers also defeated Jefferson, Madison County, Jackson County (twice) with one being a playoff game as well as Banks County, Union County, Dawson County, Social Circle and Palmetto. Commerce lost to Oconee County, Lincoln County early in the season and to East Rome in the North Georgia title game.

Other members of the 1986 squad were James Wood, Rick Massey, Paul Ingram, Kevin McCook, Tyrone Rollins, Donnie Gholston, Keith Hall, Todd Austin, Shane Crumley, Bob Ellis, Bobby Blake, George Mathis, Barry Brooks, Kevin Wood, Vincent Harper and Chip Massey.

Partially compiled from *THE COMMERCE NEWS* reports

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