

# TIGER FLASHBACK

## HART COUNTY

### 1970

The Tiger defense, acting similar to some produced by Coach Paul "Bear" Bryant in the early 1960's, flexed its muscle on three occasions in the final period to preserve a hard-fought (7-6) win over visiting Hart County in the second contest of the 1970 season.

Three times in the final period, the defense led by Doug Bolton, Ed Nelson, Dennis White, Johnny Kesler, Steve Savage, Alfred Smith, Stanley Seagraves, John Fleming, and Ronnie Slater found themselves backed up to their own goal line. But three times the dogged defenders stood tall and failed to yield to the onslaught by the Bulldogs.

The first quarter was uneventful, as neither team could muster a serious threat to enemy territory.

For Commerce, the first symptoms of the dreaded football disease called fumblitis reared up to frown on players, coaches and spectators alike when Commerce on its second possession knocked out two first downs and 26 yards only to cough up its first of nine, yes nine, fumbles for the night.

As the second quarter opened, Hart fumbled and Tiger defender David Adams pounced on the loose pigskin at the Tiger 33. But three plays later Commerce gave the hot potato back by way of its third miscue (fumble) of the evening.

Hart's tandem of QB Lee Woolbright, and running backs Eddie McCurley and Mike Turner advanced the ball to the Tiger 5 with first and goal. The Tiger goal line defense reared its defiant head and the Bulldogs lost the ball on a fumble of their own at the Tiger five yard line having gained nothing on four thrusts into the Commerce defense.

After three unsuccessful plays by Ray Lamb's charges, Fleming punted with Hart returning it 14 yards to the Tiger 31 to set up Hart's only score of the night. After Woolbright was viciously stopped by Kesler on his run around right end, he threw a strike to end Mike Vasser only to have Fleming and the ball arrive at the same moment--a resounding collision that resulted in an incomplection.

The third play of the drive spelled disaster for the Tigers, as the Hart QB found fullback Jeff McCurley on a 25-yard screen pass, as the young halfback sped down to the Tiger ten before being stopped by Seagraves and Fleming.

Three snaps later, Woolbright tossed an aerial to end Joe Sorrows who gathered it in at the three and stepped into the end zone untouched for the game's first tally. The PAT

kick by David Beard sailed wide to the left and proved to be the margin of victory for the Tigers. The Hart County Bulldogs now led (6-0) as the half closed.

Eddie McCurley returned the ensuing kickoff 11 yards, and the Bulldogs set up shop on the Hart 34. On third down and four Alfred Smith slashed through the line and stopped the Hart QB for a three yard loss forcing the visitors to punt.

Tiger halfback Oral Chester returned the kick for 13 yards to the Commerce 38, and John Fleming and company proceeded to put on a show.

Nelson burst for 9 yards on the first play, and Chester tacked on 11 more and a first down at the Hart 42. Two plays later Fleming nailed Chester in the numbers with a swing pass and the Tiger back squirted down to the Hart 26.

On fourth down and four to go for a first down at the Hart 20, Fleming took the snap from center Ray Wood, calmly rolled to his right and threw a strike to Stanley Seagraves breaking over the middle at the 4. Jubilation set in as the big tight end crossed the goal line with the 20-yard TD reception.

The all important snap from center to holder Fleming was true and Seagraves split the uprights. The Tigers had bolted into a (7-6) lead in the third period.

On the second play of the final stanza, Fleming punted to the Bulldog 42 yard line, and the curtain began to rise on one of the most thrilling and exciting defensive struggles in the annals of Commerce football.

The McCurley brothers moved the ball to the Tiger 14 before the drive stalled. Commerce took over, but on the first play a fumble climaxed a nine yard gain to the 23.

With Hart on the Tiger doorstep again, Eddie McCurley scampered around left end for 4 yards to the 19; his second attempt gained nothing. The Hart QB then went to the airways in desperation, but safetyman Fleming streaked in front of the off target pass at the Tiger 3 to squelch the 'Dawgs drive and stopping Hart County in its tracks.

A sigh of relief passed through the Tiger stands, but horror was soon to take its place.

From the three, Chester lost a yard trying to cut the corner around right end putting the Black and Gold back to the two yard line. The second play unrolled as Wood snapped the ball, but the play never materialized and the result was, yes that's right, LOOSE BALL!!!

Hart had recovered at the Tiger one. Coach Lamb's goal line stand was set up as follows: Slater, Savage and Smith at guards, White and Kesler at tackles, while Bolton, Nelson and Fleming were the linebackers.

For four consecutive plays Hart Co. tried to dent the dogged Tiger defensive wall, but for four straight snaps the wall was not breached and a reprieve had been secured.

Fleming's troops then ran two plays for seven yards to get some breathing room then lightning struck again as a Commerce back coughed up another one for the ninth time on the evening and the gift put the Bulldogs back in business at the Commerce three.

The immediate question was, could this overmatched, outweighed bunch of "Fighting Tigers" hold off the Hart Co. bombardment one more time with only 70 ticks left on the scoreboard? The resounding answer was YES, as the gritty 'Cats dug in once more.

Fleming and Kesler stopped the first run for no gain, Nelson then made a leaping deflection of a Woolbright pass to prevent a score on second down with less than 30 seconds on the clock. With no timeouts remaining, the Hart Co. coach determined that a field goal was in order. Beard strode to his set up position, the snap was true but the 20-yard field goal attempt fell just short of the crossbar and that fabulous, gutty, fierce, bone-jarring Tiger defense had held one final time in the face of what looked like disaster.

Fleming ran out the clock on a quarterback sneak. The Tigers had won. Wow! What a battle.

"I'm real proud of them," Coach Ray Lamb stated following the game. "They showed lots of character."

In 613 games covering 56 years of Tiger football, this game goes down in history as the greatest defensive effort in Commerce football history.

Tiger Coach Ray Lamb in later years shared that the Tiger effort in this game set the tone and the standard for the (98-16-6) record that was posted in the 1970's.

WHAT A GAME!!!

Commerce finished the game with 7 first downs to 9 for the Bulldogs. The Tigers had 139 rushing yards, and Hart Co. ended with 136. Commerce had 39 yards passing and Hart County had 60. There were 14 fumbles in the game; Commerce-9 and Hart County-5.

Commerce went on to post an 8-2-0 record also defeating Banks County, Madison County, Gilmer County, White County, East Hall, North Hall and Franklin County while losing to Jefferson and Winder-Barrow.

Others on the 1970 Tiger squad were: Dusty Brown, Greg Wallace, Mike Minish, Sid Camp, Norman Keese, Terry Barnett, Ronald Moon, Kirby Gary, David Seagraves, Tracy Minish, John Arnold, Tommy Stephenson, Ricky Chandler, and Anthony Bennett.

Primarily compiled from *THE COMMERCE NEWS* reports

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