

RIVALRY from page 10

What happened on the night of Sept. 5, 1987 cemented the rivalry and made into the intense feud that it is today.

The season opener for the Pirates was going to be a stern test for Head Coach Art Baker. Baker, in his third year as head coach, had an undistinguished tenure at the helm of the Pirate program. Having led the Pirates to a 2-9 finish in 1985 and a 3-8 record in 1986, the match up with N.C. State would be of the utmost importance to Baker's future at the school.

The game itself was uneventful. On a rainy, late-summer evening, 56,000 fans watched ECU take apart the Wolfpack. The Pirates' run and shoot offense was clicking with Travis Hunter at the helm. The Pirates opened up a 13-7 lead at halftime and cruised to a 32-14 win. ECU racked up 330 rushing yards in the victory.

With 10 seconds remaining, and the scoreboard projecting the all-but-certain ECU victory, hoards of Pirates fans streamed from the grassy hill behind the South end zone of Carter-Finley. The stampede was turned back by an infuriated Baker. However, as the final seconds ticked away, neither Baker nor the police could stop what was about to happen.

Storming the field following a Pirate win in Carter-Finley was nothing new. Pirate fans had taken to the field after every Pirate win since 1971. It was usually a peaceful, uneventful action. However, on this night, it was different.

Thousands of Pirate fans ran over a chain link fence and took to the field. This time N.C. State fans were waiting. While the ECU fans headed for the goal posts, N.C. State fans tried to defend their home field. When the two factions met, a riot ensued. Police were unable to control the melee.

Maj. Larry D. Liles, of the NCSU Department of Public Safety, told the News and Observer that he estimated over 2,000 people were on the field during the incident.

In the chaos, fist fights broke out and both goal posts were torn down.

The incident outraged fans of both teams. As a result, the series that had been played every year since 1970 was halted indefinitely.

"One of the great college football games, period,"
Jan. 1, 1992

If the 1987 game gave the rivalry its intensity, then the 1992 Peach Bowl gave it its magic.

The effects of the game are still felt today in this part of the state. Names like Jeff Blake, Robert Jones and Luke Fisher still resonate like the names of heroes in a legend. Almost every restaurant or shop in Greenville pays homage to this team and this game with a picture on the wall, a jersey on display or some other relic from that January day in Atlanta.

"It was just one of the great college football games, period," said Head Coach Steve Logan, who then was the offensive coordinator.

The Pirates began the 1991 campaign with a loss at Illinois. It would be the last time the team lost all year. The team rattled off 10 straight wins, many in dramatic fashions. Of the teams' 10 regular season wins, four were by seven points or less.

The team's winning streak garnered much attention and its motto, "We Believe" adorned buttons and billboards across the state.

The team accepted a bid to go to the Peach Bowl in Atlanta to face N.C. State.

The game would be the last Peach Bowl played in Atlanta's Fulton County Stadium. With 59,322 fans in attendance the game kicked off. N.C. State took the early lead on a 2-yard touchdown run from Gary Downs. A 5-yard touchdown pass from Blake to Cedric Van Buren knotted the score at seven. The Wolfpack took a seven

point lead when quarterback Terry Jordan found tight end Todd Harrison for a 4-yard touchdown reception. ECU countered with 10 points of their own, seven coming on a 55-yard touchdown strike from Blake to Hunter Gallimore. The Pirates went into halftime up, 17-14.

The third quarter saw N.C. State score 13 unanswered points. A 52-yard touchdown pass from halfback Ledel George to split end Charles Davenport put the Wolfpack up by 17 with 13:01 left in the game.

"I have been a part of some storybook things here at East Carolina," Logan said. "The '92 Peach Bowl was storybook."

What happened next was storybook. After ECU got the ball following a muffed N.C. State punt with 8:41 on the clock, Blake led the Pirates back from the brink. Blake scored on a 2-yard run to cut the Wolfpack lead to 10. On the following ECU possession, Blake moved the Pirates 80 yards and found Dion Johnson for a 17-yard touchdown pass.

Head Coach Bill Lewis opted for the two point conversion. It failed and the Pirates were down four with 4:18 remaining. On the Pirates final possession, Blake hit the tight end, Fisher for a 22-yard touchdown. This put the Pirates up 34-31.

When Damon Hartman's 49-yard field goal attempt fell short, the Pirates had completed the greatest comeback in ECU history. ECU had put up 20 unanswered points and taken their place among NC's elite football programs.

From the gridiron to the legislature, 1992-1997

The 1992 Peach Bowl re-energized the rivalry between the two schools. The game, combined with both teams' moderate success in the early and mid '90s, created a movement to get the two schools to renew their annual series. State senator, Mark Basnight (D-Dare) introduced bills in the General Assembly to require ECU to play N.C. State and UNC-CH. The measure worked and UNC-CH and N.C. State agreed to play ECU, starting with N.C. State taking on the Pirates in 1996.

The two teams' first meeting since the Peach Bowl came on Nov. 30, 1996 in Charlotte's Ericsson Stadium.

On that rainy day, it was all Pirates. ECU took control early and never let up, cruising to a 50-29 blowout.

"To go down there and just totally beat them, it meant a lot to us," said defensive lineman, Norris McCleary.

Pirate running back Scott Harley set an NCAA record for rushing yards as a sophomore, racking up 351 yards on the ground.

"That was really the cap on the bottle," Logan said. "We were denied a bowl bid that year. We kind of used that game as a bowl game. The kids really responded well."

The next year, the series shifted to Raleigh, where N.C. State pulled out a dramatic victory on the last play of the game.

"They beat us on the last play of the game, and that hurts," McCleary said. "We emphasize winning on the last play of the game. They beat us at our own game."

The rivalry will be renewed Saturday, and again next year, in Charlotte.

"We could be 3-8 or they could be 3-8 or 8-3, it doesn't matter," Logan said. "When that game comes around, it's going to be very intense, very emotional and everything that college football is supposed to be, that game will be."

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