

Patience Pays: 'Cats Nip 'Dogs, 12-7

By RAY WILLET
T.R. Sports Editor

Valdosta's Wildcats, patiently waiting for Thomasville's Bulldogs to make a fatal mistake, got the break they needed near the end of the third quarter — and went on to defeat the Bulldogs, 12-7, for the Region 1-AAAA championship before 5,500 fans in Thomasville's Veterans Memorial Stadium.

YARDSTICK	
Thomasville	Valdosta
First Downs	10 17
Yards Rushing	147 274
Yards Passing	82 71
Total Offense	229 345
Passes Int.	1 1
Fumbles Lost	2 1
Punts	5-24 2-41
Penalties	1-15 5-43

Pouncing on a Cary Clark fumble on the Bulldogs' 34 yard line with Thomasville leading, 7-4, the fired up Cats needed only four plays to get the go-ahead touchdown and held on for the victory.

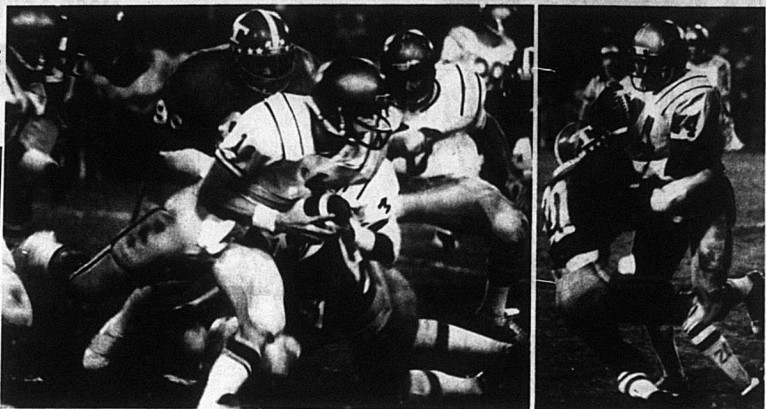
In a turnaround from past Valdosta teams, the pass was not the weapon that did the Bulldogs in that time.

Instead, the Wildcats took a chapter or two from the Thomasville playbook and used a crunching, time-consuming ground game to grind out 225 yards on the ground and keep the ball — and the ball game — from the Bulldogs.

Valdosta quarterback John Lastinger, the apparent difference between the two hard-hitting and well-disciplined teams, was as sharp as a mother-in-law's tongue — hitting his receivers on key possession plays and scrambling for good yardage when it appeared he would be lucky to escape with his life from the three Bulldog pass runs.

But in the end, Valdosta's ability to capitalize on the Bulldog mistake proved to be the difference in being region champions and region runner-up.

The Wildcats and Bulldogs



Workhorse: Valdosta QB John Lastinger Scrambles For Yardage; Steve Hardin (20) Stops Ernest King

were dead-even on turnovers. The Wildcats lost the ball once on an interception by Scott Horton to stop a drive dead in its track, and coughing the ball up twice on fumbles.

The Bulldogs turned it over three times to the Wildcats — twice by fumbles and by an interception — while another Thomasville fumble played an effective part in stopping a Bulldog scoring drive.

Both the Wildcats and Bulldogs converted fumble recoveries into touchdowns, but the failure of the Bulldogs to convert for a first down on a crucial fourth and two situations at midfield worked

in their favor. The Wildcats elected to try the quarterback sneak for the all-important first down — but the Bulldogs' Johnny Chastain came up a yard short and the game's Wildcat took possession.

Valdosta was content to grind out short yardage on the ground to eat up the clock, but the Bulldogs dug in and staked the final Valdosta drive with only 1:20 remaining in the game.

Chastain hit wide receiver Darryl Duncan for 17 yards. Kavonias got two on a draw up the middle — and the referee tacked on 15 more against the Wildcats for a face-mask violation — to put the ball on the Bulldog 47 with 20 seconds remaining.

The bottom then dropped out for the Bulldogs seconds later as the Wildcats picked off a long Chastain pass attempt — and Lastinger riddled the Bulldog secondary with four straight completions — good for a total of 49 yards.

The final 18 of those yards was an spectacular one-handed catch by wide receiver Frederick Blair in the end zone — and the touchdown.

The PAT try was wide, and the mistake gave the 'Dogs new life.

Driving goalward in the second quarter, the Bulldogs

had moved to the Valdosta 15, with four yards to go on second down.

A misplaced handoff ended up in the arms of an onrushing Wildcat lineman to bring the touchdown rush to a skidding halt, as the Bulldogs' back — mostly had — continued to hold against the Wildcats.

Thomasville defensive end Oscar Morris put the Bulldogs in business on the Dogs 40 yard line, but only 29 seconds were left in the first half — and no one really expected the turnover to be of serious consequence.

But Chastain dropped back, and spotted big tight end Guy

peared the Wildcats were sure to pad their 12 lead.

Defensive halfback Scott Horton knocked down 10 Valdosta ball carriers individually — in addition to his key interception — and defensive linemen Wayne Arrington added 10 more solo tackles.

Defensive end Mike Mash, linebacker Charles Bates and Calvin Wheeler all collected eight individual stops each in the determined Bulldog effort.

Halfback Lynn Roberts was the leading Valdosta tackler with nine stops.

Tailback Johnny Kavonias ground out 77 yards in 14 tries to lead the Bulldog offense, aided by 47 yards by fullback Cary Clark in 17 attempts.

Iryn Roe was the offensive standout for the Wildcats, picking up 101 yards in 19 plays at the Bulldog defense.

Valdosta meets Westside of Augusta, the Region 4-AAAA winner, in the next round of the state playoffs.

Thomasville 12 7 0 0 — 7
Valdosta 4 0 0 0 — 12
Valdosta — Blair 18 pass from Lastinger (kick failed).
Thomasville — Morris 41 pass from Chastain (R. Wheeler kick).
Valdosta — Roe 8 run (pass failed).

INDIVIDUAL LEADERS
Rushing: Thomasville — Kavonias 147; Valdosta — Steve Hardin 147.
Passing: Thomasville — John Lastinger 154; Valdosta — Ernest King 114.
Receiving: Thomasville — Frederick Blair 114; Valdosta — Darryl Duncan 17.
Tackles: Thomasville — Scott Horton 10; Valdosta — Mike Mash 8.
Interceptions: Thomasville — Scott Horton 10; Valdosta — Ernest King 1.
Fumbles Recovered: Thomasville — Steve Hardin 2; Valdosta — Ernest King 1.
Punts: Thomasville — Ernest King 5; Valdosta — Ernest King 2.
Kicking: Thomasville — Ernest King 1/2; Valdosta — Ernest King 1/2.
Returns: Thomasville — Ernest King 1/2; Valdosta — Ernest King 1/2.
Sacks: Thomasville — Ernest King 1; Valdosta — Ernest King 1.
Blocked Kicks: Thomasville — Ernest King 1; Valdosta — Ernest King 1.
Blocked Punts: Thomasville — Ernest King 1; Valdosta — Ernest King 1.
Penalties: Thomasville — Ernest King 1; Valdosta — Ernest King 1.

For Region 1-AAAA Championship

It Was Typically Valdosta vs Thomasville

By JULIAN MILLER

It wasn't what they expected.

Thomasville's Bulldogs relied on the pass to score and Valdosta's Wildcats forgot their pass in favor of the rush.

The rains didn't come, the cold didn't show, the coolness and patience patrolled by each of the teams in the Region 1-AAAA high school football playoff game was replaced with emotion.

It was exactly what they expected.

It was Valdosta vs Thomasville — and it ended with 29 seconds left on the clock.

"That's the first time all night that I thought we had a chance to win the football game," a relieved Nick Hyder said.

That's when cornerback Rodney Gordon intercepted a Johnny Chastain pass as the Bulldogs were mounting a fast drive goalward in hopes of turning the tide on the 12-7 Wildcat lead.

The hopes were drowned on that play because all that was left for Valdosta to do was to fall on the football and wait for the clock to run out.

For the Wildcats, it was the culmination of 12 weeks of

rejoicing — nor was it any relief.

"Now, there's no relief," said Hughes, who saw 12 weeks of region play and four weeks of pre-season practice come to an end.

"Our goal was to play three more games and we won't be able to do that now. To practice and play football at this time of year is not a drugstore — it's a privilege."

Besides putting his Wildcats in line to host Westside of Augusta in the first round of the State Class AAAA playoffs next week, the victory made Hyder a fan of the Bulldogs and Hughes.

"Quoting Jim Hughes now," Hyder said, "That was the best advertisement possible for high school football out there tonight." And give Thomasville credit. They did a great job.

The Bulldogs, Hyder said, had done more to the Wildcats than take away their spirit by taking a 14-halftime lead to the dressing room. They had taken away Valdosta's passing attack — and they didn't even know it.

"Thomasville had done such a good job of getting us outstaged in the first half we had to pack him in ice at halftime," Hyder



said. "They (the Bulldogs) played the game just the way it was supposed to be played."

However, it was still Lastinger who turned things around for the Wildcats in the second half, scrambling for 47 yards in 13 attempts — most of them coming on plays where he rightfully should have lost yardage, Hyder pointed out.

"Thomasville had fought their hearts out," Hyder said. "They never gave up. They were coming back at the last as strong as ever. That's what I mean by character."

The Bulldogs had come back from a 6-0 deficit after the Wildcats scored on their first

possession to take the halftime lead.

"We had the lead," said Hughes, "but we were not exactly kicking people around out there. We had an emotional effort before the half. We hit the (touchdown) pass that surprised them. But from the standpoint of blocking and tackling, we weren't just running them out of there."

It was actually mid-way the fourth quarter that the crowning blow was dealt the Bulldogs, Hughes said. He recalled the fourth-and-two situation on the Thomasville

Bowling Tips

sleepers
Dick Weber and Patty Costello

Sleepers are troublesome and require an extra bit of care and concentration. A sleeper is a pin that is left directly behind another in a spare leave. It could be a simple sleeper such as the 2-8, the 3-9 or the 1-5. Or the sleeper could be in a combination of other pins in the spare leave.

If you have a simple sleeper, say the 3-9, concentrate on the 9 pin and aim to hit it full on. You'll get the 3 pin in the process because you'll have to go through the 3 pin to get the 9.

In combinations, you're almost on your own. As in any spare leave, you have to study the situation and try to select the angle that will get you as many pins as possible.

One of the most troublesome spare leaves is "the bucket," the 2-4-5-8. In this case, in addition to the sleeper (the 2-8) you also have a pin on each side (the 4 and 5). A strike ball is the best way to handle the bucket. Imagine the 2-5 as the strike pocket and have at it.

But whatever, don't go to sleep on the sleeper. Chops are common in the sleepers and you'll have to be extra careful.

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