

Game Recap

Raiders Harness Wave, Outlast Ashbrook, 28-19

When Florida State joined the Atlantic Coast Conference in 1991, they reeled off 29 consecutive football victories against conference opponents. Over that stretch the Seminoles expected to win football games. To that point it was all they had known and the victories seemed to come easily. For the most part they had not been challenged in any one contest and this became the league dynamic. One by one, ACC teams would try to mount a challenge but to no avail. Surely one was bound to break through, but the streak continued. There is a popular notion in sports, whether real or imagined, that teams sense pressure to win and this tends to have a counter effect. Feeling pressured, it's thought, can cause a team's focus to drift and possibly contribute to a loss. If any teams in history could attest to the phenomenon of pressure, it would be the Florida State Seminoles of the ACC in the early 1990s, AND the opponents they faced. No player in the locker room wanted to be on the squad that would become the first to lose a game to a conference opponent. And on the other side, every player wanted to be on the team that made that happen. There was, therefore, pressure sensed in both locker rooms on gameday. Finally, the inevitable became reality in 1995 when the Virginia Cavaliers broke the Seminoles' streak by defeating FSU 33-29 in Charlottesville. The following week Florida State returned to their tradition of winning and began what would become another impressive streak without a conference loss. Again, it would seem logical that players began to feel pressure to protect the winning streak. And opposing players felt pressure to bring the streak to an end. It would happen again in 1998. That year, FSU visited NC State in Raleigh. The underdog Wolfpack upset the heavily favored Seminoles 24-7. Former Wolfpack head coach, Mike O'Cain, when asked what he said to his team to push them to victory over the conference powerhouse, gave a simple and effective answer. He said that he told his team they were playing against eleven guys on the opposite side of the ball and nothing more. There was no pressure as far as the outcome was concerned. Rather, this would just be two teams taking the field to compete in a game they loved to play. He emphasized that they were not playing the "mystique" that is Florida State football. The coach stressed to his team that if they entered the contest in awe of what the Seminoles had accomplished in the past, "well" he said, "they've already beaten us". There would be no reason to leave the locker room and take the field. His words removed any pressure to win that his team may have sensed. Rather he encouraged the players to

do what they loved to do - play football. Entering the matchup with Ashbrook, a similar storyline could be drawn. South Point was coming off their first loss of the season and may have felt pressure to get back on a winning track against a lesser opponent (based on conference records). The Greenwave on the other hand had the freedom to just go play football. A signature win could make their season, but a loss would not be unexpected. Ashbrook threw the punches. The Big Red fought back. And when the final whistle blew the Raiders were the last team standing, with the 28-19 victory.

Ashbrook won the toss and elected to give South Point the ball to begin the game. The Raiders moved to near midfield, but the drive stalled, and they were forced to punt. The Red 'D' took the field and established early dominance. A second and ten became a third and thirteen after DL Zolan McCulloch recorded a tackle for loss on the Greenwaves second play from scrimmage. DL Jack Milford followed that up with a sack at the Ashbrook 1-yardline to force fourth down. The tone was set. RS Will Ross assured excellent field position for South Point's second possession, scooping the punt and returning to the Greenwave 23-yardline. QB Patrick Blee, WB Dawson Tobin, and FB Cam Medlock worked quickly to the 4-yardline. From there Medlock plowed through for six and the Raiders had the lead. K Charlie Birtwistle added the PAT to put the 7 on the scoreboard. Everyone in red expected the rout was on. It was not. Ashbrook benefitted from a questionable call after it appeared the Raiders kicking team had recovered an onside kick. The ruling was unclear but never-the-less the Greenwave was awarded possession at their 35-yardline. The momentum shift energized the home team, and they were able to put together a drive to inside the South Point five. The Red 'D' put up a wall but were victimized by a fumble that was recovered by Ashbrook just across the goal line. The extra point knotted the score at 7-7 with 2:17 remaining in the first quarter. The Raiders carried their next possession into the second stanza.

South Point moved to the Ashbrook 25-yardline, but the drive stalled, and the Raiders settled for a field goal attempt. The 42-yard attempt was blocked and the Greenwave took over. They failed to mount a charge. In fact, both teams traded possessions from that point as the defenses held strong. With 4:28 remaining in the half, South Point began a drive from midfield. In six plays the Red 'O' moved to the Ashbrook 9-yardline. On the seventh play of the drive, Blee lofted a pass to the back of the endzone that a leaping WR Aaron Chaney hauled in for the score. The receiver gave the credit where due, explaining, "I knew it was coming and it was a good throw by my quarterback". "I just had to go up and get it", he said. With 1:33 left on the clock, South Point had the

14-7 advantage. Ashbrook had no quick answer and so the teams went to the intermission.

The Greenwave came crashing out in the third quarter. Benefitting from a breakout run deep into South Point territory, Ashbrook managed a quick score to pull within one. A high snap on the PAT cost them on the try and the tally held at 14-13, Red Raiders. The teams went on to trade possessions the remainder of the quarter with neither mounting a threat. The Greenwave carried the next possession into the final 12:00 minutes of regulation.

South Point forced a punt early in the fourth quarter and Ross once again managed a return to give his offense excellent field position. From the Greenwave 33-yardline the Raiders mounted a ground-pounding attack to the Ashbrook 5-yardline. On the drive the Red ball-carriers, led by Medlock, delivered hits, and carried tacklers, picking up positive yardage on each play. Medlock burst through from five yards out with defenders on each arm. His run put South Point up 21-13 in a game in which they never trailed, but never seemed able to comfortably put away. Credit the resolve of Ashbrook to “just go play football” as the Greenwave never backed down from the fight. The Greenwave added a touchdown on the ensuing drive to cut the lead to 21-19 with over 5 minutes to go in the game. The Raiders needed a typical South Point, clock-killing drive to ice the victory. The Red ‘O’ delivered! An 80-yard drive ended with a 6-yard run by Medlock to put South Point up 28-19 with 1:23 remaining. A desperation heave downfield by Ashbrook was picked off by Ross and the victory was sealed!

With an attitude devoid of pressure, Ashbrook set out to just play football and the Greenwave managed to keep the Red Raiders honest. Asked about the flow of the game, WB Dawson Tobin said, “We put our heads down, we got to work out there, that’s all we could do.” He added that the Big Red never gave up. A sense of pressure brought on by any reason can draw focus away from what a team sets out to accomplish. Coaches insist that any pressure felt is self-imposed. The important thing is to just go play ball. It worked for the Virginia Cavaliers in 1995 and the NC State Wolfpack in 1998. So, there’s proof in history. Just go play football, Red!

Go Get ‘Em, Red!

Notable Facts and Thoughts

At one point in their early ACC history, Florida State had a conference football record of 70-2.