

IT'S A TIE

Valdosta, Griffin Left In 7-7 Deadlock

Nobody Expected The Final Result

The Valdosta Daily Times SPORTS

By MIKE CHASON
It was not at all expected. Nothing could have driven that fact home any harder than the reactions of the mammoth crowd on both sides of Cleveland Field when Saturday night's Class AAAA state championship football game ended in a 7-7 tie.

As the Griffin fans shouted "we're number one" and waved their mitered fists in the air, the Valdosta side of the huge stadium was almost silent.

But it wasn't because Valdosta's Wildcats lost in their second consecutive trip to the state finals. It was because nobody won.

What it was, was a 7-7 tie. "We're happy as hell to be co-champions in Class AAAA," Griffin Coach Lloyd Bohannon said as he excitedly patting individual members of his team on the back and on their helmets.

Valdosta Coach Nick Hyder wasn't exactly a bundle of joy but he wasn't disconsolate either.

"I just feel neutral," Hyder said. "That's how a tie leaves you, just neutral."

"I think one of Coach (Wright) Baremore's state championships was a tie, wasn't it? We didn't lose last year we lost."

Overtimes and penetration rules are in effect during the regular season and in playoff leading up to the state final but no such tiebreaking methods are used in the title game.

Valdosta also tied Athens in 1969 for the state title in a 26-26 contest. That game was also played at Cleveland Field, which was loaded to the gills with a crowd of

11,500 Saturday night. Turnovers dominated the action with both teams shivering from either the 45 degree temperature or the excitement or both.

Valdosta coughed the ball up twice on fumbles and turned it over three times on interceptions. Griffin lost two fumbles, one of which resulted in Valdosta's only score.

The Bears, who wound up with a 12-2-1 record, had already gambled on fourth down and when senior fullback Jesse Stewart popped into the center of the VHS line and lost the ball with 8:54 left in the first quarter.

Wildcat defensive tackle Carroll Johnson pounced on the pigskin 39 yards from paydirt.

"The Cats put their wide open offense into high gear on the opening play with a halfback pass from Irvin Roe to Frederick Blair for a 14-yard gain."

Junior quarterback John Bond, making only the second start of his career, found tight end Sam Fletcher and Blair for two more catches to push the ball to the 10-yard stripe.

After Bond threw an incomplete pass, junior halfback Ernest King squeezed for seven yards to the 3, and Roe carried to the 8-inch line on that down.

Bond then bolted over the back of center Tony Blasetti for the touchdown with 6:21 showing on the first quarter clock.

David Reeves added the extra point and even the folks

hanging on the chimney across the street, from the stadium joined in the applause.

Griffin quarterback Jeff Ector fumbled the ball back to the Cats on the Bears' next possession. Senior cornerback Troy Thomas, who came in jumping one minute into the game, recovered the ball.

Bond lost the ball twice on fumbles before the first quarter ended. Griffin got a 30-yard field goal attempt out of the second miscue but Wally Wetherbee, grandson of former Georgia Coach Wally Butts, couldn't connect.

Griffin safety Marvin Curtis picked off two of Bond's passes in the second quarter, one of which bounced out of the hands of Blair.

Early in the quarter, Bond had spotted Blair wide open and streaking toward the end zone but the senior split end couldn't hang on to the ball.

"The turnovers were certainly a factor," Hyder said. "It's just like when you work hard all week and then you come up and get your check and find out they cut your salary in half."

Valdosta, which wound up 14-0-1, could still have had a 14-0 edge at intermission when Roe ripped 82 yards with a punt return only to have it called back because of a clipping penalty.

The boom rained down on the officials like hail from heaven when it was signaled that Roe's handwork was all



Valdosta Defender Kenny Evans Pursues Griffin Quarterback Jeff Ector While Teammate Fights Off Block

for nothing.

VHS defensive coordinator Jack Rudolph dashed out on the field while the penalty was marked off but the man in the striped shirt prevailed, despite a heated protest by the Wildcat coach.

But Rudolph didn't point to that particular play after they cut your salary in half.

"They were what I told people they were," Rudolph said. "They had speed. Tonight, they were as good as anybody we've played."

Thinking with the weather conditions the way they were, it was more of a climate for a defensive ballgame.

An icy breeze sent the chill

factor steadily downward as the game progressed.

Rudolph lost one of his key performers with 4:18 to play in the second quarter when Thomas severely twisted his ankle. He came back to play in the second half although he wasn't able to return punts.

"He showed a lot of courage," Rudolph said. "He had to be hurting."

The third quarter contained the play the game in Hyder's opinion.

Moving behind the powerful strut of Ricky Williams, who has 60 yards in 13 carries, Griffin moved the ball to the Valdosta 30-yard line.

At that point, Ector rifled a 21-yard pass to Cyrus Jackson, who almost broke it for a touchdown as the third quarter ended.

"That play was well executed," said Hyder. "Our defense did a good job but they just executed perfectly."

Two plays into the final period, Ector outran the VHS defenders from seven yards away and dove into the end zone. There was 11:19 to play when Wetherbee kicked the extra point.

Both defenses were determined not to give an inch the rest of the way.

Thomas and end James Harris topped VHS with seven tackles apiece. Lynn Roberts and Jimbo Hancock chalked up six apiece.

Freddie Gilbert was a one-man wrecking crew for Griffin with 11 tackles.

With 15 seconds left, Bohannon ordered a 49-yard field goal by Wetherbee, which sailed far to the right.

But Bohannon had hope. "I thought it was going to be good the first year Griffin coach said. 'I didn't miss but that far (holding his hands apart a yard).'"

"We prepared ourselves for the fake," Hyder said. "We thought they might fake it."

But they didn't and with four seconds left, Valdosta got the ball back for one of those last gasp deals which never seem to work for anybody but the Atlanta Falcons.

Bond ran to his right but was buried by Bears before he could get his headlifter pass off in the opposite direction.

One side began to celebrate and the other couldn't believe it was all over. But it was.

Playoff Results

- Class AAAA
Valdosta 7, Griffin 7
- Class AA
East Rome 25, Clayton 9
- Class A
Buford 47, Charlton Co. 6

Valdosta	Score by Quarters	Griffin
	0 0 0 0	
Total	7	7

Game Number of Tackles: Thomas 7, Harris 7, Roberts 7, Hancock 7, Ector 3, Blair 3, Carter 2, Gordon 2, Carroll Johnson 2, Curtis 1, Giff 1, Giff 1, Adams 2, Jackson 3, Vaughn 3, Ware 3, Wetherbee 2, Fletcher 2, Lewis 1, Grier 1, Grier 1.

Interception Returns: Valdosta - no interceptions; Griffin - Curtis 25.

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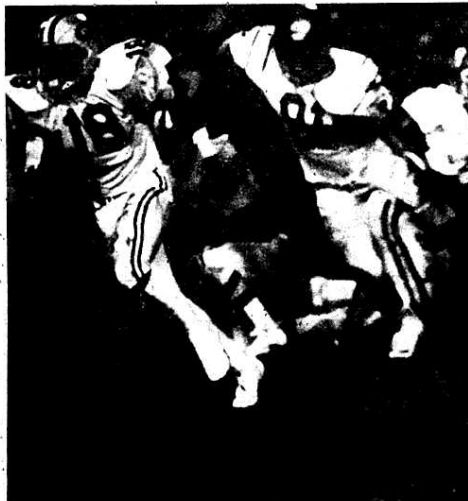
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Griffin Halfback Ricky Williams Looks For Running Start Around The Left Side Of His Line

Dooley Expects Versatile Lastinger To Fit In At UGA

A year ago the University of Georgia had no idea it even wanted John Lastinger as a part of its football team.

But before a packed game room in the Lastinger home on a dreary Saturday afternoon several hours ago, the number one quarterback in Region I-AAAA this season put pen to paper and became a bona fide Bulldog come December 10, 1978.

And there was no doubt that Georgia does indeed need the 6-foot-2, 174-pounder with nice manners and quiet demeanor.

Wayne McDuffie, the Georgia assistant coach who's made Valdosta his second home the past two years in the recruitment process of Buck Belue and Lastinger, perhaps said it best.

"I told John I thought he was a winner, and that he could help our football team," the always snappily dressed McDuffie said as he helped himself to a paper plateful of the various snacks spread on the dining room table.

"Winning means more to him than where he plays. He can help us win at some position. All I told him was that he could play at Georgia."



Mike Chason Times Sports Editor

his direction Saturday.

And just for the record, Lastinger's not going to Georgia to carry the torch of Pyburn or Belue or anybody else. He's going to try to win a place on the football team...somewhere.

"I think the best opportunity for John will be at some other position (other than quarterback) next year," Bulldog Coach Vince Dooley said after sitting through several picture sessions with Lastinger.

After the first year, I would like to see him some at quarterback.

It's no secret Pyburn graduates after next season. Unless the situation changes, and it could, that would leave the quarterback job to Belue and Lastinger. Which is not to say Belue won't be battling Pyburn for the position next year.

Dooley realizes the situation. He knows some people might be inclined to think Lastinger is headed for Fine Time, U.S.A. "I think it's great," Dooley said. "I think he realized we have a great future up there. He wants to be a part of it. It's going to be an asset to our program to have someone of his calibre."

"He can do so many things. I don't know where they're going to play him but he's got the kind of talent that he can play in a lot of positions. He's somebody you can't lose with."

Ironically, when Belue signed with Georgia last year, Dooley nor McDuffie had any idea they would return to Valdosta a year later to sign another Wildcat quarterback.

"I watched the spring game without really knowing he was a prospect," McDuffie said. "I went down to (Valdosta Coach) Nick (Hyder) after the game, and he started telling me all the things he could do."

"It was hard to believe it could happen all over again. You just don't hear of one quarterback following another one like that."

McDuffie has seen Valdosta play 18 times over the past two years. He dodged Belue's footsteps and then he put his hand on dog nose on Lastinger. Just like the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, he got his man every time.

"It's really been a pleasure," McDuffie said. "You couldn't ask for two finer young men. I think both of them handled recruiting extremely well. I think these are the kind of young men we need at the University of Georgia."

Most of the VHS players dressed in silence while down the way, the Griffin players featured smiles and a couple of number one fingers in the air.

"We got what we came for," one Bear said. "We're still number one," Bond said. "I just wish we could play them again."

At the time of this writing, there was no way to know if Valdosta did or did not win the state title Saturday night. But however the game came out, Lastinger did not get to write the final chapter.

Instead, he was on the sideline with a separated shoulder with no chance of even playing in the game. But there is a silver lining to the Lastinger saga. His career is not over. He has the chance to play again on a higher level. The opportunity is there.

No one doubts John Lastinger will make the most of it.