



Miserable ticket sales had the Peach Bowl's future in jeopardy 24 hours before kickoff. Nearly 15,000 no-shows were the story on game day.

DTH/Charles Ledford

Carolina turns up a lemon in Peach Bowl

By ROBYN NORWOOD
Staff Writer

ATLANTA — Tallahassee, Fla., and Chapel Hill are 641 miles apart, but the Dec. 30 when the Florida State Seminoles and the North Carolina Tar Heels met around halfway in Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium for the Peach Bowl, neither team's play could have been further from the way it was during the regular season.

Coach Bobby Bowden's Seminoles were still smarting from a searing defeat at the hands of intra state rival Florida to close their regular season. And if that game wasn't on the Seminoles' minds as it was, somebody made sure they wouldn't forget and hired a plane to tow a sign that read FLORIDA 53-FSU 14 across the Atlanta sky during a timeout in the second quarter of the Peach Bowl.

For UNC, original sin began at College Park, Md., on Oct. 29, when the Tar Heels suffered their first loss of the season, 28-26. Before that, UNC was 7-0, ranked third in the nation behind Nebraska and Texas and listening to talk of a national championship battle against the Cornhuskers in the Orange Bowl.

North Carolina dropped two more games before edging out a victory against Duke to end the season 8-3.

So *The Atlanta Constitution* dubbed the Peach the Atonement Bowl, a place for wayward teams to expiate the season's wrongdoings before packing in the shoulder pads until spring practice.

For Florida State, even a 28-3 victory won in spanking new gold pants — reportedly paid for by former FSU player Burt Reynolds — wasn't enough.

"This was a great win for us but there's

no way we could have redeemed ourselves from that Florida game," Bowden said.

But the outcome was not the only turn-about in the game. Florida State's much-maligned defense held North Carolina to just 198 yards in total offense. UNC had averaged 441.8 yards per game during the regular season.

"Their defensive line has a lot of strength," said Tyrone Anthony, a 1000-yard rusher who was held to 27 yards on 9 attempts. "They pulled some defensive stunts I guess we weren't prepared for."

Offensive tackle Brian Blados agreed. "We weren't expecting a lot of what they were doing defensively," he said. "We thought maybe we could dominate them in the trenches, but they were tough. They had tremendous pursuit after the ball defensively. All 11 players were constantly on the ball," the 6-6, 300-pound senior said.

"I think they knew exactly what they had to do," said Eihan Horton, the ACC's leading rusher, who managed only 32 yards against the Seminole defense.

Florida State was surprising offensively as well. Quarterback Eric Thomas, in his first varsity start, connected for a touchdown on his first pass of the day when 6-6 stringbean receiver Weegie Thompson outreached 6-0 UNC defensive back Steve Hertrickson for the catch and the score.

Thomas and Thompson combined for another touchdown in the first quarter to open a 14-0 FSU lead that was never challenged.

The Peach Bowl loss was Dick Crum's first as head coach at North Carolina, dropping his record in post season play to

6-1. But the Peach has never been kind to the Tar Heels, who lost there in 1970 and 1976. Indeed, until Brooks Barwick's fourth-quarter field goal, UNC had not scored in the Peach Bowl since 1970.

"In the first half, we just self-destructed," Crum said. "We put ourselves in bad position in the first half. You can't do that and beat a team like Florida State."

UNC's bowl loss marked a different end to the pattern of tremendous early-season success followed by a late-season stumble that North Carolina has developed in the last few years. But in the last two years, unlike in the most recent season, the Tar Heels have rebounded to post bowl wins. In 1981, UNC downed Arkansas 31-27 in the Gator Bowl. Last year, North Carolina beat Texas 31-10 in the Sun Bowl.

"There's something there," senior linebacker Bill Sheppard said. "I can't put my finger on it. It's just too much coincidence." Sheppard, UNC's leading tackler, had 10 unassisted tackles in the Peach Bowl.

But Anthony, held to 70 yards below his average in his final game, put it best: "Going out this way is frustrating," he said.

Peach Bowl officials had more to shiver at than the 20-degree weather as game time neared. By noon on the day before the game, local ticket sales were still at least 2,000 short of 24,214 — the 40 percent of capacity that the NCAA commands must be sold in the local area for a bowl to maintain accreditation.

Speculation was abundant as to why it was so difficult to sell 24,000 tickets in this city of 1,920,529 (a digital display outside of the Darlington Apartments, 2025

Peachtree Road, keeps a running tab on the city's population).

Peach Bowl tickets sold for \$20 Georgians can see the Falcons for \$13. Interest in the game was certainly lessened by Georgia's bid to the Cotton Bowl. And finally, UNC and FSU were both teams on the decline at the end of the season, neither managing a spot in the wire service polls at season's end.

Peach Bowl director George Crumbley went on the record two days before the game as being "bitter" at the Atlanta business community for not underwriting more Peach Bowl tickets. Talk of the 16th annual becoming the last annual was rampant.

But tickets sold briskly in the last 24 hours before the game, and Peach Bowl president Bill Ziebertz announced in an unscheduled pre game press conference that the goal had been met.

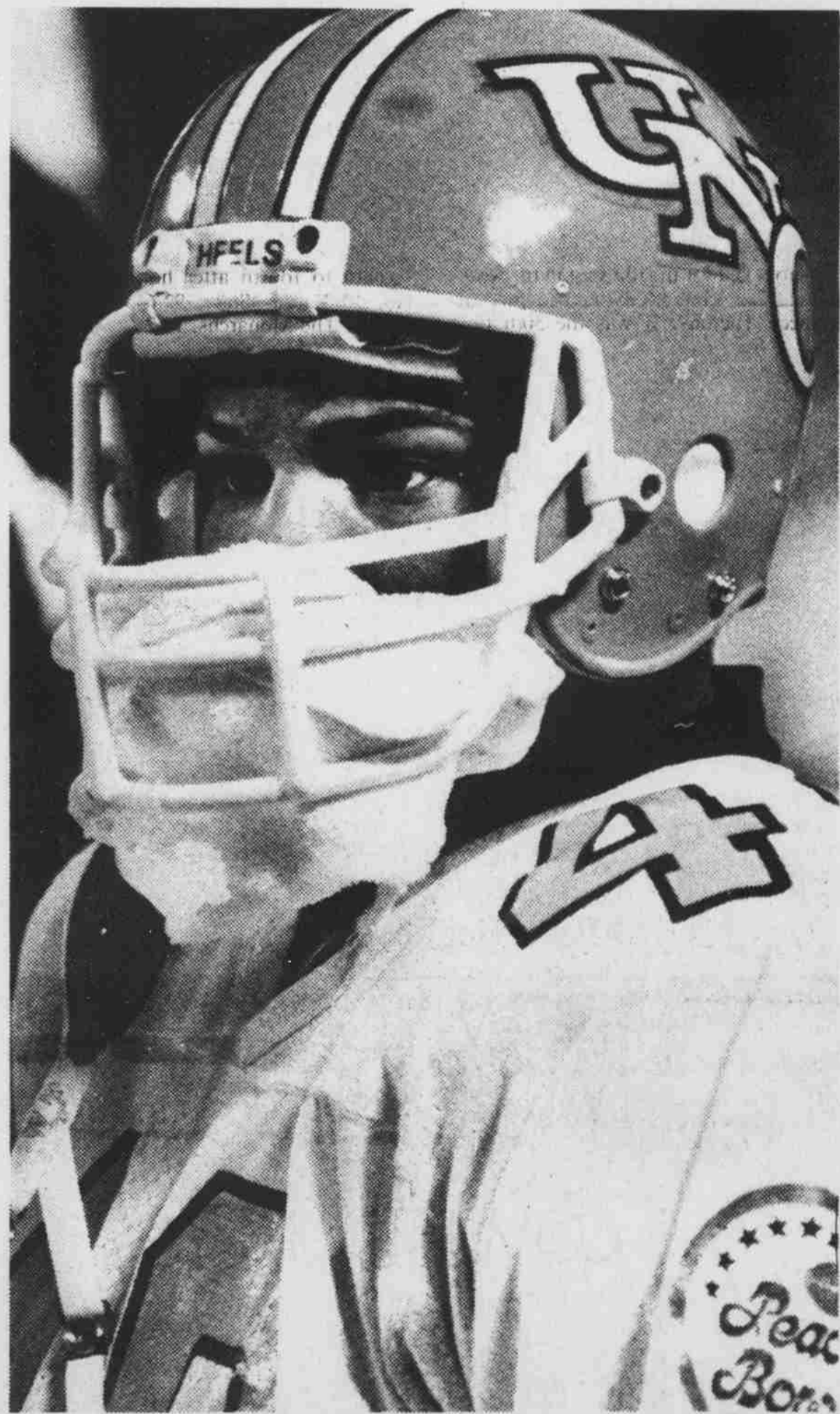
"There's no question that the Peach Bowl is here," Ziebertz said. "It's here to stay."

"The phone was ringing very steady," he said. "There was no big company that came forward. There were an awful lot of small groups buying two-to-25 tickets."

Official attendance at the game was 25,648, indicating approximately 13,500 no-shows. Ziebertz pointed out that this year's ticket sales were not the lowest in Peach Bowl history. That was in 1978 when officials agreed to play on Christmas Day to secure a vital CBS contract.

"Christmas Day in the South is not a day to play a football game," Ziebertz said.

"If we were ever in trouble, that was the year. I feel that the problem we've had this year was very minor."



North Carolina's James Jones shivered in 20-degree cold not long after Peach Bowl officials shivered at anemic ticket sales.

DTH/Charles Ledford



UNC's defense fared no better than its offense here as Florida State recovered this Greg Allen fumble in the first quarter.

DTH/Jeff Neuvillo

Peach Bowl scoring summary

Score by Quarters 1 2 3 4 Final

North Carolina 0 0 0 3 3
Florida State * 14 7 0 7 28

First Quarter

FSU — Weegie Thompson 15 pass from Eric Thomas (Phil Hall kick)
FSU — Weegie Thompson 18 pass from Eric Thomas (Phil Hall kick)

Second Quarter

FSU — Roosevelt Snipes 1 run (Phil Hall kick)

Third Quarter

No scoring

Fourth Quarter

UNC — Brooks Barwick 36 FG
FSU — Eric Thomas 1 run (Phil Hall kick)