

Gardner-Webb Bulldogs



SPORTS

Bulldogs Tame Lions

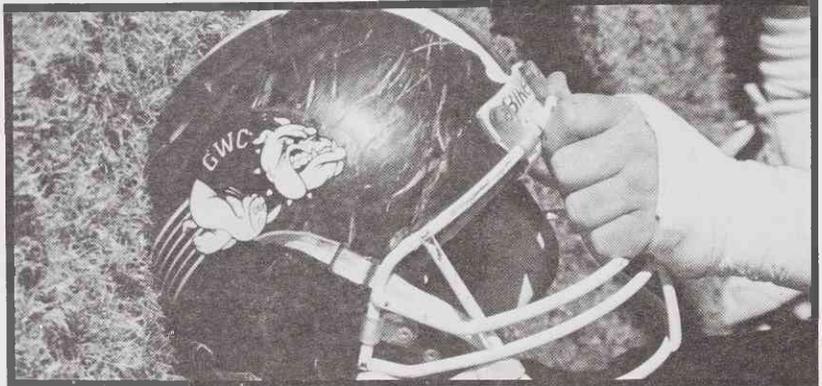
By R. Shawn Lewis

After last week's impressive 31-14 victory over Presbyterian, Gardner-Webb's hopes for a winning season were higher than ever as the Runnin' Bulldogs traveled to Mars Hill to take on the Lions. A victory for Gardner-Webb would assure the Bulldogs a winning season, their fourth in the past five years. But, first the Bulldogs had to tame the Lions.

Mars Hill came into the game with the second-ranked defense in the SAC-8, an honor which they earned on Saturday. In a game that saw sluggish offenses on both sides, the Bulldogs' first two drives of the contest stalled and punter Darren Wilson was forced to show his wares. Wilson's second punt was downed on the Mars Hill 2-yard line and the Gardner-Webb defense was called on to hold the Lions at bay. And that they did. On Mars Hill's first play of the possession, an errant lateral from quarterback Jeff Bailey in the endzone led to the first score of the game, a safety. Bulldogs 2, Mars Hill 0.

After the safety, freshman quarterback Bobby Boggan marched the Bulldogs down the field, completing 6 of 7 passes on a drive that culminated with Boggan hurdling 3 Mars Hill defenders and into the endzone. Jeff Parker added the extra point to make the score Bulldogs 9, Mars Hill 0.

Mars Hill was not about to lay down, however. A victory would keep them in the hunt for the SAC-8 title. If that was not enough incentive, the game would also be the final home game for the Lions' seniors. Realizing these, the Lions came roaring back, using a ball control drive that ate away at the Bulldog defense. The drive came to climax when Elijah Askew, a freshman running back, scored on a touchdown run with 10:49 left in the first half. Bulldogs 9, Mars Hill 7.



The ensuing Gardner-Webb drive stalled and Mars Hill was once again on the attack. Using same ball control offense that led to their first score, the Lions moved down the field. However, the Bulldog defense would stand the test this time. Bulldog defensive back James Ingram leaped high in the endzone to bat down a Mars Hill third down scoring effort. On came Chris Jones, senior placekicker for the Lions, to attempt a 39-yard field goal. The kick went wide to the right and the Bulldogs withstood the test.

The third quarter saw the Runnin' Bulldogs' offensive attack struggle early, especially on the ground. Third and 16, third and 23 were just a few examples of the Bulldogs' stalled offense. Late in the quarter, though, the Bulldogs got their offense rolling. Coach Woody Fish, searching for a firestarter, gambled on a fake punt on fourth and short. Dunsey Harper, former Shelby High standout, snuck through the bewildered Lions defense and to the first down. On the very next play, quarterback Bobby Boggan went long to receiver Rodney Robinson. Robinson could not catch the pass, but defensive pass interference was called on the play. The penalty opened the door for a Gardner-Webb score. Bobby Boggan, playing just his second game as a starter, scored his fourth rushing touchdown of the season on a 9-yard keeper. Bulldogs 16, Mars Hill 7.

The Lions were not ready to quit for the afternoon,

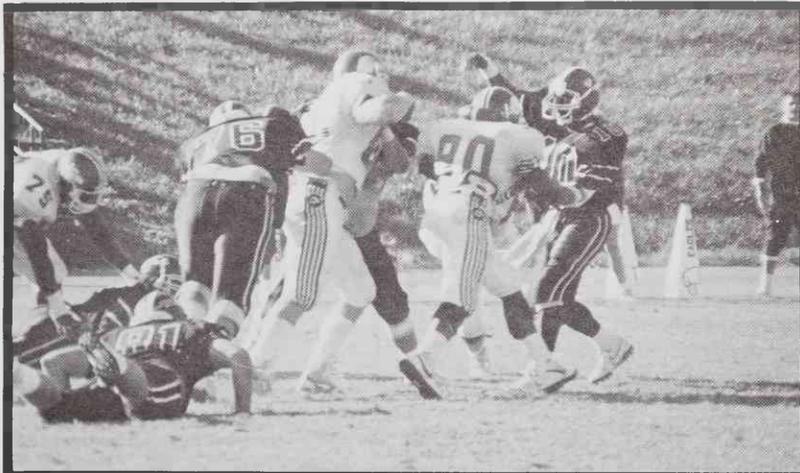
however. After an interception, Mars Hill scored on a 13-yard TD run by Jonathan Byars. Bulldogs 16, Mars Hill 14.

Gardner-Webb appeared headed for another score when All-American running back Darrell Middleton broke loose and into the clear. Middleton ran 40 yards down the field before fumbling the ball on the Mars Hill 15, on what many observers thought was a facemask.

Late third quarter and most of the fourth quarter was the scene of probably the Bulldogs' best defense of the year. Though Mars Hill kept the ball in Bulldog territory much of the time, the Bulldogs held time and time again playing with inspiration and perspiration.

With the clock winding down, Mars Hill coach Felton Stephens called on placekicker Chris Jones, who had missed two field goals already, to win the game. In a show of confidence in Jones, Stephens let the clock wind down to 6 seconds, and then gave him the nod. Jones lined up, kicked, and watched as the ball hit the right upright, bounced down and hit the crossbar, and fell into the endzone, killing the Lions hopes with it. Final score Bulldogs 16, Mars Hill 14. The victory raised Gardner-Webb's record to 6-4 (4-3 SAC-8).

For the Bulldogs, Darrell Middleton ran for 113 yards, raising his school-record to 3,823 yards. Darrell needs 177 yards to reach 4,000 yards in his career, a mark that only the best can attain. Jeff Parker, ranked third all-time in NAIA history for number of field goals, needs 4 fields to tie the all-time record held by Tim Saiz of New Mexico Highlands.



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