

### Tar Heels lose 26-24 to Mississippi State

# Steamy Sun Bowl clouds UNC football finale

by Elliott Warnock  
Sports Editor

EL PASO, Tex. — Amidst swirling wind devils of steam and swarming maroon and white football jerseys, the 1974 North Carolina football season came to a halt.

The Mississippi State Bulldogs, led by Southeast Conference player-of-the-year, quarterback Rocky (the Flying Squirrel) Felker, optioned and sprinted their way past the Carolina Tar Heels, 26-24, in the 40th annual Sun Bowl.

Carolina's loss ended all hope of an Atlantic Coast Conference team posting a bowl victory. North Carolina State had the best post-season performance, tying Houston, 31-31 in the Astro-Blue Bonnet Bowl, while Maryland lost a 7-3 squeaker to Tennessee in the Liberty Bowl.

The Sun Bowl was everything expected as a game: high-powered offenses banging heads up and down the field. What wasn't expected were six inches of snow on El Paso two days before the contest.

As the snow began to melt and steam rose

off the heating Astro-Turf, it became apparent Carolina would have to stop State's explosive veer if the Tar Heels were to keep the score below 100 points. MSU had two (that's right, count 'em) tailbacks that tore around the ends of Carolina's defense for 347 combined yards.

Walter Packer ripped for 183 yards in 24 carries as he rolled his way to a new bowl record, and Terry Vitrano hit the line 20 times for 164 yards to capture the game's MVP award.

Vitrano set up the first State TD as he blasted 55 yards on a pitch-out. Packer got the score with a one yard run.

The Heels punched out 80 yards on their next possession behind the running power of James Betterson and Mike Voight. Carolina's own double set of tailbacks, plus a 46-yard bomb from senior quarterback Chris Kupec to split end Pat Norton. Betterson dove one yard with 9:43 left in the first period to bring the Heels even with the Bulldogs.

Vic Nichols gave State its 10-7 halftime lead as he kicked a 24-yard field goal early in the second quarter.

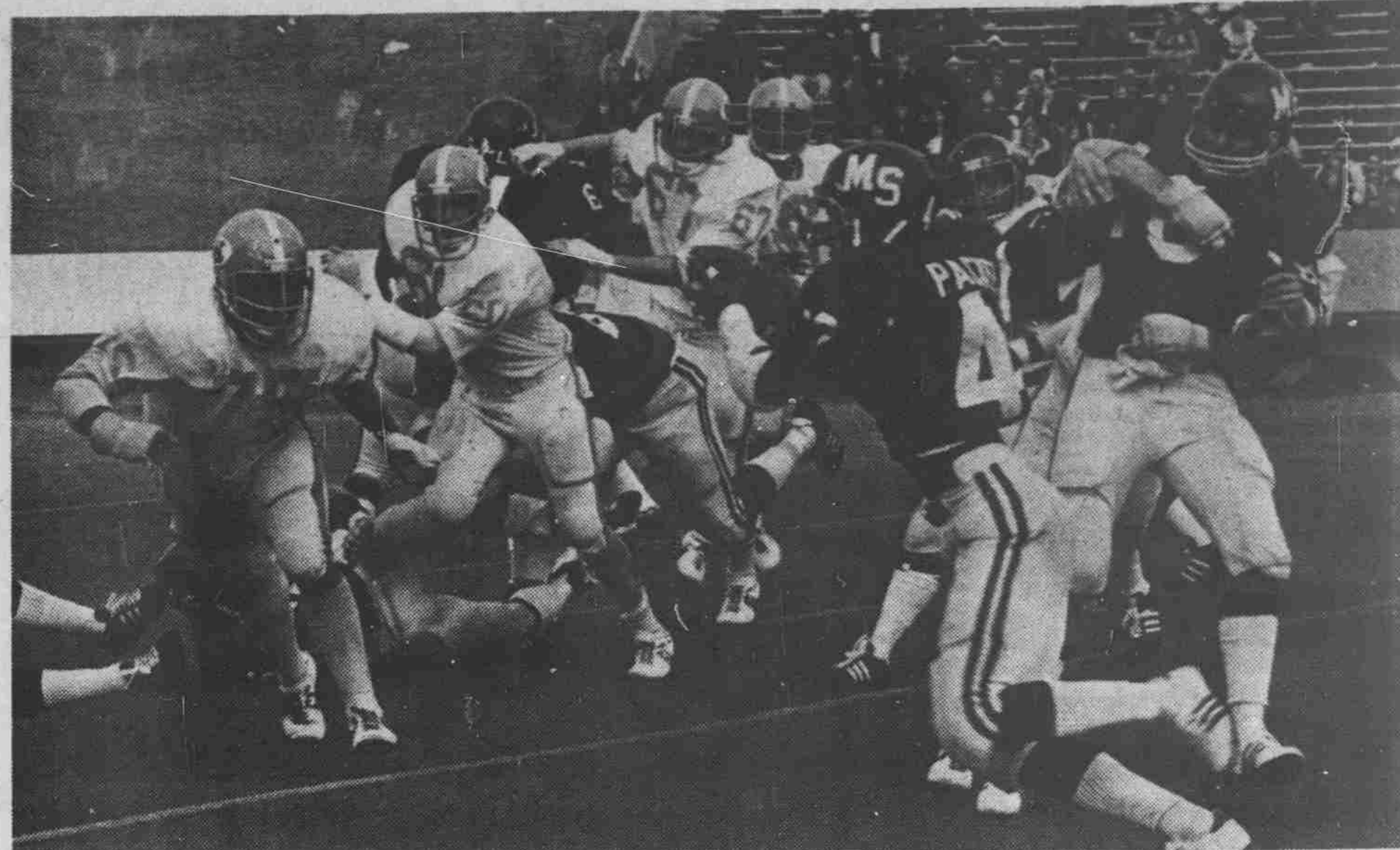
Carolina nabbed the lead in the second half as Betterson ran 45 yards with the opening kickoff, then finished the drive with a six-yard sweep to the left for the TD. Ellis Alexander's PAT was good for a 14-10 UNC lead.

Even with a new version of the 5-2 monster defense, Carolina barely slowed Vitrano and Packer on Mississippi State's next possession. It took the Bulldogs only 2:06 to move 69 yards in six plays to recapture the lead at 17-14.

The Tar Heels got their biggest break of the game in the third quarter as Vitrano fumbled the ball on UNC's 45, giving Carolina excellent field position. Carolina made the best of a good situation, driving the 55 yards to the goal line in 2:51, capped with a 29-yard pass from Kupec to wingback Jimmy Jerome.

Alexander's conversion gave UNC a 21-17 lead, but Nichols closed the gap to one point as he booted a 32-yard field goal to make the score 21-20.

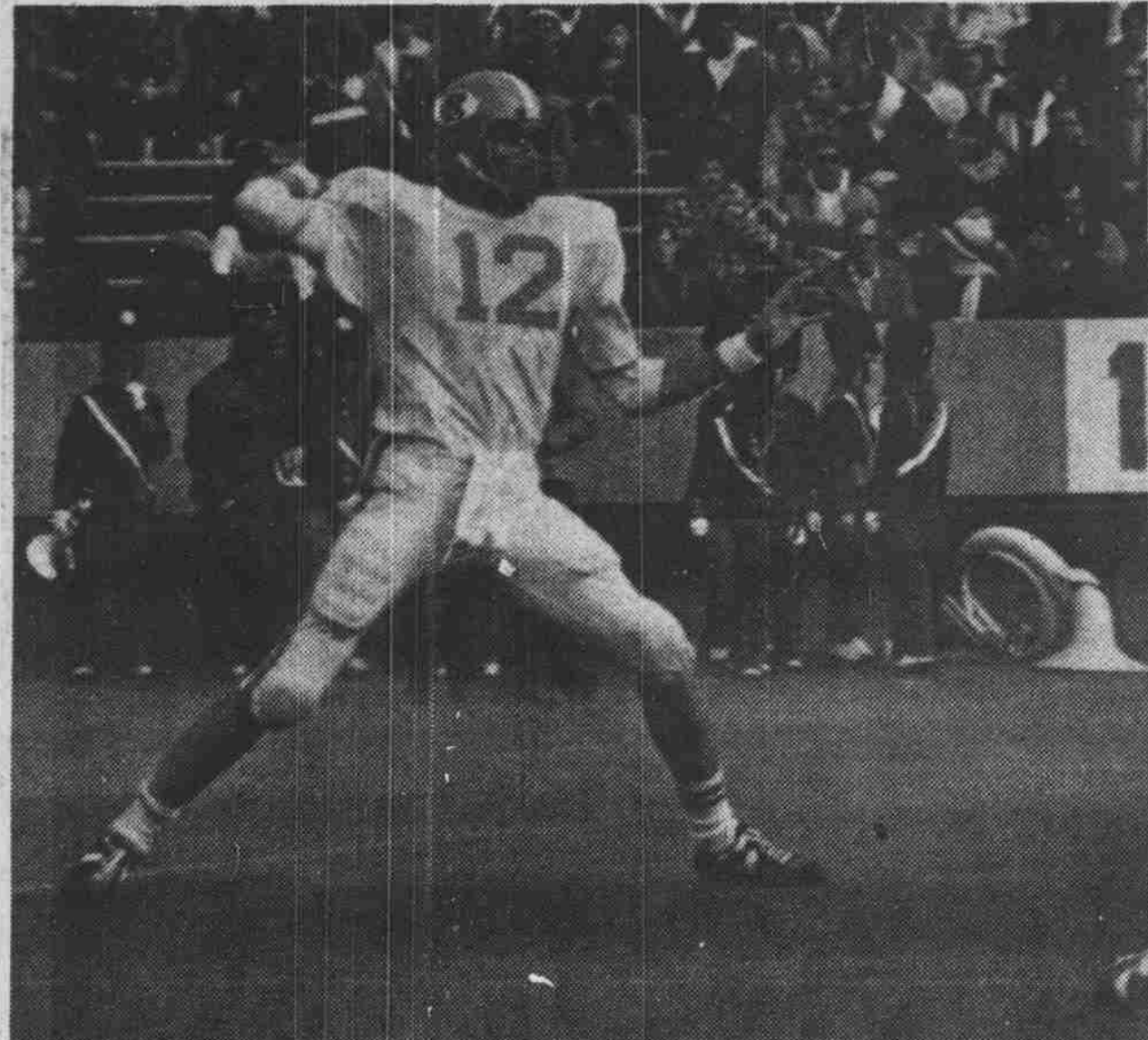
Carolina padded the lead to 24-21 as



Carolina's defense ...

... tries to cut off Mississippi State's fleet tailback, Walter Packer. Spending most of his time sprinting around the outside of UNC defense, Packer rolled up 183 yards on the

ground and set a new Sun Bowl rushing record. Packer's fellow tailback Terry Vitrano won the game's MVY trophy. (Staff photo by Gary Lobraico)



Quarterback Chris Kupec ...

... finished his senior year at Carolina in the Sun Bowl. Kupec set a NCAA record for pass completion percentage this season, connecting on just slightly less than 70 per cent of his passes. The New York native passed for 125 yards and one TD in the Sun Bowl. (Staff photo by Gary Lobraico)

Alexander kicked a 27-yarder in the fourth quarter.

Felker, whose play-calling had kept the Tar Heels at bay for most of the game, lived up to his SEC prestige and ran a quarterback keeper up the middle for 15 yards and set up Vitrano's two-yard TD run, giving MSU a 26-24 lead with only 3:41 to play. Nichols missed the extra point, and Carolina hopes were heightened as Alexander warmed up his leg on the sideline.

But the Bulldogs stopped the subsequent Carolina drive on a crucial fourth down and

one-yard-to-go situation. Stalled on their own 48, the Heels went to Voight on an off-tackle play, but the State defense read the play quickly and stacked Voight up for no gain.

"We went with our best play," commented senior tight end Andy Chacos after the game. "but their linebacker (Ray) Costict pointed right at the place the play was supposed to go. They just poured in there."

Voight finished the game with 90 yards in 17 carries to lead the Tar Heels in rushing,

while James Betterson carried 19 times for 84 yards. Fullback Dickie Oliver, who had one of his best days blocking and running, netted 57 yards in nine carries.

Kupec led the game in passing, completing five of 15 attempts for 125 yards and one touchdown.

"It has been a pleasure for us to come back to the Sun Bowl," stated UNC coach Bill Dooley afterwards. "I'm just terribly disappointed we came up on the short end of the score."

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