

# The Georgia Armada

By Ray Schmidt

This writer has frequently used the claim that his subject was yet another "forgotten" outstanding team of the past. But that's exactly the description for a team that, despite a national Top Ten ranking, was rated no better than third best in their own region. It was a squad that teemed with an amazing array of outstanding running backs who could beat you with speed and power. They impressed knowledgeable football observers wherever they played yet, because they lost the two biggest games on a very tough schedule, they have been lost in college football's past. They were the 1931 Georgia Bulldogs.

As Coach Harry Mehre prepared Georgia for the 1931 season he had to be pleased with the team's prospects. From a fine 7-2-1 team in 1930 he had back an outstanding quarterback in Austin Downes; the great Catfish Smith at end; and fullback Jack Roberts, who carried the nickname of "The Ripper". The other leading backs included Homer Key and Spurgeon Chandler at left-half; Buster Mott and Marion Dickens at righthalf; Lloyd Gilmore and Jodie

Whire at fullback; and Sully Sullivan at quarterback. The line was anchored by guards Milt "Red" Leathers and Red Maddox, with Bobby Rose at left tackle. Everyone in the South knew the Black and Red of Georgia was going to be a powerhouse in 1931.

Georgia opened the season on a very hot Oct. 3 by hosting VPI. The Bulldogs took the opening kickoff and, paced by the "slashing runs" of Roberts, marched 65 yards with "The Ripper" blasting in from 4 yards out for the TD. With a 13-0 lead in the second quarter tackle Jim Hamrick of the Bulldogs intercepted a pass and rambled 70 yards for the TD that started the avalanche. Later Whire dashed 24 yards to a TD, while Key and Dickens broke off several nice runs each as Georgia wrapped up the 40-0 victory.

The VPI game had been primarily a tuneup, but in this opener Coach Mehre defined the starting backfield as Downes, Chandler, Dickens and Roberts; with the second backfield consisting of Sullivan, Mott, Key and Whire. Except for injuries during the season these units would remain intact. After the game Coach Orvill Neal of VPI sounded a warning to the South when he said "I don't know who can stop Georgia. They have a great football team."

The second week of the season found the Bulldogs up in New Haven to play Yale and their "superstar" Albie Booth. After a scoreless first period Yale had the ball on their own 45 and Tommy Taylor dropped back to pass. Catfish Smith hit Taylor as he released the ball and the wobbly toss was grabbed by guard Red Leathers of Georgia, who proceeded to dash 40 yards to the TD. On the following kickoff Booth broke loose and raced 80 yards to the Georgia 21. Yale then advanced to the 2 yard line but lost the ball on downs. A couple possessions later Georgia started from their own 26 after a punt. On the first play Homer Key "started through the right and cut back. He was surrounded by blue-clad players. He shuttled in and out like a white needle in a haystack of blue, and finally he shot out and streaked for the goal" to cap off the brilliant 74-yard TD run, and Georgia led 13-0 at halftime.

Early in the third quarter Booth threw a 7-yard TD pass to get Yale on the board, but this was the extent of the damage done by Albie. Smith played a great game on defense for Georgia and repeatedly tackled Booth so hard that, in the words of Ralph McGill of the Atlanta Constitution, "one could almost fancy one heard Booth's teeth rattling like castanets." Then in a great put-down of Eastern football, the writer added that "Albie Booth is just a good little halfback such as most any good football team has."

In the fourth quarter a short punt gave Georgia good field position, and on the first play Austin Downes rifled a pass to Key for a 27-yard TD. A short time later Dickens intercepted a Booth pass at the Yale 29, and then Georgia marched it in with Gilmore blasting in for the TD to round off the

26-7 win for Georgia. Key, Gilmore and Smith had been the big stars for the day, but Coach Mal Stevens of Yale offered that "Downes is a great player. He is, I think, the best quarterback who ever played in the Yale Bowl."

The following Saturday Georgia was on the road again at North Carolina where they defeated the Tar Heels 32-7. Carolina stunned Georgia when Bill Croom dashed 53 yards to a TD within the first two minutes of play, but the Bulldogs marched right back and got on the board with Buster Mott's 23-yard TD gallop. Chandler dashed to a 41-yard TD, but it was the speedy Homer Key who again ran wild all day and chipped in a pair of TD's.

Then came a rugged Vanderbilt team that was well prepared and did a great job of containing the Georgia attack (only 163 yards of total offense), continually keeping the Bulldogs backed-up with quick kicks. Georgia was nursing a 2-0 lead in the third quarter when Downes hauled in a punt and raced it back 57 yards to the Vandy 8 yard line, on a run the Constitution called "one of the most beautiful pieces of footwork one will ever see." After three shots into the line gained nothing, Chandler lofted a pass into the end-zone where Smith went over four defenders to grab the toss for the TD, and Georgia escaped with a 9-0 win. Roberts did the major ground gaining in this struggle, while Dickens stood out with his excellent open field tackling. The following week, with Downes and Chandler being rested, Georgia trounced Florida 33-6 in a game that featured a 56-yard TD dash by Mott and a 46-yard TD run by "Ripper" Roberts.

Now it was time to travel to New York City for the battle at Yankee Stadium against an excellent NYU team. Georgia was in probably their best physical condition of the season but Mehre feared NYU, which had suffered their first defeat of the season just the week before against Oregon. Immediately in the first quarter the Bulldogs were stung by the ferocious NYU running attack that was led by Bill Abee and Bob McNamara. The Violet threatened three times in the opening quarter alone, the first being set-up when Chandler's punt attempt from short formation was blocked at the Georgia 24. But the Bulldog defense held and took the ball back on their 20. Shortly after this NYU staged a long march to the Georgia 11 that was stopped only when Chandler intercepted a pass in the end-zone.

But at the start of the second period Joe Lamark of NYU connected with McNamara on a pass play good for 45 yards to the Georgia 4. Two plays later and McNamara blasted in for the TD. On the extra point attempt Red Maddox roared in and blocked the kick by Tanguay and so NYU led 6-0. The rest of the first half NYU continued to pound the Georgia line with runs, while on defense they played 8 men up near the line as they dared the Bulldogs to pass, yet Coach Mehre stayed with his running game.

To open the second half Tanguay kicked off for NYU and the ball came down to Buster Mott on the 3 yard line and, as Ralph McGill wrote: "there was no hint that he was to make football history". Mott started upfield behind a wedge of blockers, and at the 35 a swarm of NYU tacklers closed in, "suddenly, as if propelled forward by some sudden impetus, there popped out of the mass four running figures and with them Mott, running like a frightened deer". Buster put it in over-drive and sped down the sideline and into the end-zone to finish off his 97-yard TD runback. Catfish Smith calmly kicked the PAT and Georgia led 7-6.

The Georgia defense then began holding up NYU, while the Bulldogs twice recovered third period fumbles at the NYU 20 yet failed to score. In the final quarter NYU started from their own 33, and paced by McNamara's 35-yard run,

drove to a fourth down and goal at the Georgia 1 yard line. Here Abee blasted off tackle, where the Catfish met him and held him up till four other tacklers swarmed him under to dodge the NYU bullet. A short time later Chandler recovered a fumble at the Georgia 15 to stop another threat, and with a minute to play Austie Downes intercepted an NYU pass at the Georgia 28 to seal the 7-6 win for the Black and Red. Grantland Rice wrote that "the battle was one of the most exciting of the year for the losers were always threatening to win and the winners were just strong enough to repel every thrust." Ralph McGill wrote that "the flying feet of Buster Mott nullified all the furious and weary labor the New-York team had spent."

And so it was back home for the long-awaited showdown with a great Tulane team, led by Coach Bernie Bierman, that featured a galaxy of stars that included names like Jerry Dalrymple, Don Zimmerman and Nellie Felts. With a massive crowd overflowing the grandstands and crowding around the sidelines, Tulane went on offense first but a fumble was recovered by Smith at the Tulane 27. A big 17-yard gain by Roberts gave Georgia a first down at the 5-yard line, but four plays later and Tulane had the ball back, still on the 5. Felts punted well out of danger and the momentum was lost for Georgia. A short time later Tulane staged a short 45-yard drive, capped off by a Zimmerman to Haines 33-yard TD pass play, for a 7-0 lead.

In the second quarter Tulane again took over in great field position and staged a 47 yard drive. The key play was a pass interference penalty to give the Green Wave the ball on the 1 yard line, from where Felts plunged

in for the TD and a 13-0 lead. Georgia had not threatened in the first half, as Harry Glover's quick kicks kept them backed up in their own end and also produced the excellent Tulane field position on their scoring drives.

Early in the third quarter, with a fourth down and one at their own 36, the Bulldogs gambled and were successful. Then at their own 40 Homer Key rolled out and launched a long pass to Mott, who took it in stride at the 30 and outran Zimmerman into the end-zone for the 60-yard TD. Suddenly it was 13-7. But midway thru the quarter a short punt gave Tulane the ball on the Georgia 29. On a double-lateral play Payne sped around left end behind great blocking and raced 23 yards to a TD.

When the game ended Tulane had a 20-7 win that all but guaranteed the Dixie championship and ultimately a bid to the Rose Bowl. As Ralph McGill wrote: "Georgia's dream of empire came to an end on a smoke-filled field." Tulane had clearly been the better team with speed, power and a superior line. Buster Mott had played a great game on offense and defense, while Dalrymple of Tulane clinched his All-American spot with his play before most of the top national football writers. Grantland Rice wrote that "Tulane's fast, versatile attack was far beyond anything the east or the south has shown".

Following the back-to-back major struggles there was no relief in sight, as Georgia next took on a fine young Auburn team. Georgia totally dominated play, but their two early drives were stopped by fumbles and so it was scoreless at the half. On their first possession of the second half Georgia staged a 62-yard drive, the big play a 29-yard run by Key, that was capped off by a 5-yard TD run up the middle by Whire. Later in the third quarter Mott plunged in for the TD that provided the winning margin in Georgia's 12-6 win.

Then came the annual war with rival Georgia Tech. Lloyd Gilmore dashed 29 yards to a TD; Chandler faked a pass and then sprinted 76 yards to his second TD of the day; and Dickens took a little screen pass from Sullivan and raced 49 yards to a score as Georgia took a convincing 35-6 victory. The Bulldogs concluded the 1931 season with a trip out to Los Angeles to tangle with eventual national champion Southern California. The Trojans concentrated their awesome ground attack on the Georgia tackles. while they double-team blocked Catfish Smith on every play to his side. The result was that USC scored four TD's on the same reverse play to the strong side of their unbalanced line. The Trojans scored two TD's in the first nine minutes of play and Georgia's 60-0 defeat stunned all of Dixie.

So the curtain rang down on an excellent 8-2 year for the 1931 Black and Red of Georgia. In the final Dickinson National Ratings the Bulldogs were awarded the #6 spot in the country; some idea of the strength of Southern football in 1931 is seen as Tulane was rated #2 nationally and Tennessee #3. On the All-Southern team selected in a poll of writers from the major Southern newspapers Catfish Smith was the only Georgia player to get a First Team spot. When it came to All-America recognition Smith was a First Team end on a long list of squads including: Grantland Rice, AP, Central Press, Boston Post and Consolidated Press; with a Second Team from NEA, UP and NANA. Milt "Red" Leathers received All-America guard recognition on the Hearst Second Team and the UP Third Team. Austin Downes was named to the UP Second Team and the

Central Press Third Team.

On offense the Bulldogs averaged 259.2 yards per game rushing and 40.0 passing. Their confidence in the running game is seen in that they were only 21 of 64 passing with 4 TD's for the entire season. On defense Georgia yielded per game figures of 155.2 yards rushing and 51.8 yards passing. The leading Georgia rushers for the season (figures for VPI game not available) were Mott with 60 carries for 358 yards; Key- 42 for 354 yards; and Roberts, injured much of the year, with 50 for 322 yards. Homer Key was the leading scorer with 7 TD's; Buster Mott- 5 TD's; Roberts, Dickens, Whire, Gilmore and Chandler all had 3 TD's each; and Catfish Smith scored 1 TD and 16 PAT's.

After the last game Ralph McGill summed up the 1931 Georgia football season best when he wrote that "the Red and Black still stands at one of the highest peaks ever attained by a southern football team. Defeat cannot erase the record which the team has made this year." The 1931 Georgia Bulldogs deserve to be remembered among the best of college football.

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