

SEMINOLE FOOTBALL: A POINT OF PRIDE

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It was a season for the hungry, a record-breaking one rivaled by only two others in Florida State football history. But the final '77 record of 10-2 topped, in many ways, the 9-1-1 of '64 and the 7-2-2 of '67.

For one thing, it was the Seminoles' first winning campaign since '72. For another, it was the first time they had beaten Florida since '67. Moreover, the Seminoles earned their first bowl bid since '71, and throttled Texas Tech 40-17 in the Tangerine.

The season of '77 was dominated, individually, by the extraordinary Larry Key, who became the first Seminole ever to run for more than 1,000 yards in one year.

Darling of the fans, who came to jangle their pocket keys in tribute to him and chant "Key, Key, Key—," he also blocked, caught passes, ran back kickoffs and evolved into an inspirational leader by example. Key finished Florida State with 2,953 regular-season rushing yards behind him, and annexed every possible Florida State running record.

It was also a season that saw perhaps the finest all-round corps of receivers in Florida State history terrorizing enemy secondaries, and one of splendid defense, with end Willie Jones

and freshman nose guard Ron Simmons notable ones.

But it may be remembered primarily as the season when the Seminoles demolished rival Florida 37-9 on the Gator's own home field, ending 10 years of frustration against this opponent.

A second season under Coach Bobby Bowden was again characterized by the comeback. In Bowden's first season the Seminoles had come from be-



hind, dramatically, to win their last five games and finish 5-6.

Florida State also came from behind in its first four games of '77—though the Seminoles finally fell in one of those, to Miami 23-17—and that made it seven consecutive games in which a Bowden team had rallied to go ahead, winning six of the seven.

The Seminoles came from behind to win in one other '77 game, Virginia Tech 23-21.

Considering the fact that in four previous seasons the Seminoles had won only nine games, that Florida had not fallen since '67, that the team was ranked a final 11th (UPI) and 14th (AP) nationally, it might have been Florida State's most prideful season.

Football got started at Florida State on a point of pride.

It was just after World War II. Many would-have-been students had gone to war as 18-year-olds.

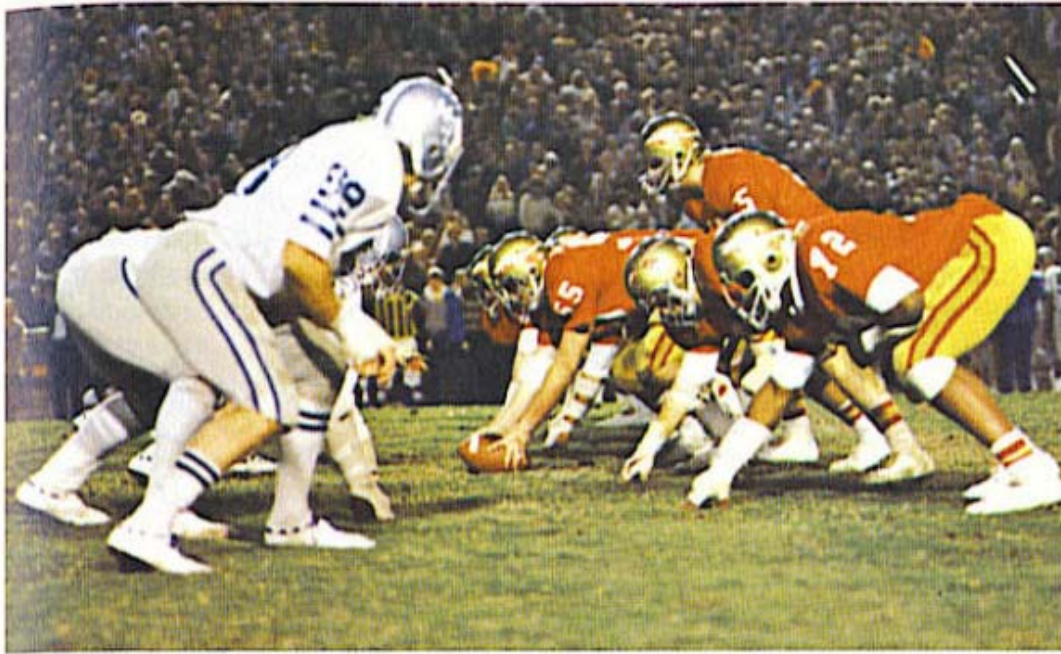
Colleges were swamped by returning veterans. There was no room for them all.

One of the multiple developments that came about was the evolution of Florida State into a co-educational institution—and the quick birth of modern football at the school.

In one form or another, however, Florida State had been around for a long time, since 1857 when it was first the Seminary West of the Suwannee. By 1861 it was Florida State College. In the year 1901 Florida State played its first football, and the schedule included winning games against a school that would become the University of Florida.

The scores and records of those early days are clouded, but Florida State continued with football through 1905. The passage of something called the Buckman Bill in 1905 meant wholesale change in Florida higher education. Florida State College became Florida Female College, and retained that name





until 1909 when it was rechristened Florida State College for Women.

After World War II the school became part of the answer for those returning veterans. Briefly, there was the Tallahassee Branch of the University of Florida, set up on what was called West Campus — previously the site of Dale Marby Field, where Air Force pilots were trained during the war. FSCW remained intact a couple of miles away, but the TBRUF boys attended classes on that campus.

Florida State University was born, by act of the state legislature, in the spring of 1947. And by September of that year Florida State had its first football team of modern time.

In a nutshell, football came to Florida State because those returning veterans demanded that it come — and as a point of pride. The student body, the townspeople promptly rallied around the cause. That rallying hasn't stopped yet.

Reflecting that early pride was a famed cheer. One story has it that the origin was an impromptu one, with an exuberant veteran rising to his feet in the stands during one of the first games and yelling: "FSU one time! FSU T-W-O times! FSU T-H-R-E-E times! FSU A-L-L the damned time!" The stirring yell continues unchanged, and has been copied by other schools.

Florida State's first coach was Ed Williamson, a Tallahassee native who played football at University of Florida. He agreed to take the job for one year only. A five game schedule was hastily drawn up. The Seminoles started proudly, losing an opening game 14-6 to Stetson in downtown Tallahassee, at old Centennial Field (a block from the State Capitol). Stetson was pretty good in those days, and fans quickly came to expect too much too soon. FSU scored only two touchdowns the rest of the way, and lost the remaining four games. Williamson resigned, as he had said he would, at season's end.

Florida State hired as his suc-

cessor Don Veller, a soft-spoken gentleman and scholar who had a doctorate and a distinguished football background. He had been a whiz running back for the University of Indiana under the great coach, Bo McMillan.

Operating with a formation called the Cockeyed-T, Veller quickly got Florida State football on the road. His first season was 7-1, his second 9-1, his third 8-0 and his fourth 6-2. Hard-nosed combat veterans contributed

significantly to those proud showings.

Moving toward the bigtime, Florida State started playing tougher opposition. In 1952 the Seminoles really moved into high cotton, and the result was a disappointing 1-8-1 record. Veller resigned, but remained at FSU in a prominent physical education role. He's still there. His overall FSU coaching record was 31-12-1, and it remains unmatched.



Along came Tom Nugent as the next coach. An imaginative man, a showman, Nugent brought with him a capacity for creating excitement. He also brought with him the "I" formation that many years later was to become so popular all over the country.

Nugent's 6-year record was 34-28-1 at Florida State. In his second year the Seminoles went 8-3 and earned an invitation to play in the Sun Bowl.

Among those who went to the Sun Bowl, after that '54 season, was a freshman running back name of Buddy Reynolds. A better than average runner,



Reynolds got hurt in an auto accident soon after. Later, after starting his acting career, Buddy (Burt) Reynolds was ready to give it all up for another fling at Florida State football. But after a brief period — he had a little problem playing defense in a day you had to go both ways — Reynolds returned to Hollywood and moved on the box-office fame.

Stars of the Nugent years were many, among them quarterback-halfback Lee Corso (now head coach at Indiana), and the notable triple-threat Bobby Renn, still generally regarded as the best all-round back in Florida State history.

Nugent's last year, 1958, was a memorable one. The record was 7-4, but it included a thundering 10-0 upset of Tennessee in Knoxville — one of the two or three biggest victories in Florida State history. It also was the first year that Florida State played Florida.

Maryland lured Nugent away, and the Seminoles hired Perry Moss, a Tulsa-reared former quarterback who had served as an assistant at several schools.

The 4-6 season of 1959 was a depressing one. The word leaked prior to the Homecoming game against William & Mary that Moss would leave to accept a lucrative offer in Canadian pro football, at Montreal — and the Seminoles were victims of a 9-0 upset that day. Still, with many players hurt, with morale supposedly shot, the Seminoles closed with a gutty 18-8 loss to a vastly superior Florida team.

Then came Bill Peterson as coach, and Florida State's most interesting decade of football. An Ohio native, Peterson had served under Paul Dietzel at Louisiana State in years that included a national-championship one in '58.

Peterson set out to "establish a defense" at Florida State, and did. Playing Florida the first six years of the series in Gainesville, Peterson's first two teams lost down there 3-0 and tied 3-3.

Those games rather typified an all-out defensive style. In '62 the Seminoles tied Kentucky, Georgia Tech and Auburn, beat Georgia 18-0 and finished 4-3-3, with defense much the name of their game. That battling team of '62 remains one of Peterson's favorites.

By '64 the Seminoles were rolling on offense — and now Peterson had made a vow to "throw the football — even if I have to fire every coach on my staff." And no team in college football over the next seven years threw the football as effectively as those Seminoles.

In spring practice of '64 a lanky quarterback named Steve Tensi threw to a quick and graceful Fred Biletnikoff . . . so often it became monotonous.

That fall, prior to the first kickoff, defensive players — the seven closest to the line of scrimmage — decided to shave their heads and proclaim themselves "The Seven Magnificents." Avery Summer, a tackle, instigated the move. (During the season that followed, the seven got so much attention players in the secondary came to dub them-

selves "The Forgotten Four.")

With high dedication, Florida State shut out its first three foes of '64. In the fourth game, Kentucky — unbeaten, untied, ranked No. 4 in the nation — came to town. Florida State startled the football world by clobbering the Wildcats 48-6.

That game is rated by many as Florida State's greatest victory.

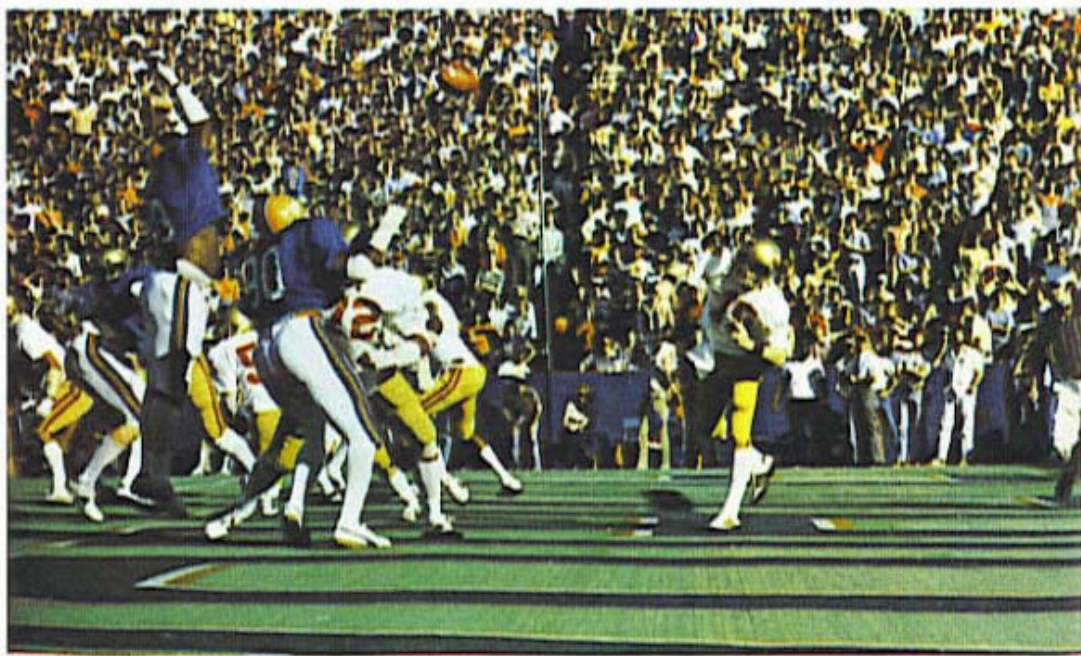
But "The Seven Magnificents" cried after the game — because Kentucky had managed to score on them after recovering a fumbled punt down deep near game's end.

The Seminoles' passing game that day was peerless. For the remainder of the season it was much — in Peterson's words — "like stealing." The regular season ended 8-1-1, the lone loss to Virginia Tech, the tie with Houston on a day when Biletnikoff was hurt. The Seminoles took their first-ever victory over Florida 16-7, with Biletnikoff scoring on a Tensi bomb and Les Murdock kicking three field goals.

Florida State capped that big year by taking Oklahoma apart in the Gator Bowl 30-17 as Biletnikoff caught four touchdown passes. (Still catching 'em with the pro Oakland Raiders, Biletnikoff was acclaimed the game's most valuable player after the 1977 Super Bowl.)

Another rather unbelievable season came in '67. Following a crushing 33-13 opening loss at Houston, the Seminoles tied Alabama 37-37 in Birmingham — surely one of the great football games of all time.

It was another sensational passing combination — Kim Hammond to Ron Sellers — that got the job done. ABC-TV was doing a documentary on Alabama Coach Bear Bryant at the time. The shocking tie at FSU hands took up much of the film that was later shown on national television. There was a memorable moment when a stunned Bryant, his team down 14-0, was hollering to his players: "What's going



on out there — what the HELL is going on out there!”

With Sellers and Hammond going their big thing, Florida State won the last seven games of '67, then tied Penn State 17-17 in the Gator Bowl.

Going 8-2 in '68, the Seminoles again got a bowl bid, playing LSU in the Peach. That was the fourth bowl for Peterson in a 5-year span.

In 1969 the record was 6-3-1 and in '70 it was 7-4. Peterson resigned after the year to become head coach and athletic director at Rice.

The Seminoles hired Larry Jones, another former Paul Dietzel aide, as the new coach. In 1971, with Gary Huff throwing to Barry Smith, Florida State finished a strong 8-3 and played Arizona State in the first Fiesta Bowl, falling 45-38 in an extraordinary offensive battle.

In '72, with high expectations, the Seminoles won their first four. Then injuries took a heavy toll. The final record was 7-4, with South Carolina springing a

24-21 upset at the end and knocking the Seminoles out of a Peach Bowl bid.

Disaster came in '73. The Seminoles won none. It was a combination of many things that wrought an all-losing season, including the graduation of several pro-type players. But it stemmed notably, many feel, from an unsettling aura of ill publicity prior to the season's start.

Jones left after that season. Darrell Mudra, with a successful background at smaller schools, was hired. Mudra teams went 1-10 and 3-8. A highlight, reflecting familiar Seminole pride, was a first-year loss at Alabama 8-7. It was a stunner that Florida State not only could have won but, in the view of most, should have won.

When Mudra departed after the '75 season, Bowden was hired. Notably successful as head coach of West Virginia, Bowden had strongly wanted to return to Florida State where he had served as an assistant under Peterson for three years.



Bowden's dramatic first-year showing included a 28-9 upset of then-unbeaten Boston College up there, and an "almost" victory over Florida — the Seminoles lost 33-26. Larry Key put himself in the Florida State's record book as the leading Seminole ground-gainer of all time as he racked up more than 700 yards in his junior season.

It says something favorable about Florida State that Bowden would leave West Virginia to come here. Something favorable is also said in the fact that three former coaches — Williamson, Veller and Peterson — live in Tallahassee.

Nugent returned here to live after his coaching time at Maryland, but now is associated with Florida Tech in a public relations role. Moss is now on the staff of the University of Kentucky, and Jones on that of the University of Kansas. Mudra is now head coach at Eastern Illinois.

One of Bowden's top aides is Bob Harbison, a fixture at Florida State. He's served with every head coach except Williamson, the first one. Harbison has been associated with 29 of the Seminoles' 31 seasons.

Florida State's 32nd year of football will be a continuing point of pride with those World War II veterans who started it all. Most of them are still around, too.

