

**North Carolina Central loses heartbreaker**

Tanner's 37-yard field goal gives North Alabama the Victory

*By Donal Ware*

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DURHAM, N.C., Nov. 19, 2005 – North Alabama kicker Beau Tanner lost his starting job just two games into the season after missing two field goals. He started Saturday's Division II second-round game against North Carolina Central, but after having two consecutive kickoffs go out of bounds he was replaced by place-kicker Yuta Fukuda.

However, after Fukuda missed two field goals during the course of the game, Lions head coach Mark Hudspeth decided to call upon Tanner to attempt a field goal with four seconds remaining.

It turned out to be the right decision.

Tanner's 37-yard field goal as time expired lifted the Lions over the Eagles 24-21 before a crowd of 7,188 at O'Kelly-Riddick Stadium. The Lions will now play Central Arkansas in the semifinals next Saturday.

"I was really nervous to tell you the truth going in," said Tanner who is now 1-for-3 on the season in made field goals. "I hadn't kicked all year, but they were confident in me and I went in there and did my job."

North Alabama (10-2) got off to a fast start, getting a 32-yard kickoff return from Jaron Fountain. The Lions scored just four plays later on a Vinnie Saylor to Fountain touchdown pass and catch 1 minute, 50 seconds into the game, taking a 7-0 lead.

Conversely, the Eagles couldn't move the ball on their first possession. They drove to the Lions' 12-yard-line on their second, but quarterback Adrian Warren was hit by Derrick Chatman. Warren fumbled the ball and the Lions recovered, thwarting the Eagles drive.

By that time the Eagle defense had come to life. After an interception by defensive end Jermicus Banks gave the Eagles their best field position to that point, a five-play, 19-yard scoring drive was capped off by an Adrian Warren to Charles Futrell nine-yard touchdown pass, tying the score at 7-7 early in the second quarter. The last big play and score of the half for the Lions was an Anthony Merritt 61-yard touchdown catch, giving the Lions 14-7 lead. For the remainder of the half the Eagles defense shut the Lions down, while the offense began to move the football behind the running of Greg Pruitt, Jr., who had 93 yards rushing in the first half.

"In the first half, the way Greg was running the football, he was the best football player on the field by far. He was playing faster than anyone on the football field," said Eagle head coach Rod



DURHAM, N.C. - North Carolina Central running back Greg Pruitt, Jr., rushed for 118 yards on 32 carries, but had just 25 yards in the second half as the Eagles fell to North Alabama 24-21 in the second round of the NCAA Division II Playoffs. Photo by Ken Shipp of All-Pro Photo for HBCSports Press Association.

Broadway. "It wasn't surprising that he was having the success that he had. We challenged the team at halftime that everybody play at that level. Greg's a warrior."

Pruitt racked up 22 yards rushing during the Eagles seven-play, 92-yard drive. Futrell, who is also the Eagles' backup quarterback, scored on a 39-yard touchdown run off right end, tying the score at 14-14 midway through the second quarter. Pruitt added 25 more yards on the Eagles last scoring drive of the game. Warren found Torey Ross (8 rec., 89 yards) from four yards out, giving the Eagles their third-straight score and a 21-14 lead. The Eagles had one more chance to score before the half, but Brandon Gilbert's 32-yard field goal sailed wide right.

"You are going to hit some field goals you are going to miss some field goals," said Broadway. "That didn't have any bearing on the ballgame."

Although neither team scored in the third quarter, the Lions turned it up a notch defensively and the offense began to come to life behind the play of backup quarterback A.J. Milwee. They limited the Eagles to just 112 total yards in the second half and held Pruitt to 25 yards on 11 carries. Midway through the fourth quarter Milwee engineered an eight-play 79-yard drive that burned 4:10 off the clock and ended with DeMarcus Blount's 23-yard touchdown run tied the score at 21-21. The Eagles punted on their next possession, and North Alabama's Fukuda missed a 41-yard field goal attempt with 4:32 remaining.

At that point, the Eagles became conservative and inserted Futrell as quarterback on their final drive. On third and seven a draw to Pruitt went for no gain and the Eagles were forced to punt. The Lions started their game-winning drive with 1:38 remaining. On third and 16 with under a minute left in the game, Milwee found receiver Chip Long for a 10-yard completion, moving the Lions close enough to set up Tanner's field goal.

The two teams combined to amass 835 yards of offense.

"At halftime we sort of had a rallying meeting and I sort of challenged this football team and put it on the team," said Hudspeth. "How bad did they want to keep playing and they responded extremely well."

**Note:** This was the second time that North Carolina Central hosted a playoff game. In 1988 they hosted Winston-Salem State and defeated the Rams, before losing at Cal State Sacramento. The Eagles are 1-2 all-time in the playoffs.