

A sporting event of historical proportion in South Liberty County...

1945 FOOTBALL GAME AFFECTS MANY FOLKS IN SOUTH LIBERTY COUNTY

Phil Carrico



1945 Starting Offense, Hull-Daisetta Bobcats

Front L to R – Dick Sonnier, Phil Carrico, Chuck Hulsey
Back L to R – Wimpy Alford, J.B. Burwick, Harold Bay, Pot Rowell, Alton Enloe,
Jimmy Hudnel, Joe B. Farris, David Hornback, Robert Shivers

Preface:

It's high school football time in South Liberty County. With this column we are taking a peek into our past when the Bobcats of Hull-Daisetta had been the "King" of local football for many years. With this game the worm began to turn and a new chapter was about to begin.

There was a time in Mic's life when the world was fair and life was simple, the factors that governed this well ordered existence were, in hindsight, frightening to contemplate.

An assumed responsibility lay upon the shoulders of all the young men in Mic's community. The conditions of their existence were directly related to that responsibility. Of course not all the young men felt the pressure. The majority, who did, was involved in the high school's athletics.

Tradition, a bond with the past, was the monster that rode their back. Being a winner in athletics had put the small community on the map like nothing else could.

A winner was something to be proud of, something to brag about – a tradition to pass on to your children.

Now that's all well and good as long as you are not the party the tradition is passed to. In the case where you are that party, that responsibility had a tendency to disrupt your entire existence and can turn your life into misery.

The time was fall 1945, the place Hull-Daisetta and the activity – football.

Just five years previous HD had set the NATIONAL record for consecutive wins. By their exploits on the gridiron they had brought fame to the Big Thicket region of East Texas. The winning streak ended, but the expectations of the community and the tradition lived on.

On the successful completion of the 1944 football season the majority of both the senior and junior classes left school and went into the armed forces. (Remember the big one – WW 2)?

When the season of '45 rolled around, Mic, who had been a scrub on the previous year's district championship team, suddenly found himself a 128-pound starter. He, along with a large number of underclassmen was expected to fill some big shoes of the upper classmen who had departed. Mostly fifteen year olds who were still wet behind the ears were expected to respond to the Hull-Daisetta tradition – hoist the flag, carry the torch...

The sixth game was coming up. This game was against traditional rival, Liberty, and Hull-Daisetta had not lost to Liberty in 13 years. But this year Liberty was riding high with an outstanding team.

The game was played on November 1, 1945 at HD stadium before a fanatical hometown crowd. The final score was Liberty 31 - HD 0. The following morning Mic's body was found still clothed in his football togs, hanging from a stadium goal post.

Before you start to believe the above – don't...

Of course, you can believe it all except the punch line, the part about Mic – who did not exist and the suicide, which definitely did not happen. However, enough things did happen as a result of that loss – until almost everyone involved was affected to some degree.

After talking at length to many of my peers who actually participated in the game, the following comments, after all these years, are interesting.

STERLING GRIFFIN, RUNNING BACK - LIBERTY. "Through all our school years until that game, we had been in awe of Hull-Daisetta. We had always heard that even if you beat 'em on the field – you were sure to get your tail kicked after the game. We were just a little apprehensive".

Sterling laid his old year books aside and continued, "However, the week of that game coach Donahue became a demon. He had hyped us that entire week prior to the game and on the night of the game gave a Knute Rockne speech – we were hyped more for that game than any I had ever seen before or since".

Sterling said that, after the game was over there was a different feeling, "It was almost like we could feel their pain". He told me that after Liberty was ahead by more than 20 points he was still looking for HD to make a comeback.

HAROLD BAY, RUNNING BACK – HULL-DAISETTA. "In that week prior to the game something happened that I have always resented. Not only the school faculty,

but also the entire community seemed to be gearing us for a loss. They seemed to be afraid of what we would do in that case and were gearing us for moderation. I don't think that particular attitude has ever been seen in the HD community before or since".

"As for the team, I don't know if it was over confidence, but we seemed to think we would win the game by just showing up. In the game itself, Liberty was hyped and we were flatter than I've ever seen a team". (This was to be my last conversation with my old schoolmate. He passed away shortly after this interview. We had grown up together, played ball together and graduated together. He was a fine friend and a great Bobcat).

WESLEY 'POT' ROWELL, RUNNING BACK – HULL-DAISETTA. "In our case – no coaching. H.J. Taylor, who was a science teacher did the best he could, but most of the players know more about football than he did".

Pot, after reflecting, continued, "Of course most coaches were in the service at that time, so we can't really blame Taylor – we just got our tails kicked".

Of the game itself, Pot told me that Liberty's Sterling Griffin played the best game of high school football that night he had ever seen.

ALONZO PUGH, END – LIBERTY. Alonzo related that in his opinion the preparation and strategy of coach Donahue, along with desire, won the game for Liberty.

The coach's strategy was to use a five man defensive line to take advantage of some underweight interior linemen for the Bobcats. (Remember there were three sophomores on the Bobcat offensive line).

PHIL CARRICO, CENTER – HULL-DAISETTA. As for myself, I remember when the final whistle blew, I was standing in the middle of the field, a 128-pound sophomore who was bloody, beaten up and totally broken hearted with tears streaming down my face. A big Liberty lineman approached me hesitantly, then said, "Sorry man, it had to happen sometime". I watched his back as he slowly walked off with his head down.

Over the years, I've sometimes thought those boys from Liberty felt as bad about their win as we did about the loss.

Liberty went on to win district 26A that year, then lost to Nederland in bi-district. They placed three men on the all-district team, Griffin, Albrecht and Pugh.

Hull-Daisetta was runner up with a 5-3-1 record. They placed four men on the all-district team, Alford, Hornback, Rowell and Burwick. Two of those sophomores from the HD team made the all-district second team, Bay and Carrico.

Over the years there have been many memorable high school football games played in South Liberty County. However, the one played in HD stadium on November 1, 1945, in my opinion, affected almost as many people as did the one where HD lost to Humble to end their 43 game win streak in 1939.

POSTSCRIPT:

A few years after this game, the Bobcats who had began losing students as the oil boom played out, dropped to a lower bracket and seldom played Liberty anymore. However, the winning tradition continued. Some say that the decade of the 60's was a second "Glory Days" that compared favorably with the 30's. The Bobcats made

the State playoffs during that time and as everyone knows, won all the marbles in the late 70's for Liberty County's only State Championship in football.