

Sports

# Punched-out

# Non-ejection, injuries doom Tigers to Longwood in Suffolk quarterfinal

By MICHAEL ADAMS

The Northport football team went toe-to-toe with the Longwood Lions for much of their Suffolk Division I quarterfinal matchup, until one literal blow to the face shifted momentum towards the Lions, ultimately resulting in a loss of 28-7, eliminating the Tigers from the playoffs.

With the score tied at 7 heading in the second quarter, Longwood running back Latrell Horton punched Northport senior running back Ryan Elliott in the face while on defense. The hit, which came after Horton had already tackled Elliott, was ultimately allowed to slide with nothing more than a personal foul, penalized for 15 yards.

After a lengthy pre-game statement emphasizing the new, "Tommy Tough" Football Safety Standards—in which any player committing an illegal hit would be promptly ejected—the referees allowed Horton to stay in the game, the rationale being that he had merely struck Elliott's helmet with the butt of his open palm.

With regards to the referee's call on Horton's punching of Elliott, Northport coach Kip Lukralle later said he held no resentments. "The referee did what he felt was best for that moment," he said. "That kind of thing happens in-game, sometimes with some teams more than others. Honestly, I had no problem with that."

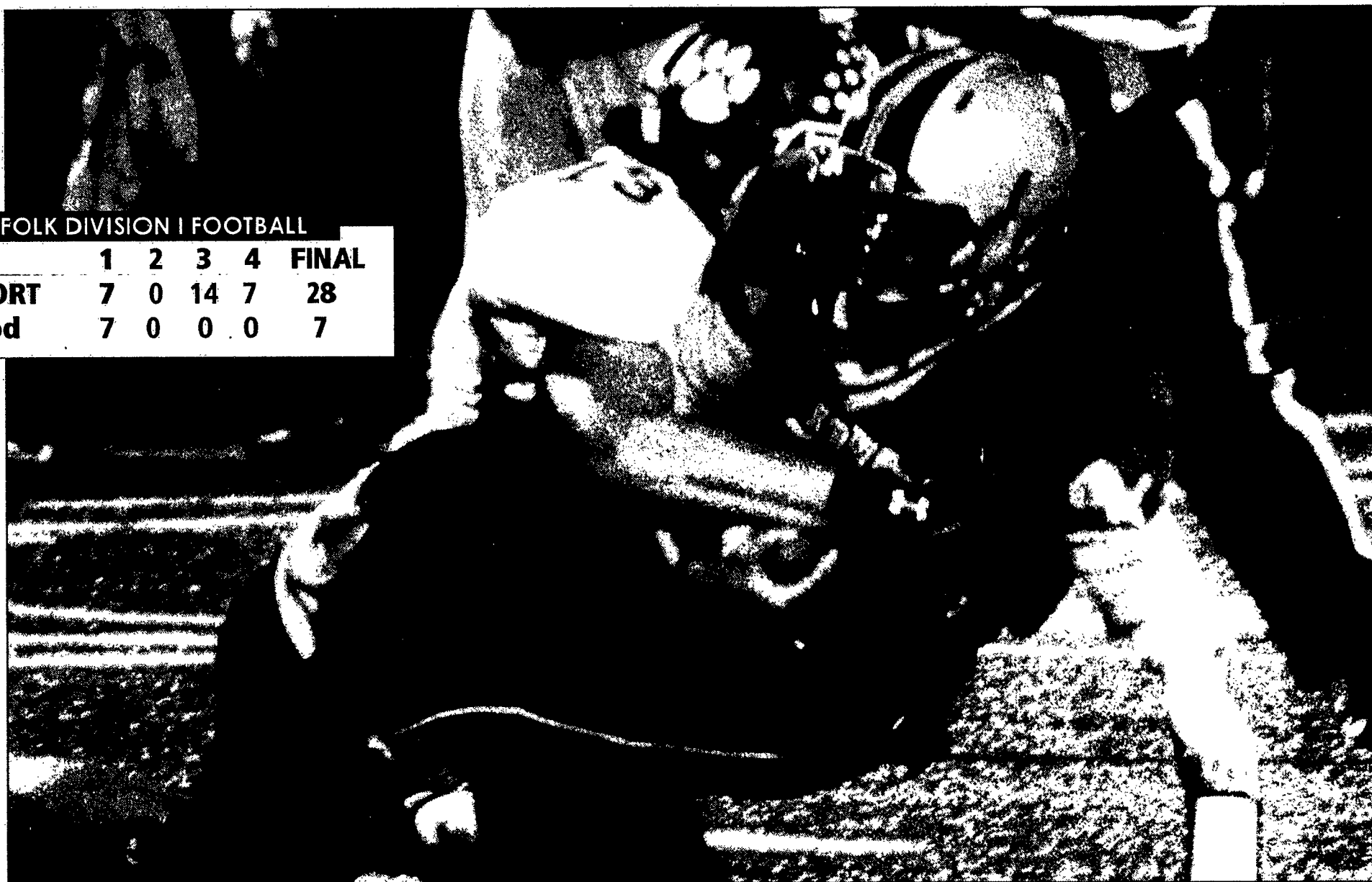
The non-ejection of Horton seemed to have energized both him and his team. Despite his role in scoring Longwood's lone first-half touchdown, Horton's early game was largely bereft of significant yardage. Once the third quarter started, the narrative changed entirely. Horton's first touch of the football came on a handoff he ran 73 yards downfield, being brought down just short of the goal line. A 2-yard push from Jake Murphy and a converted extra-point kick gave Longwood a lead they would never relinquish.

Northport suffered a number of injuries during the game, further compounding a health problem the Tigers had before they had even stepped on the turf. Lukralle said his team came into the game with "a tremendous amount of players banged up," the additional injuries only wore the team down that much more.

Perhaps most damaging

SUFFOLK DIVISION I FOOTBALL

	1	2	3	4	FINAL
<b>NORTHPORT</b>	7	0	14	7	28
<b>Longwood</b>	7	0	0	0	7



of all the Tigers' injuries was dealt to senior wingback Frankie Stola, who suffered a dislocated shoulder at the end of the second quarter. Losing Stola for the second half had a particularly damaging effect on the team as a whole, limiting Northport's running game to the point where the pass became the only viable offensive threat they had.

"Stola couldn't really go in the second half. He came in with both shoulders hurt already and still went out, but he dislocated his shoulder during the game. We just didn't have the manpower to run or stop the run."

Lukralle claimed the injury to Stola—who had 116 receiving yards on four receptions—made his team one-dimensional, predictable to the point where an interception by Longwood in the fourth quarter served to permanently seal any hopes of a comeback.

Ultimately, the injuries Northport sustained left it without the stamina to cope with the sheer physicality of Longwood's rushing attack. Horton in particular, who weighs in at 232 pounds, continued to burn the Tiger defense for big run after big run, finishing with two rushing touchdowns.

Longwood quarterback Jordan Harris added a touchdown on a rare passing play in between Horton's

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**HEAVY HITTER:** Northport junior defensive tackle Sam Gozelski (above, #73) makes a tackle and junior wingback Jason Aiello (below, #8) runs past a defender in the Tigers' 28-7 quarterfinal defeat at Longwood, Friday, November 4

-Mike Gozelski photos

