

# Sports

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## Freaky Friday

### Tigers toppled by early miscues; loses on road in Division I semis

By ANTHONY LIFRIERI

It just wasn't the Northport football team's day.

When a team allows two flukey touchdowns on the road in the first 90 seconds of play of the Suffolk Division I semifinals, it can't be expected to win.

Such was the case of the Northport football team, which fell behind 14-0, battled back to cut the deficit to 21-15, then lost 48-21 at Longwood, Friday, November 13.

"I don't think you can start a game any worse than that," Northport coach Kip Lukralle said. "Very few teams could have fought back from that. As much as it was a very negative event, the way our kids responded was very positive. It was kind of the way they responded all year. A lesser-character team would have just folded at that point."

On the first offensive play of the game, Longwood fullback Latrell Horton ran the ball up the gut, broke through the Tigers' front seven and scampered 75 yards for a touchdown and a 7-0 lead 19 seconds into the game.

Northport (6-4) tried to strike back on the ensuing drive, but ran into trouble after losing five yards on first down. On second-and-15 from the Northport 19-yard line, senior quarterback Andrew Smith dropped back to pass and rolled out to his left. Under duress, Smith threw the ball 15 yards down-field, but a Longwood linebacker tipped the ball. It traveled another five yards down-field and into the arms of defensive back Mike Linbrunner, who bolted for the end zone for a 30-yard pick-six and a 14-0 lead.

"There's no other way to deal with it, except to stay positive and focused, hope we can fight back into it, which we did," Lukralle said.

Despite the early setbacks,

the Tigers managed to claw their way back into the game. Late in the first quarter, Longwood was driving deep into Northport territory and seemed to be on the verge of going up by three touchdowns, but junior linebacker Andrew Havrilla forced a fumble that junior cornerback/running back Ryan Elliott recovered at his own 16-yard line, giving the Tigers new life.

Northport senior fullback Rob Dosch got the Tigers in gear on a second-and-8 from the Tiger-18, when he ran a draw-play up the middle for 17 yards, before senior running back Dan Preston gained another 22 running behind a convoy of Northport blockers. After a 25-yard pass from Smith to junior running back Frankie Stola, Preston punched it in from 7-yards out to cut the deficit to 14-7 seven seconds into the

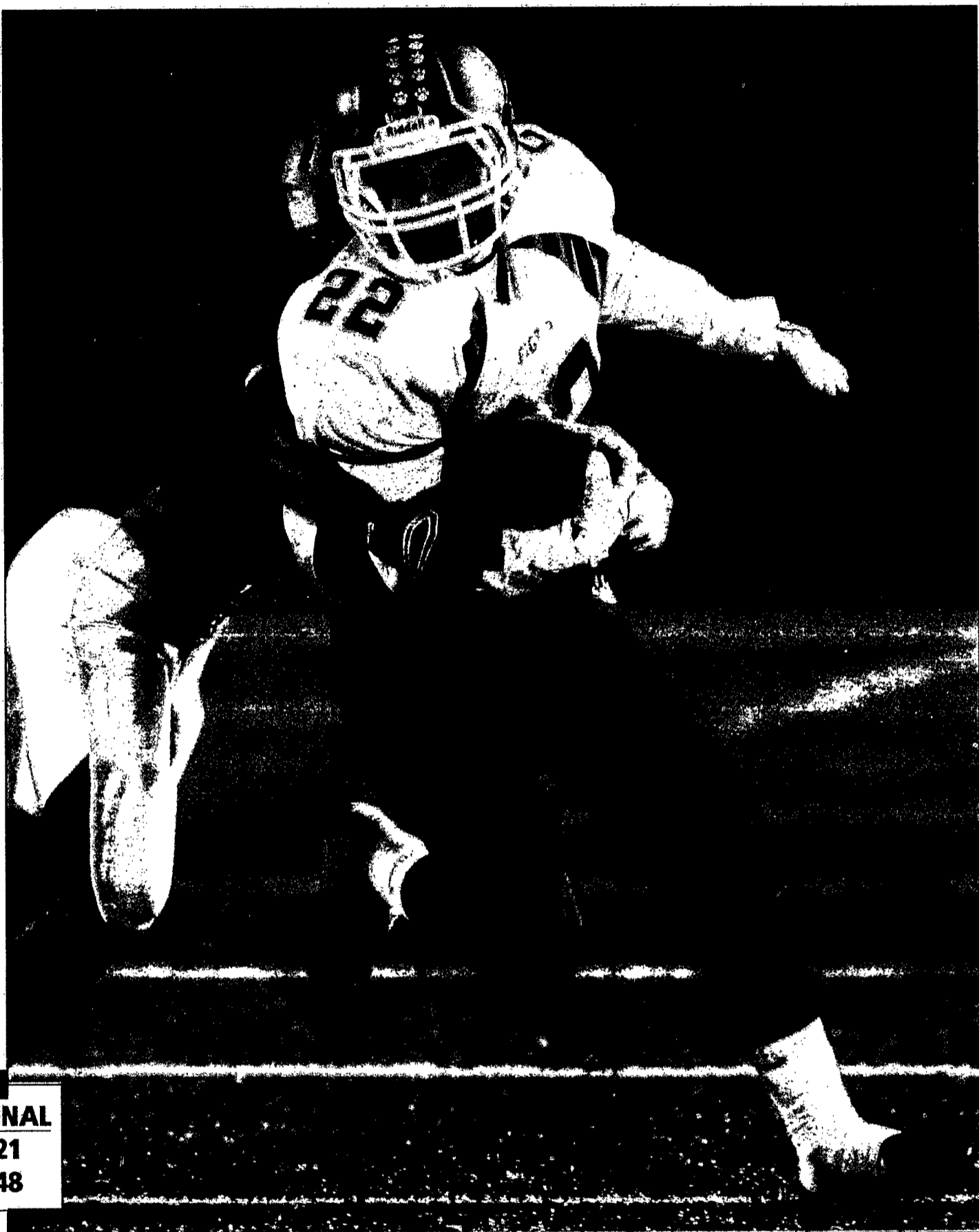
#### DIVISION I FOOTBALL PLAYOFFS

	1	2	3	4	FINAL
No. 3 NORTHPORT	0	15	0	6	21
No. 2 Longwood	14	15	6	13	48

second quarter.

Longwood answered back with a 31-yard touchdown run from running back Tahj Clark, who would torch the Tigers all game for four touchdowns and 253 yards on 19 attempts, but the Northport defense later forced a safety on a tackle by Havrilla in the end zone, cutting Northport's deficit to 21-9 with 4:41 remaining in the first half.

Northport took advantage of the extra possession following the safety. On a first-and-10 from the Longwood 26-yard line, Smith shuffled around the pocket to avoid the Lion pass-rush, then threw a rainbow-arched pass to senior wide receiver John Tabert in the end zone. Tabert, who beat the Lion defenders using a double move, ran to the back of the end zone, turned around,



Northport senior fullback Rob Dosch (#22) slips through the grasp of a defender (above) and receives a hand off from senior quarterback Andrew Smith (below, #3) in the Tigers' 48-21 semifinal loss at Longwood, Friday, November 13.

-Richard Valeo photos

leapt into the air and caught the pass before coming down in-bounds for the score, which cut the Tigers deficit to 21-15 with 1:42 left in the first half.

"That tells you what kind of kids we have," Lukralle said. "It's all about their commitment, their preparation and their perseverance."

Although Lukralle was proud of the way the Tigers cut the deficit, it was as close as they got. Longwood managed to score a touchdown just before halftime on a 9-yard run by Clark, who added a 45-yard touchdown midway through the third quarter to put his team ahead 42-15 after

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