

Bucket goes back 57 years

Morehead City ruled early years; East Carteret catching up during last 30 years of gridiron battles

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MOREHEAD CITY — On Saturday afternoons late in the fall, college football teams play in front of packed stadiums, while bands play and cheerleaders shout for treasured trophies with odd names like the Little Brown Jug, Paul Bunyan's Axe, the Old Brass Spittoon, the Bronze Boot, Wagon Wheel, Peace Pipe, Apple Cup and Victory Bell.

But for all their pomp and pageantry, none of these rivalry games could match the passion and fervor of a Friday night in Carteret County when Morehead City and Beaufort high schools battled on the football field for the trophy with an equally strange moniker, the Mullet Bucket.

Although austere in appearance, a wooden bucket painted grey with red lettering, for the players and fans separated by the Newport River, it was and still is more precious than rubies.

It is a time-honored tradition that in 2007 is entering its 57th year of existence, counting the old.

Recently the competition on the field

has been fairly even with West Carteret winning 16 and East Carteret capturing 14 Mullet Bucket titles in the last 30 years.

But in the beginning, it was Morehead City High that dominated the rivalry game.

During the 1950 school year, both Beaufort and Morehead City High suited up to play their first complete football seasons since the 1930s. Each school had cancelled their football programs during World War II.

Morehead City and Beaufort's junior chambers of commerce were responsible for putting the football programs back on their feet. The task was daunting though, with each group needing to raise \$1,000 for uniforms, lighting and other amenities.

But on Oct. 6, 1950, coach T.H.

McQuaid brought 25 young men in green-clad uniforms from across the causeway to Wade Brothers Park to take on coach Charles Hester and 22 Morehead City High Eagles, who were forced to play in their red practice uniforms because their new game uniforms hadn't arrived yet.

Whiteway Laundry washed the practice uniforms free of charge so the boys would look nice in the first rivalry game since 1941.

The near decade long break had done little to dampen the enmity between the two schools.

The News-Times reported on the day of the game, "Tradition demands that there may be a few fights ... whenever Beaufort and Morehead City meet on the gridiron."

Apparently, those fights were not relegated to the playing field.

One player commented, "The boys in Beaufort and Morehead City get along fine. We run around together, we date the same girls and we hang around the same spots. If there is ever any trouble in the football game, it will be with the spectators. They ruin every game ever played between Morehead City and Beaufort."

Anticipation was at an all-time high as "the largest sports turnout in Carteret County history is expected at 8 o'clock tonight," at Wade Brothers Park in Morehead City, the newspaper stated.

Nearly 3,000 spectators arrived at the ball field that was outfitted with new bleachers, benches and grandstand. Wallace Fisheries had donated the new goal posts.

Unfortunately, the fans were not rewarded with much of a game as the teams dueled to a 0-0 tie.

Morehead City's Clifton "Strug" Steed intercepted a Seadog pass near the goal line and returned it to the 41-yard line in the closing minutes to preserve the tie.

Strug nearly scored on the play but was brought down by Billy Downum in a game-saving tackle to prevent the winning touchdown.

Although the Eagles were the favorite entering the contest, they were outplayed by their cross county rivals, forcing Hester to remark, "Our boys were lucky to get off with a tie."

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