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Cardinals remember this Bird of another feather

By RUSS BROWN
Staff Writer

It wasn't his first and there have been lots of others since, but the touchdown Bill Bird will always remember came in his debut as a college football player four years ago in Cardinal Stadium.

Undoubtedly, it also made a lasting imprint on many University of Louisville players, a few of whom are still around and eager for tomorrow's 7 p.m. EDT rematch with Bird and his Murray State teammates.

With U of L leading 23-20 in the final seconds of its Sept. 1, 1984, game with Murray and the Racers backed up deep in their own territory, it looked as if the Cardinals would survive the visitors' strong upset bid.

Then Bird, a stocky, 5-foot-11 freshman fullback who had scored earlier on a three-yard run, took a screen pass from quarterback Kevin Sisk and scooted 75 yards for the winning touchdown with 27 seconds remaining, giving Murray a shocking 26-23 victory.

"That touchdown is always going to be in the back of my mind," said Bird, now Murray's starting tailback. "It was a great thrill."

When Bird caught the pass, all he wanted to do was get a first down and get out of bounds to stop the clock. "But then I saw an opening and just kept running," he said.

And running. "He looked like a little bowling ball running over peo-

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ple," U of L punter Kirk Kennedy recalled.

Bird can't remember how many tackles he broke. "I might have shattered a couple," he said. "I don't know."

Kennedy and U of L defensive tackle Chris Thieneman, both of whom were watching from the sideline, remember the play differently. "He broke at least seven tackles," Kennedy said.

"It was just a rinky-dink screen pass," Thieneman said. "Eleven guys tagged him; it looked like two-hand touch. I wasn't in the game, but even if I was, I wouldn't admit it. It wasn't the greatest defense I've ever seen."

Two? Seven? Eleven? When the story gets retold in a few years, Bird will have knocked down all 11 defenders, run through the band and eluded the Cardinal Bird at the goal line.

Whatever, the U of L players on the sideline were in a state of shock.

"They probably thought we weren't the caliber of team that could beat them," Bird said.

He's probably right. "We thought we already had it won," Thieneman said. "We were all celebrating."

Thieneman has called the loss "embarrassing," but it had ramifications beyond the red faces that re-

sulted from a Division I-A team being upset by a Division I-AA club from its own state.

It is generally regarded as the game that sealed the fate of U of L head coach Bob Weber, who was already under fire. His resignation — under pressure — didn't come for seven more games, but he said later that he believes he was doomed the instant Bird reached the end zone.

"We knew we had to start the season off with a win or coach Weber would be in trouble," Thieneman said.

Three years later, the thought of the loss still revolts Thieneman, who is eager for a measure of revenge. "I get goose bumps just talking about it," he said. "I've got a lot of frustration to take out on those guys."

Thieneman is also making sure his teammates, the majority of whom weren't around in 1984, are well aware of what happened.

"Chris talks about it all the time," said senior linebacker Kevin Harvey, who transferred from Compton Junior College before the 1986 season. "He says everybody on defense had a chance to get the guy, but he just went through them like he had a force shield around him. Nobody could believe it. They gave them the game, signed, sealed and delivered."

The lesson Thieneman is preaching, Harvey said, is to not overlook Murray again, and he thinks the message has come through loud and clear.



BILL BIRD
Clutch TD defeated U of L in 1984

"They can hang in there, sneak up on you and catch you when you're not looking," Harvey said. "We've got to take them seriously and be ready."

Especially since the Racers still have a Bird flying around in their backfield.

■ Deon Booker, U of L's starting halfback, will miss tomorrow's game because of a recurring ankle injury.

Booker's badly sprained left ankle was put in a cast Wednesday night in an effort to speed healing. The cast is to be removed Sunday, and Booker hopes to return to action Oct. 3 against Southern Mississippi.

The 5-10 junior gained 100 yards in U of L's opening victory over Tulane but suffered a sprained ankle in the fourth quarter and played little the past two weeks against Cincinnati and Purdue.

"It's been rather frustrating," Booker said yesterday. "I can't go to my full potential. I don't like walking around here in a cast, but maybe it will end up for the best."

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