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The U of M football team's historic win over the University of Tennessee, the Tigers' first in 16 tries, is still fresh on the minds of fans 10 years later.

One for the ages

by Eric Smith

On Nov. 9, 1996, Rick Summers sat in Liberty Bowl Memorial Stadium and cheered, as usual, for the University of Memphis football team.

But when the final horn sounded that Saturday, an overjoyed Summers uttered words proving just how unusual this game was — how different from anything in the previous three decades of watching the Tigers play.

"I told [my wife] Cheryl, 'Take me to meet my maker,'" Summers says.

Summers indeed would have died a happy man that autumn evening. After all, he and thousands of other U of M fans had just watched their beloved Tigers beat the University of Tennessee for the first time in school history.

The 21-17 victory over UT was the Tigers' first in 16 tries, dating back to 1968, and the momentous win sparked celebrations all over the city.

"It was a glorious day," Summers recalls.

The game was an instant classic, as big as — if not bigger than — the Tigers' first victory against Mississippi in 1967 and their lone victories against Alabama in 1987 and Florida in 1988.

A Liberty Bowl record crowd of 65,885 watched Memphis rally in the fourth quarter with a 69-yard drive that was capped by the game-



winning touchdown with 34 seconds remaining.

When the clock reached 0:00, students rushed the field, tore down the goal posts and carried them back to campus down Central Avenue. Victory parties lasted deep into the night as revelers soaked up the historic win.

The next morning, people began commemorating the Tigers' victory by saving their issues of *The (Memphis) Commercial Appeal* and framing the front page of the sports section. "Orange crushed" was the headline, and those triumphant words still adorn the walls of homes and businesses throughout the Mid-South.

Summers ('67), a longtime U of M booster, turned part of his East Memphis office into a shrine of sorts, with that newspaper displayed prominently above a cutout section of a goal post.



Rick Summers made a shrine in his East Memphis office to commemorate the U of M's first-ever football victory over UT. Summers ('67) framed the front page of *The (Memphis) Commercial Appeal* and acquired a piece of the goal post that students tore down after the Tigers' monumental 21-17 win on Nov. 9, 1996. "It was a glorious day," he recalls.

TV and then dashed back to meet all of the others for the victory party."

Van Hoozer got his recording — on two tapes — and he watches it each year Memphis plays UT. The result is always the same.

"We still win," he says.

He wasn't alone in memorializing the victory. David Van Hoozer (BS '68) has gone to U of M football games for years along with Summers and a host of fellow Pikes from the 1960s, but Van Hoozer had to scramble for his memento. Though he didn't even see the end of the game in person, he relives that magical memory often — on videotape.

"That night, I had my state-of-the-art VCR set to record the game, and as the game stayed close, I panicked that I did not have the recording speed set right to get the complete game," Van Hoozer says. "So, I left in the fourth quarter to run home and change out the tape. I actually saw us score the game-winner at home on

Unfortunately, that's the only time the Tigers win. Memphis is 0-4 against Tennessee in the past decade, including last season's 20-16 loss in Knoxville. UT leads the all-time series 19-1.

The recent disappointments shouldn't diminish the efforts of Rip Scherer's '96 Tigers, which beat a Tennessee team ranked sixth in the nation and led by future NFL all-star Peyton Manning.

"It wasn't a fluke," Van Hoozer says. "We lined up and played hard-nosed football. It was total vindication, proof that we're worthy."

Is another monumental win over UT on the horizon? Victory No. 2 over UT would be a fitting way to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the program's proudest moment, so Tiger fans should mark Sept. 30 on their calendars. That's when the Vols roll into the Liberty Bowl for a nationally televised game — and another chance for U of M football to make headlines.

The Tigers begin the season in Oxford Sept. 3 (originally scheduled for Sept. 2) in a 3:30 p.m. game to be nationally televised by ESPN. The U of M opens the home campaign Sept. 17 against UT-Chattanooga. Note, too, that the Tigers' home game against Southern Miss has been moved to Sunday, Nov. 5, at 7 p.m. to accommodate an ESPN broadcast, and is one of five nationally televised U of M football games this season.

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