

By Jason Epp

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For those who remember, when the playoff scenarios started to take shape and it looked like Turpin might be playing against Cashion, fond memories of Autumn Friday nights and childhood thoughts of the red-clad heroes in the Oklahoma Panhandle were stirred.

This Friday the Turpin Cardinals will make the 227-mile trek to Cashion for a first-round match-up with the second-ranked Wildcats. It will be the first time these two schools have met in 11-man football, but far from their first battle on the gridiron.

From 1974 to 1983 it was the top 8-man regular season rivalry in the state of Oklahoma.

During that 10-year period either Turpin or Cashion played in the state championship game nine of the 10 years, combining to win seven titles. Oddly, with the many playoff games the two teams participated in, they never met in the championship or even in a playoff game.

While Turpin made the move to 11-man starting with the 1984 season, Cashion made the move just four years ago.

"I know it started when Coach (James) Waters came here," said Gary Riffe, a retired Turpin teacher who was an assistant football coach from 1975 through the rest of the rivalry. "He (Waters) and Larry Mantle got it started when they met at one of the summer coaches meetings."

Not many outside of Oklahoma high school football would know Larry Mantle, but most know his older brother, Mickey, of New York Yankees fame.

"Every time we played both teams were always in the top 10, and at least one of us was in the top five," Riffe said.

James Waters, who coached Turpin from 1975 to 1988, remembers the rivalry and his relationship with Larry Mantle fondly.

"It was a great rivalry," said Waters. "The thing that I think made it so great was we had the utmost respect for their program, and I think they felt the same way about us. It was a long way to drive to play a football game, but we had good players and they had good players, and we wanted to play good teams. Over the years Larry and I became very good friends. A lot of people don't know that he was one the more innovative coaches in high school using the pass."

For many from Turpin it was a chance to travel to "The City" for the weekend, with Cashion being only 30 miles from downtown Oklahoma City. The Turpin band would often march at the Oklahoma State Fair the next day, and others traveled further south to watch the Sooners.

Brian Riddle, who was Turpin's quarterback on the 1980 state championship team, remembers the game his senior year when Turpin was ranked No.1 and Cashion No. 2.

"We won a close game. Part of what made it so memorable was that as a team we traveled to Norman that night to go to the OU game," Riddle said. "We saw John Elway and Stanford beat them the next day, but we stayed in the same hotel as the team (Oklahoma) that night. Some of them asked us where we played, and we were surprised to hear them say they had heard of Turpin and knew about us playing Cashion."

Cliff Benson, who was the Turpin defensive coordinator in '82 and '83 and is now the principal at Yarbrough, Okla., remembered a one pre-game incident.

"Cashion's field is down in a bowl and the locker rooms are up on a hill," Benson said. "This is a huge game and our guys are all excited. We busted out the door screaming and hollering only

to hit the edge of the bowl, and realize the Cashion band was playing the national anthem at that time.”

In 1982, Turpin faced Oklahoma Christian in the semifinals in Enid. With Cashion already out of the playoffs, many of their fans came to Enid to root for the Cardinals.

Mike Isaacs, a fullback and linebacker on the 1980 championship team and on the 1983 runner-up, remembers the Cashion game as one that set the tone for the rest of the season.

“We usually played them early in the season, and that set the tone - the testing point for your team,” Isaacs said. “You knew whether you were going to be any good that year. It was always close, and it was one of the most physical teams we ever played.

“With them being a passing team, as a linebacker, it was very tough because we hardly ever faced passing teams. When you are not used to that and now you have to cover really good players, it’s tough.”

Coach Waters remembers one trip to Cashion in particular.

“One year at Cashion we were ahead with seven seconds on the clock, and Jimmy Jones, who played at Oklahoma, chased their quarterback back about 30 yards,” Waters said. “He heaved the ball toward the end zone and it fell incomplete, and we all ran out on the field jumping up and down. And then we looked at the clock, and their was still one second on it. They tried it again, but we stopped them. I asked Larry after the game ‘What in the world happened with the clock?’ He said ‘James, you’re playing in Cashion. There’s always time for one more play.’”

Turpin fans will hope that if the Cardinals need one more second on the clock at the end, they’ll get it — for old times sake.