



WHISENHUNT IS NO STRANGER TO ADVERSITY

New Arizona Cardinals head coach **KEN WHISENHUNT** is ready to face the challenges that come with being a first-year head coach in the NFL. But it's not the first time Whisenhunt has faced adversity.

On November 8, 1980, Whisenhunt, who at the time was a freshman wide receiver/defensive back at Georgia Tech, was forced into action at quarterback against undefeated Notre Dame, the No. 1 ranked team in the country. The Yellow Jackets entered the game with a 1-7 record and were heavy underdogs.

"I don't know how many Division I-A teams there were in the country," says **BILL CURRY**, then the Georgia Tech head coach. "But if there were 110, we were No. 110."

Early in the game, the Yellow Jackets lost starting quarterback **MIKE KELLEY** to injury and the club was forced to insert Whisenhunt into the game.

"I thought that I was third on the depth chart going into the game," recalls Whisenhunt, who played with an undiscovered stress fracture in his leg. "So when the starter got hurt early in the first quarter, I thought I still had another guy ahead of me. When the coach came to me and told me I was going in the next series, I was stunned. I was a little nervous – actually, I was nervous as heck! – when the Notre Dame punt rolled to a stop at our five yard line. So my first snap at quarterback was against the No. 1 team in the country with our backs to the end zone. All I could think of going to the line of scrimmage was 'Don't fumble the snap!'"

Whisenhunt didn't fumble the snap – in fact, he handled the snap and handed the ball off to fullback **RONNY CONE**, who rushed for three yards. Still, the freshman was not yet entirely comfortable at quarterback.

"After our first series, one of the offensive linemen, a guard by the name of **BEN UTT**, called me over to where the O-line was sitting on the bench and said 'You're going to have to speak up in the huddle, son. We can't hear you.'"

However, as the game progressed, Whisenhunt recalls making adjustments and finding a level of comfort.

"I remember feeling that I could play and that I was determined to show I could play. I also clearly remember my first pass. I had trouble throwing spirals, so when Coach Curry called for the first pass – a little roll out to the left – and I let it go, it was a beautiful spiral. The only problem was that it landed five rows up in the bleachers!

"After the initial nervousness subsided, I remember getting excited by the crowd's reaction to the way our team was playing. I remember getting the adrenaline rush when I completed my first pass and all my teammates were patting me on the back. I remember feeling the excitement of the team on the sideline and our belief that we could beat the No. 1 team in the country."

The highlight of Whisenhunt's day was a 23-yard pass to **JEFF KEISLER** that set up a field goal and led to Georgia Tech's improbable 3-3 tie against Notre Dame.

"I sprinted out and saw Jeff Keisler streaking up the middle. I just let it go to him. I remember thinking 'I hope that he turns around' and, right before it got there, he turned around and caught it. It was a big play."

For Whisenhunt, this was not only a great moment in his playing career, but also a learning experience for life in general.

"It taught me from a team perspective that if you play together, you are tough to beat. It also taught me from a personal experience to never give up on what you believe you can do. If you work hard and surround yourself with the right people, you can succeed."

