

They fought a war

The day's theme song: 'Me and my shadow'

By GREG CLAY
Review Staff Writer

If Alcorn State is the real "SWAC-buster," then Braves defensive back Issiac "General Ike" Holt must be the real Rice-buster.

Jerry Rice, Mississippi Valley's all-America wide receiver who is said to be so good that he can catch a BB in the dark, had two shadows Nov. 4 -- his and Holt's -- in a matchup that dazzled the anxious eyes of 63,808 fans in a jam-packed Mississippi Memorial Coliseum, the second-largest crowd to attend a sporting event in Mississippi history.

How close were their shadows?

"We kept bumping into each other," said Rice, the 6-foot-3, 205-pound fireball, who's better known as "World," after his team lost 42-28 in a slugfest billed as "the game of the week, game of the month, game of the year, game of the decade and game of the century" by the public address announcer.



As it turned out, Holt and the rest of the Braves' Tomahawk defense got the best of the bumping. Holt had the whole "World" in his hands, limiting Rice to eight catches for 134 yards and a 35-yard score. Those statistics would be excellent for most receivers, but only average for Rice, who entered the game averaging 12 catches, 197.3 yards and three touchdowns per contest.

And Valley began the game leading the country with a 64.1 points-per-game average, tops on any collegiate level.

Alcorn State's defense, ranked second in the NCAA Division I-AA behind Tennessee State, threw up a brick wall against the Delta Devils when it counted most. ("Defense wins championships," the Braves chanted in the locker room after the game.) Holt, who was "thinking six," turned out the lights on Valley when he beat Rice to the ball and returned his sixth interception of the season 29 yards for the game's final score with 16 seconds left, thus thwarting the Delta Devils' last effort in a gallant comeback.

Valley trailed 28-7 at the half but came back to tie the score at 28 early in the fourth quarter.

"We are the real SWAC-busters," said a jubilant Marino "Godfather" Casem, Alcorn State's head coach, alluding to Valley Coach Archie "Gunslinger" Cooley's pregame statement to the local media that the contest would be "the SWAC-buster."

Holt isn't expected to be a bust in next year's NFL draft. "He has speed, quickness and closes in on the ball," said Gil Brandt, director of player per-

The Coaches

Above, MVSU Head Coach Archie Cooley directed and devised as only he can -- but Alcorn State outpointed his scoring machine in the end (photo by James Terry). Below, left, Alcorn's Marino Casem shares a victory hug with one of his players (photo by Mark Gail).

sonnel for the Dallas Cowboys. "I'm not sure if he's a first-round draft choice, but he stands pretty close to being one. He's coming on, as they say."

"I think his (Holt's) stock went through the ceiling after the way he played in this game," said former Alcorn State defensive back Roynell Young, who now plays for the NFL's Philadelphia Eagles but is injured this season. Young was a first-round draft choice by the Eagles.

Meanwhile, Rice, who dazzled the crowd with a spectacular shoestring catch for a 23-yard gain in the first quarter, is expected to be one of the first receivers taken in next year's draft. "I watch Jerry Rice on the films three or four times a week," says Jackson State's 6-5, 210-pound wide receiver Chris Burkett, who caught two touchdown passes in Jackson State's 47-0 rout of Texas Southern on the eve of The Big Game. Burkett, a senior, is considered to be an early-round draft