

They fought a war

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Chicago Bears. Holt, a 6-2, 190-pound senior, has been timed at 4.47 in the 40-yard dash.

The life of a cornerback is often described as "me against the world." It's the toughest position in football. If you get burned, it seems the whole world sees it. But the tough ones have a streak of toughness. Getting beat on a bomb doesn't mean getting down on yourself.

The same applies for a team as a whole. Top-flight cornerbacks, like teams, have an elastic quality. They can bounce back, recover and get on with business as usual.

"It (Valley's loss) doesn't mean we aren't a good football team," says Cooley. "It means Valley can get beat on any given day. That man's football team was well-prepared. Today, they were a better football team."

Alcorn State had the better defense that day, a defense that gives up only 179.3 yards per game -- 59.3 rushing and 120 yards passing. On the other hand, Valley was averaging a nation-leading 666.6 yards in total offense, including Totten's 500.6 yards passing.

However, the Braves employed a balanced offense against the Delta Devils, gaining 220 yards rushing and 306 passing. Alcorn State's point total was also less than two points shy of its 43.3 points-per-game average, second only to Valley in Division I-AA.

Braves running back Perry Qualls, who gained 211 yards on 37 carries and

scored four touchdowns rushing and one receiving, helped Alcorn frustrate Valley's defense with its ball-control offense. Getting the ball with just under nine minutes left in the game, the Braves capped a 17-play, 80-yard drive with Qualls scoring with only 1:51 left. Workhorse Qualls carried the ball 11 times during that seven-minute, six-second drive.

With that late, time-consuming drive, the "Godfather" was on his way to silencing the "Gunslinger's" pistol -- a pistol aimed at getting the ball to Rice, preferably in the end zone.

"The key to the game was our defensive line," said Holt, who has been bothered by a leg injury that caused him to miss one game this season. "They put pressure on Totten."

Alcorn State, which survived some costly second-half turnovers by its offense, also held Valley to only 82 yards rushing.

An old saying in the football lexicon -- offense scores the points, but defense wins the game -- crept up and smacked Valley right in the face for the first time this season on that dark and damp day in the heart of the Magnolia State.

"I think you got to give the defense one helluva hand," said "The Godfather" to his troops in the postgame locker room celebration.

With that in mind, the biggest hand is reserved for "General Ike," who had the whole "World" in his hands on one of the biggest days in the history of Mississippi football.



Me And My Shadow

While listening to Totten's signals, Rice seems to be wondering which shadow is his and which is Issiac Holt's (photo by Mark Gail).

Given time, Bailey figures to create a football monster in Norfolk. But will this monster lurk in the CIAA, or will it go on to attack in bigger, swifter waters?

For sure, there's talk of Norfolk bolting the CIAA and joining the I-AA Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference. It would seem a likely stepping stone, one Bailey could easily make with the many resources available to him at Norfolk.

If the Spartans joined the MEAC, they could still retain rivalries with Union, Virginia State and Hampton,

and possibly branch out and try to schedule the established I-AA's in Virginia, like Richmond, William & Mary, VMI and James Madison.

Money talks in athletics, and when you can draw 27,500 to a football game, you can offer the kind of guarantees to visiting teams that are too good to refuse.

Happy speculation abounds these days in Norfolk as the victories pile up and a first-ever trip to post-season football competition seems almost a certainty.

Much Ado About Norfolk

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as a person and as a coach," says senior linebacker Leon Smith. "Football is a lot more than sitting behind a desk and making up Xs and Os.

"With Coach Bailey, you feel free to speak your mind, and you know he speaks his. He's very honest. The whole attitude has changed. We feel like winners, on the football field, in the classroom, everywhere."

In replacing Price, Bailey was succeeding an old friend. Price and Bailey were roommates in the mid-1960s when they were attending graduate school at New York University.

Over the years, they entertained one another often, and frequently joked about sneaking into the other's "backyard" to steal away the top talent.

When Bailey, a native of Suffolk, was given the head football job, Price became an assistant athletic director. Soon after stepping on campus, Bailey was given the dual job of athletic director, replacing William Archie.

Under Price, Norfolk was 65-40-3. The Spartans won three straight CIAA titles (1974-76) during his tenure -- but the team was 4-5-1, 6-4 and 5-5 his last three seasons -- and memories are oh so short in college athletics.

Bailey's first season at his alma mater has been punctuated by a defense that leads the nation in fewest points allowed, fewest yards permitted on the ground, and in total yardage prevention.

Offensively, the star is 5-8, 180-pound senior Tony Johnson, a bench warmer his first three seasons. From Booker T. Washington High, right down the street from Norfolk State, Johnson is running away, literally, with the CIAA rushing title, with nearly 120 yards overland an outing.

"Tony's not as good as LaRue Harrington or Orlando Goodhope (former NSU stars), but he'll outgain both of them because the system is better," says one Norfolk official.