

PROMOTIONS

Publicity campaigns crucial to garnering accolades

Nobody from a predominantly black school is likely to ever win the Heisman Trophy, the top award in college football.

Given the voting results of the Walter Payton Award that goes to the top player in Division I-AA, black schools could be shut out of that too.

Towson State running back Dave Meggett won the award, easily outdistancing Jackson State running back Lewis Tillman who was a finalist for the award in '87.

All 1-AA players are eligible for the award, which is voted on by sports information directors at the 88 1-AA schools. Meggett doubled the vote for Tillman, even though Tillman's statistics were superior.

Tillman was No. 2 in 1-AA rushing (1,388 yards and 13 TD's). Meggett was No. 3 in all-purpose yards (179.1 a game) and No. 1 in kickoff returns (32.1 yards per return), scoring two touchdowns on KO returns.

"I was surprised and I'm disappointed," said Jackson State sports information director Sam Jefferson, who had boosted Tillman for the Heisman before the season began. "You have a tendency to look at numbers and statistics to see who the competition will be. All-purpose yardage must mean a lot."

A well-targeted campaign means a lot too.

The Towson State sports information department, playing off Meggett's size (5-7, 179), used a David vs. Goliath theme. It had a cartoon drawn of Meggett in a football uniform trying to slay a giant with 1-AA on its jersey.

The cartoon, donated by an artist for a Baltimore newspaper, was mailed to voters three times during the season. The cartoons were followed up with a letter to voters a week prior to the voting deadline to remind them of Meggett.

"We wanted to do something low key and tasteful," said associate sports information director Dan O'Connell. "It worked. If we spent \$500, I'd be surprised."

It also helped that Towson State played two games out of its immediate locale, against Northeastern in New England, and Youngstown State in the Midwest.

He had 252 all-purpose yards and scored four touchdowns in the season opener against North-

eastern and was named national 1-AA Player of the Week by the *Football Gazette*.

He had 173 all-purpose yards and scored four touchdowns against Youngstown State. Both schools were

impressed by his play and talked him up.

Tillman's only exposure outside of his region was against Florida A & M in the Circle City Classic in Indianapolis. He gained 113 yards.

That disparity showed up in the vot-

ing. Meggett received 20 votes to 10 for Tillman.

"I'm satisfied we did the best we could with what we had," said JSU's Jefferson. "It wasn't a massive campaign. We made a lot of phone calls. But nobody in 1-AA had a massive campaign."

A change in the voting process next year might enhance the chances of someone from a predominantly black college winning the Payton Award. There will be a limited field of candidates rather than allowing open nominations. That will prevent SIDs from voting for someone simply because he's from his school, which is what happened to some degree in '88.

That also might increase voter participation. Kevan Berkovitz, national sales manager for the Sports Network which sponsors the award, said only 46 of 88 SIDs participated. Some probably didn't participate because they didn't have a viable candidate.

In Division II, North Carolina Central quarterback Earl "Air" Harvey was a finalist for the '88 Harlan Hill Trophy, but Texas A & I running back Johnny Bailey was the winner. It was the second consecutive year that Bailey has won the three-year old award.

His campaign was helped along by some subtle hype from his school's sports information people. They sent voters jalapeno peppers in plastic bags with a note saying that they're no longer the hottest thing in Texas, Johnny Bailey is. He also enclosed Bailey's statistics.

Another ploy was sending voters wooden numbers with a note that said, "let me throw some figures at you," accompanied by Bailey's stats. He also sent them 12-inch rulers with the explanation that they'd have to lay 10,000 of them end to end to measure the yards Bailey has gained.

"I just sent out some things to get people's attention," said Texas A & I sports information director Fred Neusch. "I don't think it swayed anybody's vote."

Because Division I-AA and Division II players get little or no television exposure, perhaps those schools will be well served to step up their campaigns for these awards.

It couldn't hurt.

-Roscoe Nance



File Photo
"Air" Harvey of North Carolina Central finished his career as one of college football's most prolific passers ever. However, his stats apparently weren't enough for him to win the Harlan Hill Trophy, which is the Heisman equivalent for Division II.