

# Sports Review

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## Hats off to Circle City

In six short years, the Circle City Classic has become the nation's preeminent black college football game.

Annually, it is second only to the Bayou Classic, which features Grambling State and Southern University, in attendance among games below NCAA Division I-A. This year's game between Jackson State and Bethune-Cookman drew 53,822 fans from across the nation, marking the sixth straight year that attendance has increased.

The Circle City Classic has reached this lofty status despite being played in Indianapolis, a city that has no black college and no exceptionally large black population. It has become more than just a football game. It's an event -- a week filled with numerous activities.

Black Entertainment Television has carried the game since its inception. This year, BET aired *Video Soul* live from Indianapolis the night before the game. The week also featured the Princess Circle Pageant, a parade and a black college fair.

Over the last six years, Indiana Black Expo, which sponsors the game in conjunction with the Indiana Sports Corp., has raised more than \$100,000 for scholarships with proceeds from the game.

The game itself has been a success because of the caliber of teams that have competed. Mississippi Valley State, featuring Jerry Rice, played Grambling State in the inaugural game in 1984. That game drew 40,752, and the standard was set.

Other games have featured Mississippi Valley vs. Tennessee State; Central State vs. Florida A & M; Central State vs. Tennessee State; and Florida A & M vs. Jackson State.

But the real reason for the game's success is its organization. Black Expo and the Indiana Sports Corp. have been in the business of staging events for decades. Their expertise is what gives the game a bowl-like atmosphere. Those two agencies are what set the Circle City Classic apart from other games that seem to crop up in other cities, try to make a fast dollar, then disappear almost as quickly as they appeared.

Those Johnny come lately games would do well to take notes from the Circle City Classic.

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## Coming Next Month ...

The November issue of *Black College Sports Review* will give you an inside look at the upcoming '89-'90 basketball season. Included will be pre-season reports on teams in the historically black college conferences and more. Be on the look-out for this special section in the next issue of *BCSR*.

## The Sports Column

# Black college ADs will have to be crafty in the boardrooms

In what clearly will be a case of the rich getting richer and the poor becoming increasingly poorer, big-time college football programs are putting the pinch on corporations for some very big dollars. Pretty soon, you may venture to a football game between say, Georgia Tech and Alabama and find that it has been renamed the "AT & T Georgia Tech vs. Alabama" game.

That is a slight exaggeration to be sure, but that is where the big colleges are headed these days. They are looking in that direction because that is where the money is. Schools like Georgia Tech think they can raise up to \$100,000 each week -- that's right, every week there is a home game -- during the football season by finding well-heeled corporate sponsors.

It is not a bad idea, given that big-time college sports are virtually semiprofessional anyway. But a question arises: What about smaller schools like Florida A & M, Grambling, Howard, and Morehouse?

Can any of these riches come their way? Probably not.

Because of the television exposure and the wealth of their alumni, bigger schools always have had an advantage. Now they will use their contacts and clout to monopolize this growing market regarding corporate sponsorships.

Somehow, the black colleges must find a way to not be left out. Too much money is at stake. We have seen beer, liquor, and cigarette distributors rally behind black college athletic events. Black college games are good exposure for those kinds of products, mainly because black consumers are among the most loyal in the marketplace.

While black colleges welcome support from those industries, it is likely they would consider it an extra blessing if some other mainstream companies came into the fold. How does the "AT & T Bayou Classic" sound? Wouldn't the "Sprint CIAA Basketball Tournament" have a nice ring to it?

Black college athletic programs do a heck of a job just staying in business. But the time has come to look past simply trying to survive day-to-day. As we head for the 1990s and on into the year 2000, the way college athletics conducts business will change dramatically.

Black colleges, not necessarily through any fault of their own, already have fallen behind in one area. Colleges and universities across the country (some of them small schools), are capitalizing on the cable television and satellite TV explosion by having their games televised locally and across the nation.

Thank goodness for Black Entertainment Television. If it weren't for BET, we'd never get to see Grambling or FAMU on the tube.

While black colleges are for the most part restricted to BET, other schools -- some of them the size of black colleges -- are looking into such ventures as pay-per-view and buying their own time on ESPN and other cable outlets.

Without question, a new day, a new age of doing business is upon all of black college athletics. We can only wait and see whether or not black college athletic directors will prove to be as crafty in the boardrooms as their teams are out on the football field.

-Barry Cooper