

COVER STORY

Despite Controversy, McNair Looking Good!

Alcorn State's promotion of quarterback Steve McNair as the next winner of the Heisman Trophy has generated a great deal of discussion and opinion among many in the sports community.

The views range from very favorable to downright hostile.

The Heisman Trophy is considered the most prestigious award in college football. The winner of the award is considered to be the best college football player of that season.

In addition to being a great honor, the award brings a great deal of publicity, generally positive, to a school. In many cases, it anoints the recipient first class status if that individual decides to pursue a career in the NFL.

NFL stars such as O.J. Simpson, Earl Campbell, Tony Dorsett, Bo Jackson, Marcus Allen and Desmond Howard are

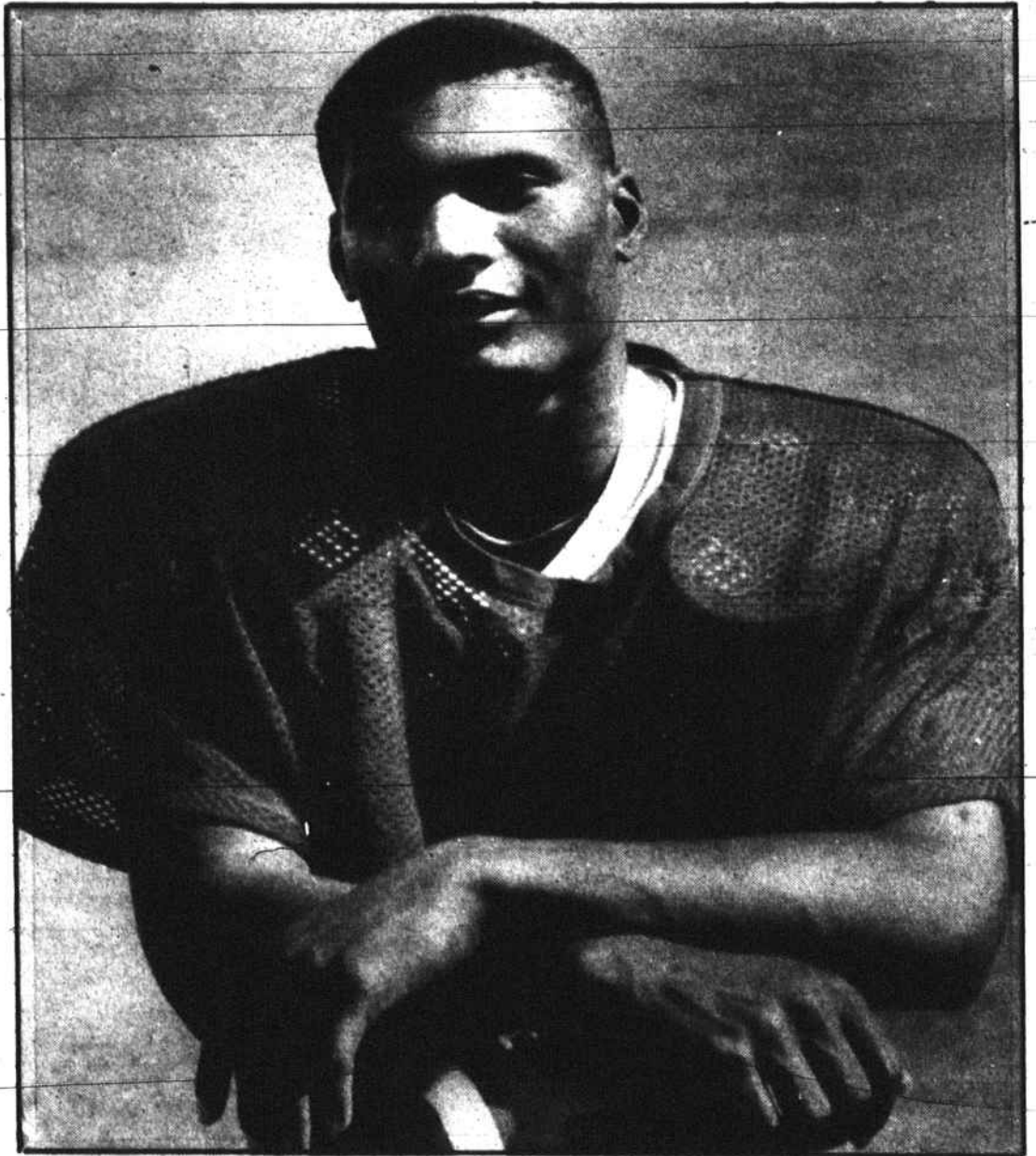
He notes that all of the promotion "in the world" won't do McNair any good if he doesn't perform on the field.

The idea of a school's sports information department promoting a player is nothing new. Miami heavily promoted Toretta as did San Diego State with Faulk. Detroit Lion quarterback Andre Ware was promoted by the University of Houston with the blessing of the Houston news media.

However, a black school has never done it. Even though Doug Williams, formerly of the Washington Raiders, was nominated for the award, from Grambling, the Louisiana school did not push any promotional material on his behalf.

"We got to get the ball rolling, and we're doing that with Steve," says Alcorn State SID Gus Howard. "Our theme is 'The Time Has Come,' meaning that the

"No black from a predominantly black college has ever won the Heisman."



Alcorn's Quarterback Steve McNair

winner of the Heisman.

Preseason predictions for the finalist of the award are San Diego State running back Marshall Faulk, Florida State quarterback Charlie Ward and Michigan running back Tyrone Wheatley. A sleeper among the bumper crop is Syracuse quarterback Marvin Graves.

McNair has the goods to be considered in that group. He is the SWAC's two-time Offensive Player of the Year and also has held the Sheridan honor two years. *Sports Illustrated*, the world's leading sports magazine, named McNair its offensive player of the year over then Miami quarterback Gino Toretta and running back Garrison Hearst of Georgia.

Last season, McNair passed for 3,048 yards and 24 touchdowns. He also rushed for 517 yards on 82 carries and 9 touchdowns.

"There is no doubt in my mind that Steve McNair is one of the finest college players," says *Washington Post* sports columnist Mike Wilbon. "The fact that he plays in a black conference for a black school will pose a problem for some white sportswriters because they feel the level of talent is inferior to other leagues."

"Nevertheless, I think Steve has proven that he deserves serious consideration for the award, and I commend Alcorn State for trying to promote him," Wilbon says.

time has come for a player from a predominantly black institutions to receive the Heisman."

Howard has received advice from fellow SIDs from Notre Dame, Southern California and Georgia.

The school's efforts have come under scathing criticism. B. Duane Cross of the *Vicksburg Post* criticizes the effort as fruitless and a waste of time and money.

"Look, I think Steve McNair is a hell of a player, but he simply doesn't have the exposure or the competition that a Marshall Faulk or a Charlie Ward has," says Cross, talking with BCSR.

"Face facts. Until the SWAC can play on an even basis with the Notre Dames, Alabamas or even the Northeast Louisians, the Steve McNairs of the world will be big fish in only very small ponds."

Washington Redskin wide receiver Desmond Howard spoke to BCSR on the McNair effort. He was generally complimentary to McNair but emphasized the need for grid-iron performance.

"Steve McNair has to push away the hype and play ball. It's easy to get carried away with the media and the hoopla," says Howard, the 1991 Heisman winner. "The writers who make the selections are concerned about your stats on the field, not how many promos you do."

Howard says that his institution, the University of Michigan, does not promote

players because it emphasizes the "team" concept. In other words, Michigan will not promote one player over any others.

It would seem that the larger issue in this matter is not whether McNair wins the Heisman but how he is promoted by

Alcorn State. If Alcorn State puts forth a first-class effort, despite its lack of resources, everyone agrees that McNair and the university will win.

— JAMES WRIGHT JR

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