

## Sports Review

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## Payton And Little Add Heritage to Hall of Fame

On the same weekend where Atlanta earned the honor of hosting the Heritage Bowl, the only college bowl game for historically black teams, two black college football pioneers took their place in pro football history. The New Year's Day football game, which turns to the grand edifice called the Georgia Dome to hopefully become a permanent home, is a mere embryo hoping to grow and prosper. However, these legends are part of where the Black college football heritage was born. Walter Payton and Larry Little embody the epitome of champions and were it not for pioneers like these two, the Jerry Rice's and Greg Lloyd's of the NFL would not be multi-millionaires today.

When you talk about the heritage of Black College football, the conversation should never begin without the mention of Payton or Little. Each exhibited class, grace, and dignity and endured a trek to the Hall of Fame that included every pot hole imaginable. In a day where there was no free agency or holdouts, and Black athletes from historically Black colleges were not necessarily respected as equal, these two had the intestinal fortitude to persevere and excel. For that, we as African-Americans, are indebted.

Little, one of the fiercest linemen in the history of the league, played for a perfect team and consecutive world champions. The pro football offensive lineman is probably the most obscure athlete in all of sports. There are no statistics, such as touchdowns or home runs, to validate the impact of an offensive lineman on the success of a team. However, when one is a part of the ultimate—perfection which has never been duplicated—then there must be credence to contribution of every part. Many former defensive linemen will attest to how valuable Little was.

After his career was over, Little came back home to help a new generation. He did not know whether he would have a chance to coach an NFL caliber athlete at Bethune-Cookman. But he did know that if it were not for the small private Black school founded by Mary McLeod Bethune, he would not have had a chance to become a success in life. Where there was no money and very little chance of winning, he brought them a MEAC Championship in 1988 although they had to share it with their arch rivals Florida A&M and Delaware State.

To this day he still is giving back to black college football players. When college football season kicks off, he'll be on the sidelines at North Carolina Central. It would be quite convenient to take a job in the NFL as an assistant, especially with his former team the Miami Dolphins, but he still has chosen to stay where he could give back.

This is the Black college football heritage!

Of course, the brightest star to ever shine once he ever stepped away from a Black college campus was a powerful young running back who played at Jackson State. During his 16 years in the NFL, Payton's running style was a two legged testimonial to his nickname "Sweetness."

His style, where the knees churned knocking him in the chest with each stride, brought thunder into packs of would be tacklers. The stutter step move, which froze every defensive player he faced at least once, was ever so sweet as well. Those close to the game knew his senior year of college that he was more than just a good player. Some experts have said that he was the best player in college in 1975. However, Ohio St.'s Archie Griffin, playing with hype and attention of the Big Ten Conference, won the Heisman Trophy but had a pro career which was a bust.

Meanwhile, Payton's career ended with him as the all time leading rusher in the history of the game, 13 years of more than 1,000 yards, 110 touchdowns, and finally a world championship. He played every down as if it was his very last and was driven to make the sacrifices to be the best. Now Payton brings that same level of intensity to the corporate America as the chief partner in St. Louis's bid for an NFL expansion franchise.

As Payton and Little have rightfully earned the rightful places in football history, their contributions to African-American history reach far beyond a football field. They faced barriers and broke through with class and resilience that was unmatched.

This is indeed the Black College football heritage!

— By Mark Gray

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## Taylor Works Magic with Pirates

"Last year," Hampton football coach Joe Taylor was saying, "we changed attitudes and work ethics. You cannot be a champion on Saturday unless you are a champion Sunday through Friday."

Yes, it's a philosophy meets the gridiron, and yes, Plato, er, coach Taylor's philosophies are working just fine.

Whatever it was he really did last season, whether he hypnotized Hampton's football players, trained them like Pavlov trained his dogs, or whether he just simply fooled the Pirates into believing they were a good football team, Taylor got results.

In one year, Hampton went from the have nots to the champions of the CIAA, under Taylor, then a rookie coach who no one expected anything close to a championship from.

Rookie coaches, especially rookie coaches at Hampton, are supposed to be whipping boys, a game that other conference coaches can mark on their schedules as sure wins.

Someone forgot to tell all that to Taylor, whose team finished 6-0-1 in the CIAA and 9-2-1 overall.

"Hard work and complete team determination paid off for us last year," Taylor said, "but now we must take our work ethic and attitudes to another level. We will be the team to beat in '93 so we must work harder."

The Pirates return 16 starters, and while that sounds quite promising for Taylor's young coaching staff, Hampton also lost four key players that represented 36 touchdowns.

Running back Carlos Fleeks (18 TDs), middle linebacker Gareth Bonds (2) and split ends Shaun Parker (6) and Terrence Warren (10) formed the nucleus of coach Taylor's surprising winner. Also gone are defensive end Steve Brannon (team-leading 17 sacks) and linebacker Doug Wynn (60 tackles).

"We lost six great athletes that started for us in '92, but we believe there is talent here to step up and take over where they left off," Taylor said.

Yes, of the 16 returning starters, Taylor believes the team's strong points are an improved defense, a better offensive line and an improved quarterback.

The offensive line is led by All-America offensive guard Emerson Martin, a 6-4 290-pound senior.

He's joined by Jason Jones (6-5, 285 senior), Jon

Hunt (6-6, 275 junior), Rod Briggs (6-3, 285, sophomore) and Antonio Poag (6-2, 270 junior). So you can see the Pirates have Division I-type size.



Joe Taylor

They should protect junior quarterback Matt Montgomery well, and if history is any indication, a well-protected Montgomery is a dangerous Montgomery.

In two years, he's passed for 3,949 yards and 35 touchdowns while completing 265 of 557 passes.

Last season alone, he threw for 2,000 yards and 25 touchdowns.

On defense, Hampton's end, Chris Williams, a 6-3 265 pound senior returns after a banner junior campaign when he had 63 tackles and 13 sacks.

Senior strong safety Darren Parker (52 tackles) and junior free safety Melvin Crawford (41 tackles, eight interceptions) join Williams to form what could be the league's best defensive unit.

The question, really, as this year begins, is who can stop Hampton? The Pirates have a powerful defense, a powerful offense and the apparent blessing of the other CIAA coaches, who voted Hampton to repeat as champion this season.

"We feel good about it (the preseason pick)," Taylor said. "But because of what the coaches voted on, when we come there to play, I hope they remember how they voted. They should," Taylor laughs, "let us win."

— By LANGSTON WERTZ, JR.

## Vikings Coach Kelley Resigns

Just three weeks before the 1993 football season was scheduled to begin, Elizabeth City State got a major shock.

Vikings football coach Alvin Kelly resigned as an investigation of possible NCAA violations continued. The announcement in early August came from Elizabeth City Chancellor Jimmie Jenkins.

"In recent months, certain events and allegations concerning the athletic program at Elizabeth City State University in the categories of coach-student irregularities, possible NCAA violations and unauthorized activities representing this university were brought to my attention," Jenkins said in a prepared statement.

Jenkins has appointed a committee to investigate the allegations, but he declined to be more specific about them when he made the resignation announcement.

During the investigation, Kelly, who was also an

assistant basketball coach, submitted his letter of resignation to athletics director Willie Shaw, Jenkins said.

In addition, the university decided not to renew the contract of Nelson Jennings, coordinator of the football program, Jenkins said.



Alvin Kelly

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