

COVER STORY

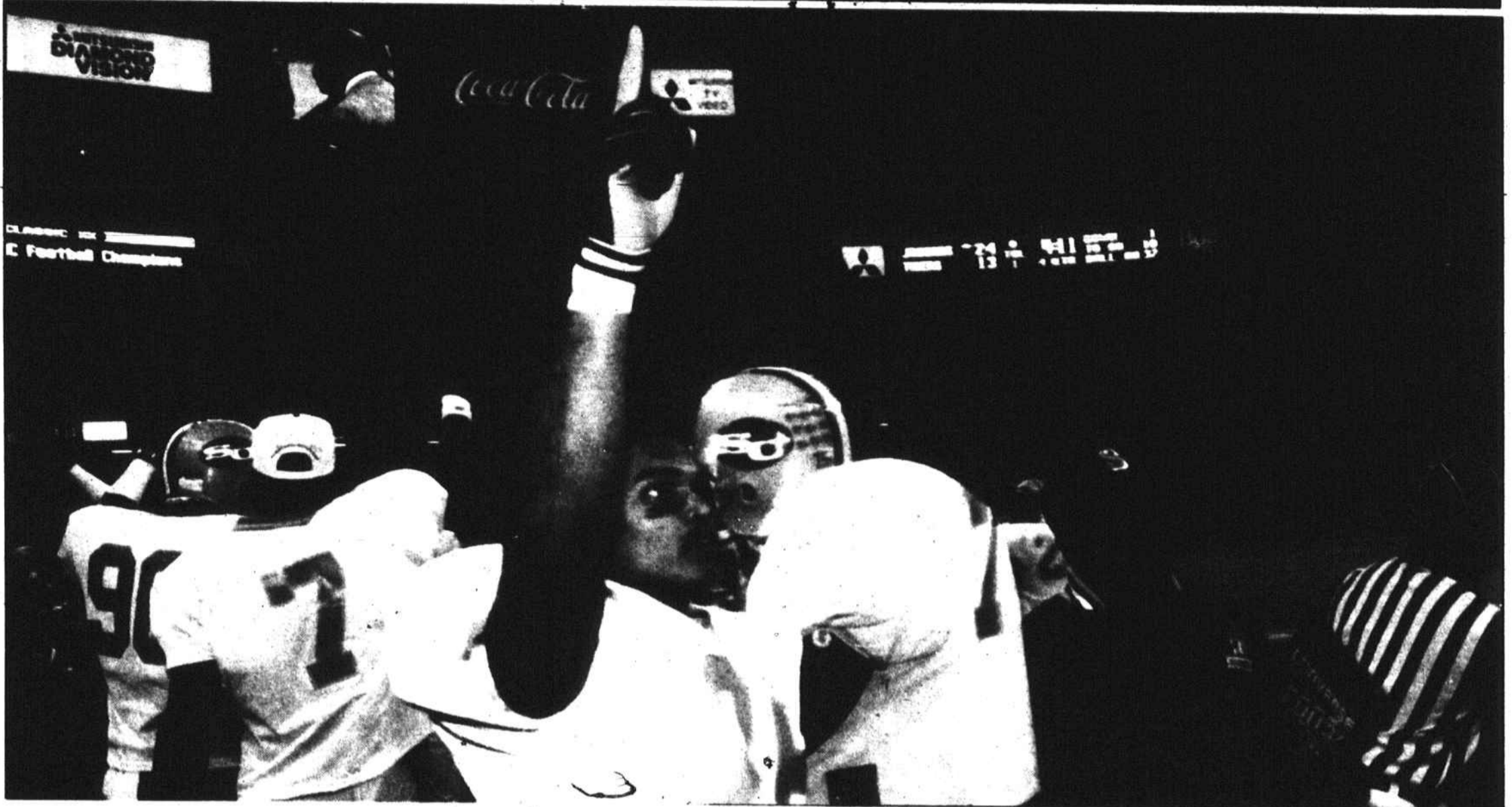


Photo by James Terry III

Southern's sideline cheers on the Jaguars defense late in the fourth quarter of the twentieth Bayou Classic, held in the Louisiana Superdome against Grambling. Southern captured its first outright championship in 34 years with a 31-13 win

Southern Capitalizes on Grambling's Miscues for 31-13 Win

Jaguars Win its first SWAC title in 34 years by holding Tigers to Season Low in Points

A change in attitude is what Southern coach Pete Richardson credits to the Jaguar's best season in 34 years.

After a 31-13 win over arch-rival Grambling in the twentieth Bayou Classic before a Louisiana Superdome sellout crowd of 72,586 and a national television audience, Southern wrapped up its first Southwestern Athletic Conference title outright since 1959.

Southern finished its SWAC schedule with a 7-0 record and was 10-1 overall. The Jaguars shared the title with Jackson State in 1975, but this year it belongs to the Jaguars.

"We've had a lot of exciting things happen to us this season," said Richardson, who became the first Southern coach to lead the team to a title in his inaugural season. "We had to get rid of a lot of people, and we had to change a lot of attitudes. There have been a lot of first, and I attribute that to my football team. They made a commitment to win. My assistant coaches also did a great job."

Southern's SWAC title can be attributed to solid defense. The Jaguars led the

league in total defense with a 253-yard average and in scoring defense (12.9 ppg.)

"The old saying in football is offense wins games and defense wins championships," said Southern linebacker Jimmy Conner, who had nine tackles and two interceptions against Grambling.

Grambling, which had the league's second-best offense, racked up 361 yards on the Jaguars. However, it was the six turnovers by the Tigers that was the differ-

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ence.

"We just got whipped in all categories," Grambling coach Eddie Robinson said. Southern capitalized on the Tigers mistakes.

The Jaguars built a 10-0 lead in the first quarter. Southern quarterback Eric Randall connected with Landry Williams on a 59-yard pass play after Jaguar free

safety Jabbar Juluke recovered a fumble by Grambling fullback Eric Gant at the Southern's 27 yard line.

Southern increased its lead to 10-0 on Duane Fuller's 26 yard field goal, which came 10 plays after defensive and Earl Mackey recovered a fumble at the Jaguars' 26 yard line.

"Every time we got started offensively, something would always come up to hinder our drive," said Grant, who had 96

score at least 20 points.

Grambling cut the lead to 17-13 when outside linebacker Valmond Brown returned a fumble by Randall 54 yards for a touchdown in the third quarter.

However, that was close as Grambling would get.

Southern extended its lead to 24-13 when Randall, who completed 13 of 24 passes for 153 yards, hit Williams on an 11 yard pass play in the third quarter. The Jaguars closed out the scoring on Lindsey Scott's 11 yard run in the fourth quarter.

"We are the SWAC outright champion, and we have the No. 1 defense in the country," Conner said. "We had to go out and shot it today. For two weeks we've practiced in the rain and in the cold. Somebody had to pay for it."

Southern will now face South Carolina State in Heritage Bowl on New Year's Eve in the Georgia Dome in Atlanta. The two teams played earlier this year, with Southern defending the Bulldogs 14-10 in the Atlanta Classic at the Dome.

—By Derrick Mahone