

BLACK COLLEGE

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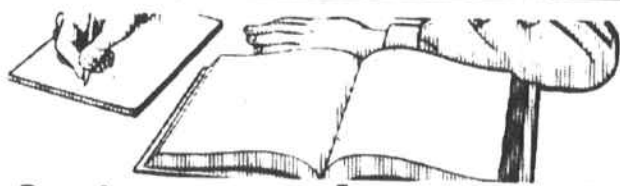
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NOTEBOOK

SEASON START BRINGS SURPRISES

Football season, sometimes, can be awful funny. The first three football weeks of the season provided two huge surprises in black college football: S.C. State, long a powerful winner, was winless and J.C. Smith, long a football weakling, had suddenly gotten strong.

What we at BCSR decided to do was to stop the clock and take a look at two moments: one team in turmoil and the other celebrating its greatest success.

After an 0-2 start, South Carolina State coach Willie Jeffries doesn't have time to wait on starters who aren't producing. His message to them: step up or sit down.



Willie Jeffries
S. C. State coach



Darryl McNeill
J. C. Smith coach

The Bulldogs had a free week to get that message before they faced Johnson C. Smith on Sept. 28 in Orangeburg. The next week, they opened Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference play against Morgan State.

But after two games, things just weren't right for the Bulldogs

"I'm going to shake up some guys who aren't playing well," Jeffries said. "We're not getting production out of three or four key guys who are supposed to be our leaders. I'm going to let them know if they don't play well in practice, they won't play Saturday."

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TIGERLAND UNDER INVESTIGATION

It was only last fall that Grambling State University basked in national attention, proud that legendary football coach Eddie Robinson had led his Grambling Tigers to an unprecedented 400 victories.



Raymond A.
Hicks

But the spotlight has turned harsh on the rural piney woods campus known as Tigerland. Many at the predominantly black school in northern Louisiana say they wish the outside attention would go away.

The school's athletics are under NCAA investigation for everything from out-of-season football practices to players' academic eligibility and grade changes.

Questions about grade changes for all students in the 7,500-student body and allegations that the school gave unauthorized degrees have prompted separate inquiries by a legislative committee, the governing board that oversees Grambling and a panel recently appointed by the governor.

One student sued the school this summer over the issue of bogus degree programs.

School officials say the allegations are largely groundless.

The institution, they say, is beset by management woes caused by years of administrative upheaval, including three changes in presidents since 1991.

"I admit, there are some problems here at this institution. That's why we've got to change it," said Grambling president Raymond A. Hicks, appointed in 1994 after his predecessor was fired in a financial scandal. "The type of scrutiny we're under, I think, is really unwarranted."

He said he is overhaul-

ing the school's management. Last week, he replaced the vice president for finance and the athletic director and announced a search for a new academic dean. Hicks said he thinks some of the criticism stems from his challenges to an entrenched old guard a daunting business on a campus where a third of the faculty and staff are Grambling graduates and many have been at the school for decades.

"I think the sense around campus is that change is coming and that it's going to be widespread."

— Raymond A. Hicks

"I think the sense around campus is that change is coming and that it's going to be widespread," said Hicks, who graduated from Grambling in 1968. "Somebody who's been working here for 30 years may be threatened by that."

Others say the outside scrutiny is overdue. For years, some legislators say, Grambling has had major financial and management woes.

"We think the problems are very serious," said state Rep. Roy Brun of Shreveport, who, as head of the House Committee on Education, is leading legislative hearings on Grambling. "I think there's been almost no oversight by the (Louisiana University System) board of trustees."

The latest inquiries began in February, when the NCAA told school officials that an investigator would visit Grambling's campus to examine football and basketball programs.

The news was particularly disturbing, Hicks and others at the school said, because it focused on Robinson's football program.

"If we didn't have a legendary coach, nobody would be interested in this," Hicks said.

Robinson, 77 — universally revered and affectionately known on the tight-

knit campus as "Eddie Rob" — had just concluded his 54th season as head coach.

Students, faculty and alumni alike say his program is a point of pride, because it is world-renowned; despite its small size, Grambling has produced scores of NFL players and has a national reputation as a football powerhouse.

The Tigers' 1995 season had been special, because Robinson, already the winningest football coach in history,

celebrated his 400th victory.

The milestone was marked by national publicity and a side-lines phone call

from President Clinton.

Robinson has said the NCAA will find nothing wrong with his program. At a news conference recently, he emotionally defended the school and his athletes, telling reporters, "We have a great school, contrary to what you say. I've been here. I lived with the founder of this university ... We stand toe-to-toe with any other university."

The NCAA expanded its review early this summer to look at the academic eligibility of women's basketball players.

A week before an NCAA investigator was to visit in late June, someone broke into the offices of the women's basketball coaching staff and stole recruiting and eligibility records from the previous two years.

Hicks said the break-in, still unsolved, was an unfortunate coincidence.

But others said it's only the latest such incident. State Legislative Auditor Dan Kyle said his office has long had difficulty obtaining records during examinations of the school. Amid one especially contentious audit in 1987, he said, the building that housed auditors' work papers and school financial records burned.

Kyle said that the audit was never completed, and

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