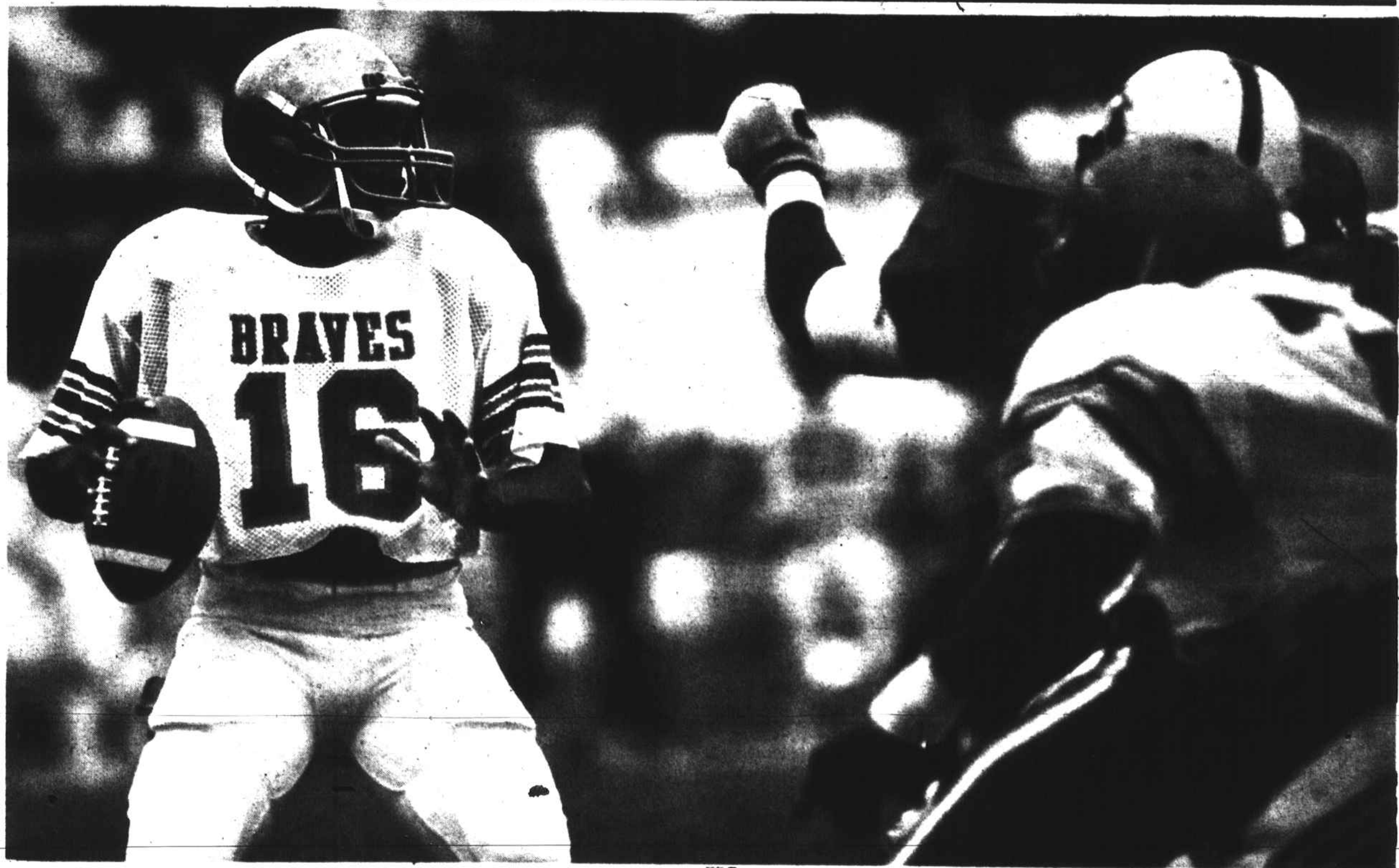


They fought a war

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Alcorn quarterback Richard Myles didn't have rival Totten's press clippings, but he did direct a Brave offense that racked up a whopping

42 points against Valley (photo by Mark Gail).

choice in his own right.

"He's good at coming off the ball. That was my problem. But now I'm picking it up better," added an admiring Burkett.

"He has done everything that would dictate him being a first-round draft choice," said the Cowboys' Brandt of senior Rice, who reminds many observers of Lynn Swann in the way he comes back for the ball. "He didn't run a 4.4 (40-yard dash) when we timed him, but he ran pretty darn fast. He ran a 4.51 or 4.52 or something like that. The only difference between that and a 4.4 is a blink of the eyelash."

One blink and he's gone.

However, Rice couldn't pick up the big gainer (his longest reception was the 35-yard scoring play) — the 60- or 70-yard electrifying flash of brilliance that he's noted for. "I think about 50,000 people were expecting that (Rice on a long scoring reception)," said Holt.

Among those expecting a great game were the national media, including

*Sports Illustrated*, ABC-TV's Jack Whitaker and, in Itta Bena before the game, CBS' Pat O'Brien. And there was a who's who of former SWAC players, including former Grambling quarterback Doug Williams, now in the USFL, and Mel Blount, an ex-defensive back for Southern who was an All-Pro with the Pittsburgh Steelers during their glory years.

Blount is now the NFL director of player relations.

Blount, the bearded and bald 6-3, 210-pounder who still looks like he could knock your block off, is one of an elite few whom Holt idolizes. "I like all the great defensive backs," said Holt. Others include Mike Haynes and Lester Hayes of the L.A. Raiders, Ronnie Lott of the San Francisco 49ers and the Eagles' Young.

"He (Young) was on the sidelines," said Holt, who started playing organized football at age 9. "He helped me out a lot."

Valley's no-huddle, sometimes no-running-back offense with as many as

four, five or six wide receivers uniquely forming patterns and diagrams usually seen in high school geometry classes, needed help in a first half in which Rice caught four passes for 75 yards and no touchdowns. The Delta Devils entered the game averaging 18 points in the first quarter. However, that wasn't the case on this Sunday.

The most critical play for the Delta Devils in the first half may have been a fourth-and-six play at the Alcorn State 20-yard line. Valley quarterback Willie Totten dropped back to pass and spotted Rice in the right flat. But Holt dashed in front of the star receiver to bat the ball away with 14:40 left in the second quarter. As a result, Alcorn maintained its 13-7 lead, and the Delta Devils missed out on a chance to grab the lead.

"I'd cover Rice just like he's (Holt's) doing," said the tough-as-nails Blount during the game. "He's jamming him at the line of scrimmage. That's the way to do it."

"Nobody scares me, period," said

Holt, who has played against some of the best wide receivers in the SWAC, including the USFL's Trumaine Johnson, formerly of Grambling. "The Lord didn't give them more athletic ability than me.

"Rice is one of the best. I respect him, but some (other defensive backs) respect him too much. They're scared to hit him (at the line of scrimmage)."

"Holt against Rice is like James Lofton (the Green Bay Packers' All-Pro wide receiver) against Mike Haynes (the Raiders' All-Pro cornerback)," said Brandt of the matchup that many observers thought would determine the game's outcome.

Lofton didn't catch a pass when the Raiders and Packers played earlier this season. The Packers' other All-Pro wide receiver, John Jefferson, caught three passes for only 19 yards in that game.

Holt is the Braves' all-time career interception leader with 24. He broke Leslie Frazier's record of 21 earlier this season. Frazier now plays for the