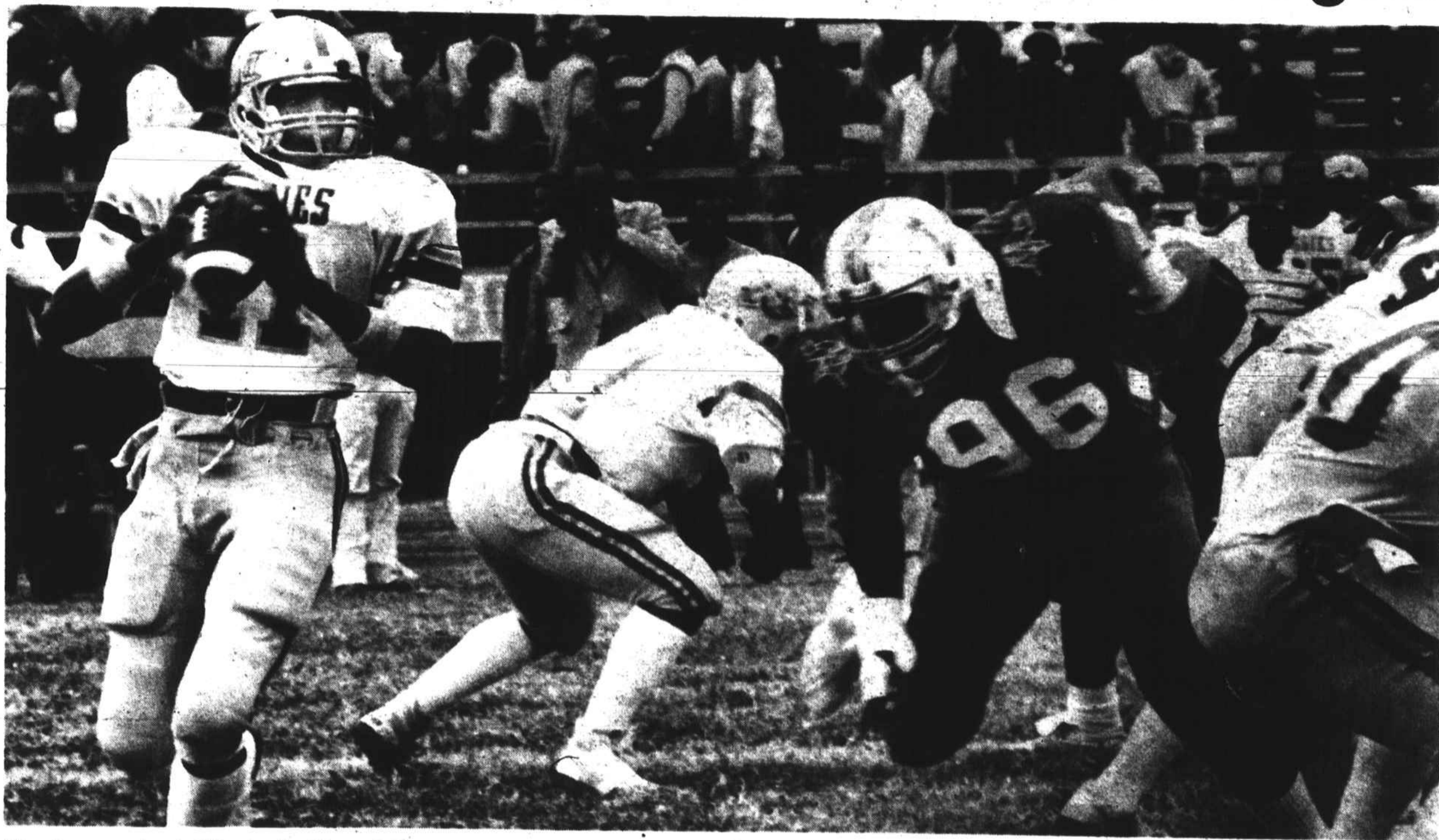


INTERVIEW

A blue-chipper who's hooked on blue and gold



Hooker against Elizabeth City: Glad he made the choice to attend A&T (photo by Joe Daniels).

By SAM DAVIS
Review Staff Writer

Alan Hooker may, in some people's eyes, have assured himself mention in "Ripley's Believe It Or Not" when he signed an athletic grant to attend North Carolina A&T last January.

After all, how could a small, predominantly black institution sign one of the state's most highly recruited athletes from right under the nose of the publicity-rich Atlantic Coast Conference?

A multi-dimensional quarterback during his prep career at Eastern Randolph High, Hooker had displayed both a strong throwing arm and the ability to run the football, faring well enough at both to rush for some 1,091 yards as a senior and throw for another 687 to lead his team to the state 3-A football championship.

Hooker also hit the mark in the classroom, performing well enough academically to hold his own at any school in the state. So, how come A&T?

Though at the time it looked as if the 6-2, 185-pound Hooker might have

made a spur-of-the-moment decision, he says he gave A&T a good look from the start and his decision was well thought-out.

"I made a decision to attend a school where I would get a good education and also make a contribution to the football team," says Hooker. "I narrowed my choices down to Wake Forest, East Carolina, N.C. State and A&T. I chose A&T because I wanted to leave my mark on the program I became a part of."

The coaches at N.C. State suggested that Hooker pursue a course of study other than his chosen major of computer science if he signed with the Wolfpack. Wake Forest didn't have a computer science major, so that eliminated the Deacons. East Carolina was too far from his hometown of Liberty, N.C., so it, too, was stricken from the list.

Another factor that figured in his decision was the way A&T Head Coach Mo Forte and his assistants dealt with Hooker on their visits with him.

"Coach Forte related with me as a person," Hooker says. "We hit it off

well from the start. After talking with him a few times, I felt like I had known him all of my life."

That differed dramatically from the way other coaches approached Hooker.

Coach Forte never promised me anything," Hooker says. "He told me that I would have to work for

can go after more top players," Forte continues. "We can say to these kids, 'If A&T is good enough for Alan Hooker, why isn't it good enough for you?'"

Since arriving on campus in Greensboro, Hooker says he's had to make a lot of adjustments to college football. Yet, he remains confident

"I made a decision to attend a school where I would get a good education and also make a contribution to the football team."

-- Alan Hooker

everything I got, but that if I put in a good effort I could make a big contribution."

By signing Hooker, Forte says, his team has turned the corner toward signing other blue-chip prospects.

"It's going to give us more notoriety and publicity," Forte says. "It will also give us an opportunity to sign more football players of Hooker's ability. If we can get one more player like him each year we are going to build a very strong program.

"Now that we've signed Hooker, we

about his decision attend A&T.

"Coming in, I didn't have any expectations," says Hooker. "I came in with an open mind. That way, there wouldn't be any disappointments."

In high school, Hooker relied on his athletic talent. But in the collegiate ranks, he's found that there's more to the game than physical ability.

"College football is much more mental than high school," he says. "In high school, the big guys and the fast guys could dominate. In college,

Please See Page 21