

ALUMNI

Richard Dent: Sackmaster in residence for the Bears

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If you were selecting music to go with a video of Richard Dent in action, "Another One Bites the Dust" would be more than appropriate.

Dent, of course is a defensive end for the Chicago Bears. He makes his living by making life miserable for NFL quarterbacks and has to rank as one the league's elite pass rushers. In four seasons, the Tennessee State alumnus has recorded 49 sacks.

The MVP of Super Bowl XX feels that being a sackmaster is more a matter of mental attitude than anything else. "You just don't decide to become a great pass rusher," Dent says. "It's something that you have to want deep down inside. You have to eat, sleep and think these type of things. It's a burning desire."

At 6-5 and 260 pounds, Dent is not the hugest of defensive ends in the league. He has sneaky speed, the kind that befuddles offensive linemen.

In between plays, the 26-year-old Dent looks like anything but a feared sacksman. His movements are almost sloth-like. That changes when the offense approaches the line of scrimmage. Dent eyes the QB and his man, slowly easing into a sprinter's stance; he waits patiently on the snap before blasting by blockers on his way to burying another passer.

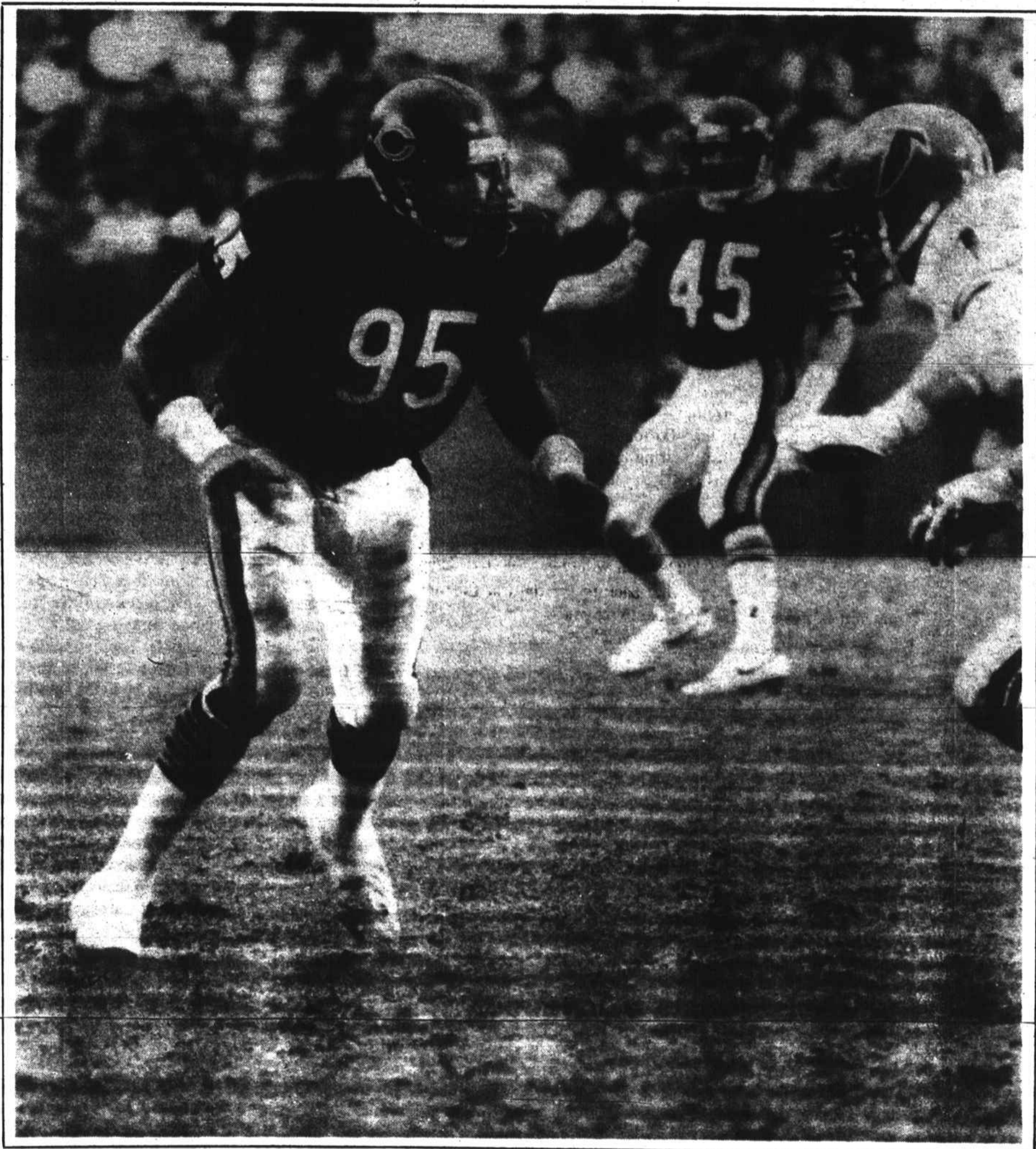
Despite the fact that they didn't repeat as Super Bowl champions, it was still a productive year for the Bears -- especially on defense. In fact, Dent and his buddies finished as the league's top defensive unit (total yardage allowed, points allowed) for the second year in a row. They allowed even fewer points (187) in '86 than they did in the championship year (198).

The defense held their end of the deal; the offense, though, was another story. All year long, the defense kept the Bears alive and on the road back to the Super Bowl, in spite of a punchless offense. Everything finally caught up with the then defending champs in their playoff loss to the Washington Redskins last December.

"To be a world championship team, a great team," Dent says, "you have to have a great defense. You can be like San Diego and score on people, but not stop anybody. On the other hand, you can have a good defense, but if you can't put points on the board, sooner or later, the defense will be worn out."

Those who know pro football were aware that while the Bears continued to excel defensively, it was still a period of adjustment, and because of that, it appeared that at times during the season, the vaunted defense wasn't as invincible as many believed.

A lot of that, Dent says, came about because of a new defensive scheme. During the championship year, Buddy Ryan, now head coach with the Philadelphia Eagles, was the defensive coordinator and architect of the



Making A Dent

Dent makes a quick move to get past an offensive lineman en route to burying another enemy quarterback (photo by Craig T. Greenlee).

famed 46 defense. Ryan's defense was an attack-type defense that had offenses adjusting to it instead of the other way around. The 46 also did away with so-called traditional positions which often confused offensive blocking assignments. More stunts, more blitzes, a high-risk defense.

When Ryan left for Philly, Vince Tobin took over with a more restrained and conven-

tional approach. And when you consider that players had to adjust to a new system and become comfortable, the job the Bears did on defense in '86 is all the more laudable.

Last season, Dent's sack total was down from 17 to 11 1/2. His responsibilities changed a bit and he was required to line up closer to the offensive line where he couldn't get as much out of his speed and quickness as

he did in Ryan's 46. With him lining up in closer proximity and with the more liberal blocking rules, Dent found it more difficult to get to the quarterback as frequently. He also missed three games because of injuries, another factor.

"Teams knew where I was going to line up," Dent says, "so they had an easier time of

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