

# TV coverage next to nil

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lege football does capture the interest of the multitudes.

Every year on Thanksgiving weekend in New Orleans, Grambling and Southern play the Bayou Classic in the Superdome. The Bayou event consistently draws the largest crowds for black college football. For 14 years, this contest has been a showcase in Louisiana. On several occasions the game has drawn 50,000 or more people. Last year, the attendance was a little over 56,000.

In Indianapolis, the Circle City Classic is moving in on big-time status. That game is played in the Hoosier Dome and has grown significantly during its four years of existence. In '87, 47,400 people went to "Nap Town" to see Central State and Florida A & M. According to the game's marketing officials, ticket sales are far ahead of what they have been at this time in previous years. They fully expect to hit or go over the 50,000 mark this time around.

But beyond the size of the black consumer market and attendance figures, you have to wonder why the major networks don't see black college football as a viable venture. Black colleges have produced some of the NFL's greatest performers over the years and that isn't likely to stop anytime in the foreseeable future.

There used to be a time when you could see black college football on TV, even though you had to wait until midnight on Sundays. But it was worth staying up to see.

In the early 70s, you'd watch the best. I remember "Jefferson Street" Joe Gilliam, Tennessee

State's sizzling quarterback and James "Shack" Harris of Grambling. Both made the grade as NFL quarterbacks -- Gilliam with the Steelers and Harris with the Rams.

Incidentally, both were instrumental in their teams making it to the 1973 playoffs. Pittsburgh, of course, won the '74 Super Bowl, but Gilliam kept them afloat while Terry Bradshaw and Franco Harris were out of the line-up for the first half of that season. Gilliam led the Steelers to a 6-1 mark before Bradshaw reclaimed his position. Harris came one play away from taking his team to the Super Bowl in LA's NFC championship loss to the Vikings.

The point here is that you get a chance to see these top people play and you know what they can do. These days, you aren't familiar with the top players unless you either live in an area where you can attend a black college football game or read publications like *Black College Sports Review*.

Believe it or not, national exposure, or the lack of it, has a major impact on a college athletic program -- for the athlete and the school.

In the case of players with pro potential, it can mean the difference in which round they are drafted, or whether they are drafted at all. The way the pros cover all levels of collegiate sports, there are very few players they don't know about. But the catch is that if you're a black college football player, you aren't likely to have gotten much national recognition. Because of that, you're more apt to go to a pro camp as a free agent which means that upon

making the team, you'll sign for far less money than an early round draft choice.

And as usual, this will be the case for several black college football players who are playing their final collegiate season in '88. Jackson State running back Lewis Tillman is felt by many to be the best in Division I-AA. He may be better than some of the projected first round picks from the major football powers. But in all likelihood, he'll be drafted in a lower round in large part to not having as much national notoriety as Alabama's Bobby Humphrey. And what about cornerback Robert Massey from North Carolina Central? The pros are impressed with him also, but he's likely to meet the same fate when you compare his "name recognition" with say Donnell Woolford of Clemson.

From the school's perspective, national recognition helps recruiting immensely. The selling job that a coach has to do may not be nearly as hard because the prospect has watched the team on television. The college that has national recognition won't be unknown to the high school or junior college prospect.

The folks involved with the Circle City Classic are determined to land a major network contract for their game. If they are to expand and consistently be on the same financial level as the Liberty Bowl or Bluebonnet Bowl, they'll have to crack the network's iceberg of indifference and insensitivity.

If and when that happens, black college football will be all the better for it.

# Pete's Rams set for opener

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power I, they run from the one back set as well as the split backfield. The split formation allows them the luxury of using Dixon and Clark in the game at the same time.

John Wadsworth will start at quarterback and enters this campaign as a seasoned veteran, after

being a back-up for the past two years. Wadsworth excels at running the option and is rated as a better than average passer.

Elon feels it can put points on the board. Stopping folks with any regularity could be a problem in the early going. They lost all of their

defensive linemen from '87. In addition, they shifted two of their secondary people to linebacker. They were burned by the option last year and so they've decided to go with quickness at those positions. They are hoping that the added quickness will compensate for their lack of size.

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