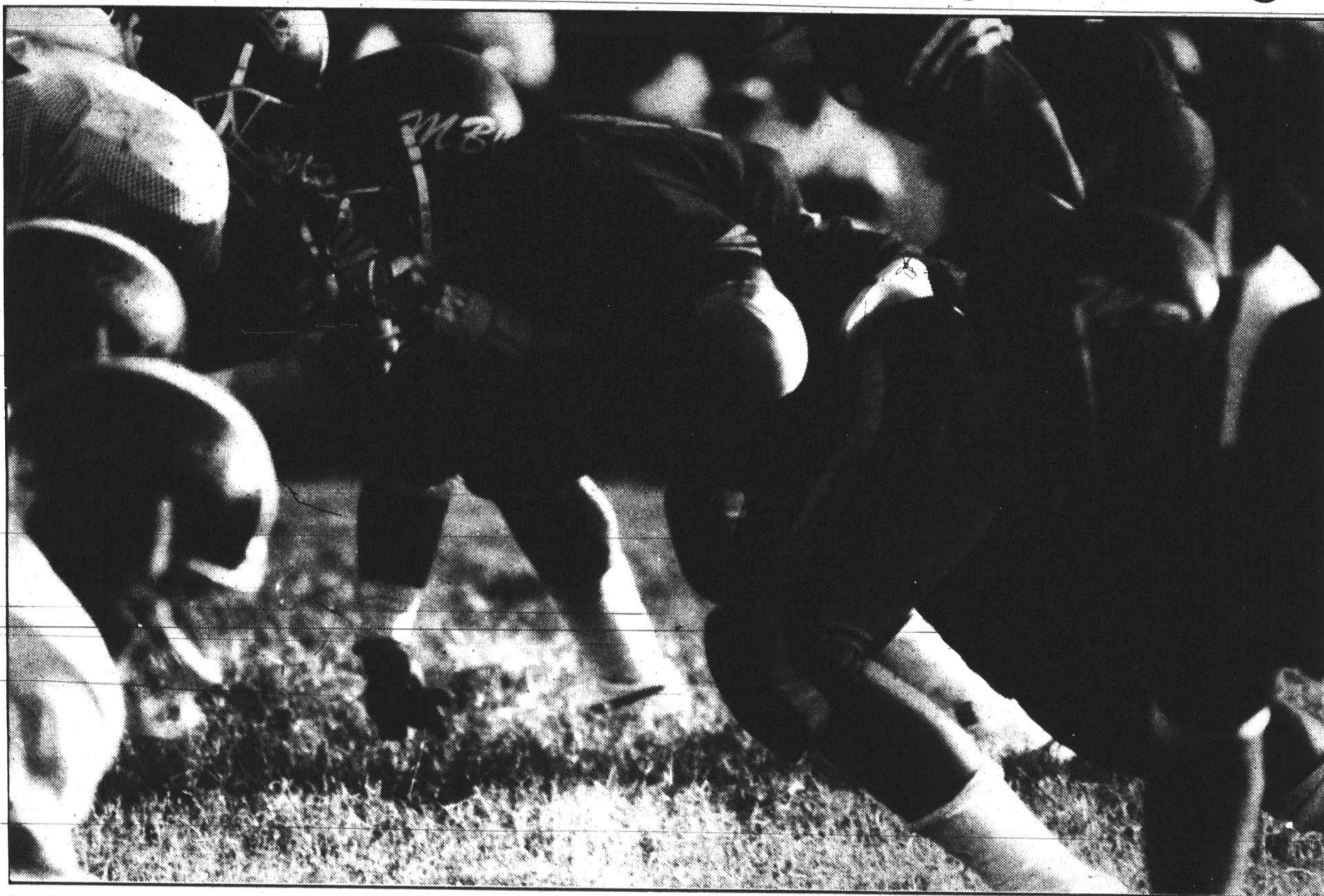


MEDIA

You can bet on BET for black college coverage



BET's programming has given black college athletics the kind of constant national media exposure that they never received from the three major networks. Photo by The Magnificent Eye

When the Supreme Court ruled that the NCAA didn't have the right to control the television contracts of colleges appearing on the tube, black colleges lost what little national media exposure they had. After that ruling in 1983, black colleges received no television coverage from CBS, NBC, or ABC.

But that has changed thanks to Black Entertainment Television and their weekly coverage of black college football and basketball games. BET started their coverage in 1980 with games aired on a delayed basis, usually shown the week after the games were played. But this past fall, the network broadcasted football games live and is doing the same for this basketball season (first game will air on Jan. 7, see schedule).

"BET has been a Godsend for a lot of black alumni all over the country," says Charlie Neal, the anchor who calls the play-by-play for the games. Neal is

also the network's sports director who schedules all of the sporting events that BET airs. "The response has been overwhelming. There are blacks living in all regions of the country," he says, "from Hawaii to the Midwest, from Florida to the Virgin Islands.

"Before the Supreme Court ruling, black college games were only shown once or twice a year by the major networks. And even then, it was only on a regional basis. So the schools never got any total national exposure."

With BET's coverage, black college sports followers have been able to keep abreast of the whole scope of black college athletics. NFL teams find that BET is a scouting aid for black college talent. The New York Jets, for example, contact the network each week to find out what game is being shown. For them, it's a very inexpensive way to scout. All they need is a VCR to get a good look at the

different players under game conditions.

Viewer response, Neal adds, has been very positive and the network expects viewership to expand as more people subscribe to cable systems around the U.S. BET reportedly reaches 20 million households.

The network is the only broadcast media outlet that covers black college sports on a regular basis.

Like any other endeavor, BET's black college sports programming has had its share of complaints. Most of those gripes revolve around the halftime shows for football, and the selection of the teams that appear on the telecasts.

"We've found that the halftime shows are a big part of the games," Neal says. "It was a surprise to find out that there are just as many people who watch the halftime activities as there are people who watch the games. It's good to not only showcase the teams, but the top bands as

well. The bands continue to be a big part of black college football."

When the network broadcasted games on a tape delay basis, they had to adhere to a strict, three hours time frame. The games were taped from start to finish. However, the time constraints limited them to showing game action only. In many cases, the halftime shows with the bands were completely deleted to meet the time deadlines.

But now that's no longer a problem. With the live broadcasts, they're on the air until the entire game is completed -- halftime shows and all. Live programming also sits well with network advertisers who feel they get more of their money's worth. Going live, Neal points out, provides the network's sales staff with more solid proof to induce potential advertisers to spend their dollars on BET's sports programming. More ad dollars will enable the network to better