

NFL DRAFT PREVIEW

Could this be the year for the Fab 4?

Think about this. Four players from predominantly black schools could be taken in the first round of the '92 NFL Draft that will take place in New York on April 26 and 27.

When was the last time that happened? It was '74, when defensive end Ed Jones of Tennessee State was selected by the Dallas Cowboys (as the first overall pick of the draft), linebacker Waymond Bryant of Tennessee State by the Chicago Bears, defensive lineman Don Reese of Jackson State by the Miami Dolphins and Henry Lawrence of Florida A&M by the then Oakland Raiders.

This time, the foursome could be Ashley Ambrose, a cornerback from Mississippi Valley State, Jimmy Smith, a wide receiver from Jackson State, Robert Harris, a defensive end from Southern University, and Robert Porcher, a defensive end from South Carolina State.

In fact, there could be among as many as 30 to 35 players from predominantly black schools selected in the draft.

Why so many this year?

"Maybe kids are just going back to black schools," said Samuel Jefferson, Jackson State sports information director. "I haven't done a survey or anything, but if they are, I certainly am not complaining."

And neither would the coaches.

Ambrose, 5-10, 168, runs a 4.2 in the 40 and played well against major college competition in the Senior Bowl. During the regular season, he intercepted three passes against Southern and finished his career with 110 tackles, 15 interceptions and 40 pass break-ups. He's also a dynamite punt returner.

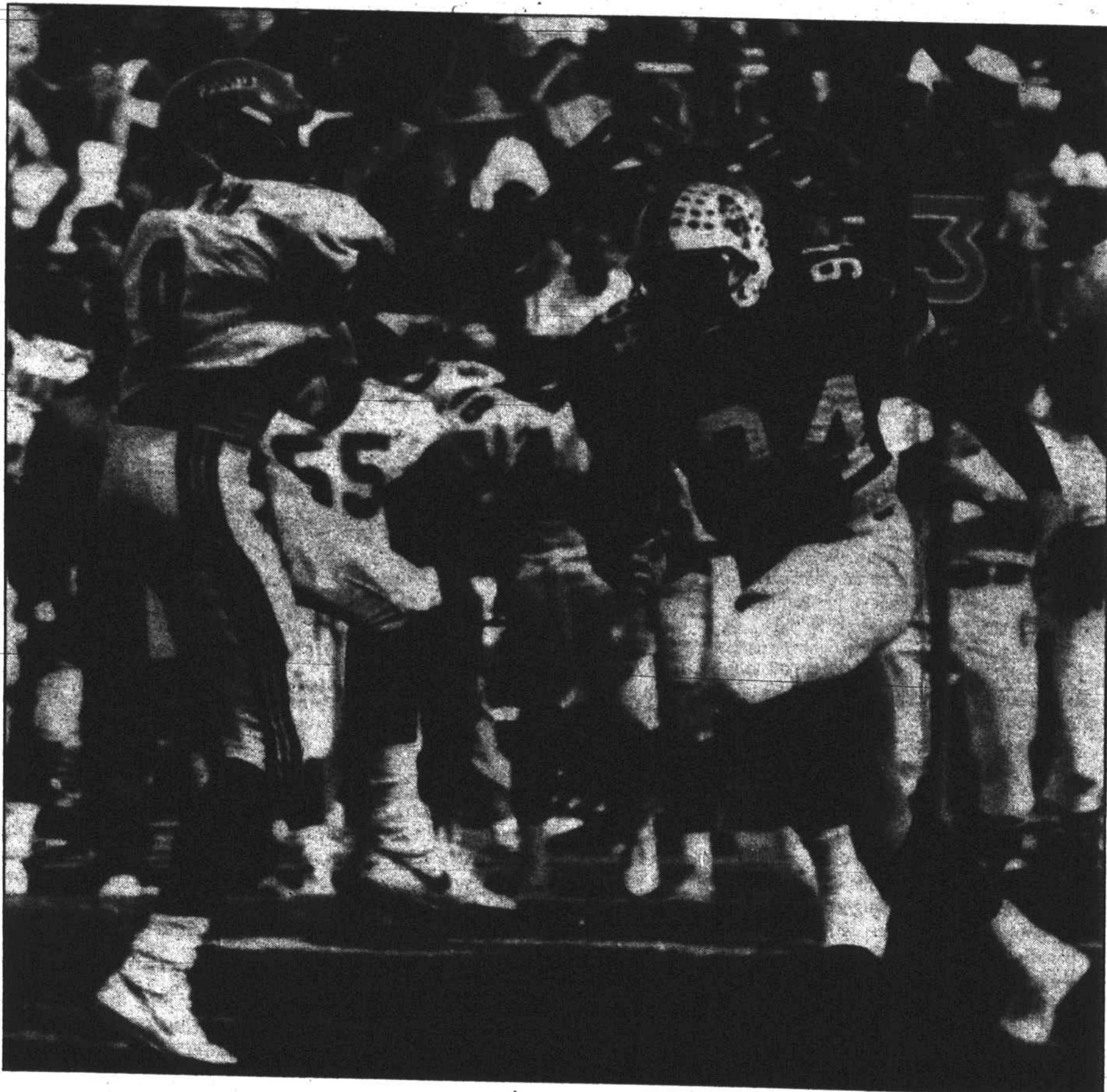
"Talent-wise he has the equipment," said Dick Daniels, assistant general manager of the San Diego Chargers. "What's going to hurt him is the level of competition, coming from a small school."

(Valley State could have three-fourths of its defensive backfield selected in the draft, the others being safeties James Williams and Everett Nicholas).

Smith, 6-0 1/2, 200, runs a 4.5 in the 40. Cut in the mold of former Jackson State receiver Tim Barnett, now with the Kansas City Chiefs, Smith caught 10 passes for 239 yards and a touchdown against Delaware State, in spite of missing a full quarter due to injury.

Mel Kiper Jr., author of *1992 Draft Report*, wrote that "Jimmy is a fine athlete with Andre Reed-type skills in the open field after the catch..... He tries to milk every inch out of the play, making defenders miss as well as any wide receiver in the draft."

Harris, 6-4, 289, runs a 4.8, 40, which is an exceptional time for a guy his size. Said the Baltimore-based Kiper, "If clubs shy away from Robert in the first round because he is a little raw and hails from a small school, they will likely regret that decision in the years to come. I can't say enough about the exciting pro potential he has displayed. It will come as no surprise to me if this young



Robert Porcher's uncanny ability to put the heat on enemy quarterbacks makes him an attractive pick for the NFL. Photo courtesy of South Carolina State College

man develops into a Pro Bowl performer by his third year in the NFL."

Porcher, 6-4, 268, runs 4.99 in the 40. He's not fast, but is ultra quick. Check out his senior season stats: MEAC Defensive Player Of The Year, 88 tackles, nine tackles for losses, eight fumble recoveries and 15 sacks. That last stat is the eye-catcher. Pass rushing specialists are highly coveted in the NFL.

Said Florida A&M center Wally Williams, who faced Porcher: "He's a come-get-you-type player. He lets you know that he's coming. I respect him."

"He's very quick right off the ball. When we played him, he lined up over every offensive lineman at some point. He beat me a couple of times and I got him a few times. When he did beat me, it was noticeable."

Other players to watch in the draft are: Ronald Humphrey, Mississippi Valley

State running back; Derrick Ned, Grambling running back; Torrance Small, Alcorn State wide receiver; Nate Singleton, Grambling wide receiver; Chris Holder, Tuskegee wide receiver; Cedric Tillman, Alcorn State wide receiver; Harold Heath, Jackson State tight end; Larry Tharpe, Tennessee State offensive tackle; James Brown, Virginia State tackle; Tracy Boyd, Elizabeth City State guard; John Terry, Livingstone College offensive tackle; Dietrich Lockeridge, Jackson State guard; Charles Hope, Central State guard; Elliot Pilton, Tennessee State defensive end; Bernard Wilson, Tennessee State defensive tackle; Eddie Robinson, Alabama State inside linebacker; Kevin Little, North Carolina A&T outside linebacker; Lloyd Straughter, Jackson State outside linebacker; and Gregg Briggs, Texas Southern safety.

Humphrey, 5-11, 200, has 4.45 speed in

the 40 and gained 600 yards rushing in his final season with the Delta Devils. "Definitely shows a great deal of raw, physical talent, but is still in the developmental stage," Kiper wrote in his draft analysis. "He's far from being considered a finished product."

Ned, a 6-0 1/4, 205-pounder with a 4.67 clocking in the 40, "has the size and strength to project as a small fullback," Kiper said. "He shows some initial quickness and is a proven receiver with quite a pair of hands."

Small (6-3 1/4, 197) runs 4.59 in the 40. As a senior, he caught 55 passes for seven touchdowns and averaged 20 yards per catch. "He plays a great deal faster than his 40 time," Kiper wrote. "He improved his draft position by at least two or three rounds with his effort in Mobile [at the Senior Bowl]."

The 5-11, 184-pounds Singleton has