By Sam Lacy

EXPLOITATION:

Problem Black Athletes Face

It is common knowledge by now that Clemson University is today under sentence of the most severe penalty ever imposed on a college for unsavory conduct in its practice of recruiting young people for its athletic program.

Ralph Sampson

It also is rather well known that one or more of the recruits the school's coaches went out of bounds to bring to the Tiger fold are black.

And, while no names have been given that would officially identify the players, it is not hard to guess that Homer Jordan is one of those who drew the attention of NCAA investigators.

For the uninformed, it is explained that the NCAA (the National Collegiate Athletic Association) serves as official watchdog for collegiate athletics. It sets guidelines which are designed to say how far college coaches (and their aides) can go in their efforts to lure topline high school prospects to their campuses.

The NCAA probe committee is especially concerned with any inducements that may be offered above and beyond a limited number of scholarships, meals, lodging and books.

Jordan's purchase of an automobile became suspect when probers looked into more than 40 violations Clemson is alleged to have committed (involving various athletes) over the past seven years.

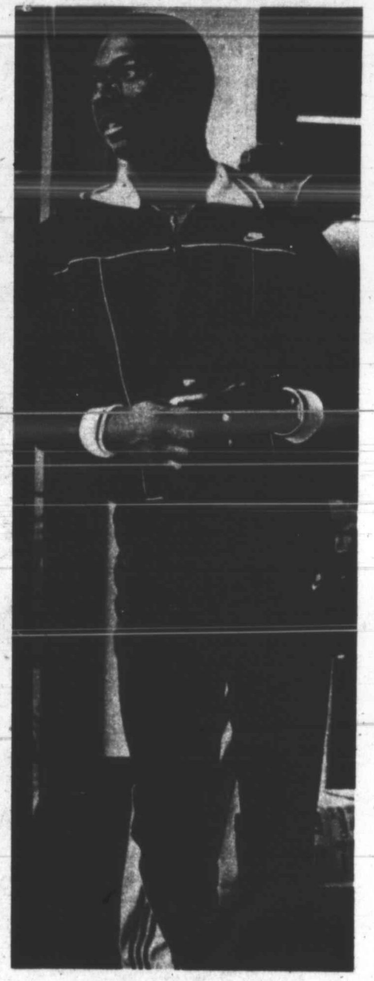
One might read this and, remembering that Homer Jordan is a football player, could ask why this article deals with an athlete whose year is ended.

It is because this is actually a piece that is a rarity: an exploration of what is past, what is current, and what is yet to come.

The college football regular season is ended but for many teams the bowl games coming up in a few days are looked upon as the ultimate.

Clemson and Jordan are aware of this since there are — or were until banishment by the NCAA — fond memories of last year's Orange Bowl where the Tigers whipped Nebraska and quarterback Homer Jordan was the MVP.

So, that brings us to what is current and what is yet to come: collegiate basketball and the ensuing NCAA championship tournament, which has the same annual excitement produced by the Rose, Sugar, Orange and Cotton bowls, etc.



Homer Jordan

Basketball, however, also has a sordid past for the black athletes in general, and one black athlete in particularly; Skip Wise, who like Jordan answered the lure of recruitment by Clemson.

Wise, a brilliant young basketball player who led Clemson to the Atlantic Coast Conference championship as a freshman, was not prepared to handle the academic responsibility and was unable to return for his sophomore year.

He tried the pro game, was not prepared for that and was later convicted of narcotics involvement in a desperate search for a livelihood. Jordan's case is dissimilar to that of Wise, even though both may have obtained access to college through questionable recruitment approaches. Homer has handled his classroom load and will receive his degree this spring.

There are other outstanding young men who have managed to cope with the academic requirements while delivering All-America performances in the athletic areana.

Football star Herschel Walker, who sports a 3.2 average at University of Georgia, and basketball sensation Ralph Sampson with an identical 3.2 at University of Virginia, to mention two who come readily to mind.

Unfortunately, though, for every Herschel Walker or Ralph Sampson there are an estimated 40 young black athletes who reach major colleges at coaches' whims.

These are young men — predominately black — who are promised all sorts of grand things by athletic officials who feel they can provide for them the difference between winning and losing seasons — for three or four years.

Since these unscrupulous coaches and their henchmen are not the least concerned with what happens to the young athletes after their years of eligibility have expired, they turn their heads when it is divulged that their crack running back or their spectacular point guard is learning nothing useful when he's not in uniform.

Happily, there are instances when all the promising and cajoling by anxious coaches fail to gain the objective.

Moses Malone turned a deaf ear to an estimated 200 college recruiters, leaped over the university campus (for which he realized he was not scholastically prepared) and became an instant millionaire as a pro.

Patrick Ewing spurned more than 100 high-pressure pursuers and locked arms with Georgetown's John Thompson who told him he would love to have him — if he understood that the classroom came first, exemplary behavior second, and basketball third.

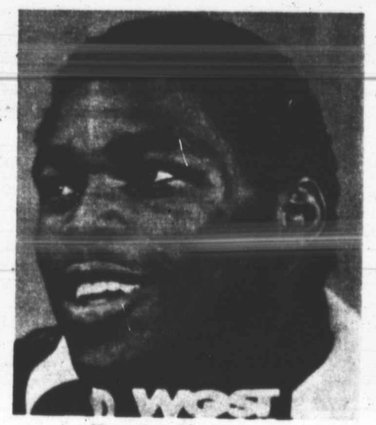
Another who had the good fortune to keep things in proper perspective is Walter Lewis.

Lewis accepted recruitment to the once exclusive athletic society at the University of Alabama. For the past three years, he has quarterbacked the Crimson Tide and been a significant force in helping the legendary "Bear" Bryant to his great coaching record.

Aware that he is not likely to quarterback in the NFL, Walter has maintained a "B" average in the classroom and is certain to be graduated.

Otherwise there have been many stories in the media detailing how young blacks have given four years of sparkling performance in football or basketball, and been graduated by colleges without ever learning to read and write.

And it wasn't until they discovered that they were not good enough to make the pros, which was a lifelong dream, that they became aware of their plight as uneducated misfits.



Herschel Walker

Arthur Ashe combined a degree in business administration from UCLA with tennis to emerge from middle-class Virginia to a multi-million Dun and Bradstreet rating.

In one of his many fine, searching writings, Ashe estimated that, of every 4,000 youths who set their hearts and minds on becoming pro athletes, only one is likely to attain his or her goal.

The odds notwithstanding, young blacks snatch the baits tossed their way by fast-talking, rules bending coaches who convince them that college is the surest and quickest path to the pros.

Win at my school, where I'll look out for you, and you've got it made.

The naive young athlete visualizing his position between a rock and a hard place, acquiesces.

Exploitation: born of greed and nurtured by need.

Arthur Ashe

John Thompson

Moses Malone