COMMENTARY

Totten has every right to tell NFL where to go

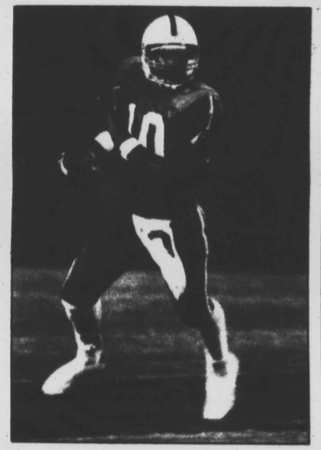
By ROSCOE NANCE
Review Columnist

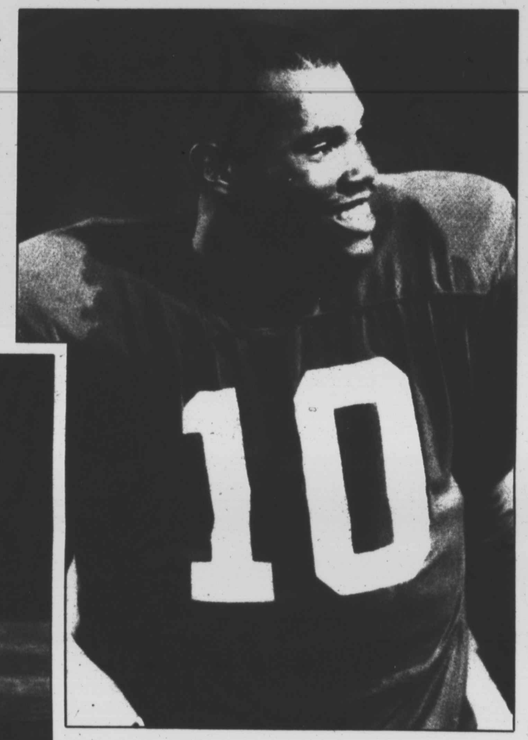
WHOEVER SAID the more things change the more they remain the same must have had an eye on Draft Day '86 in the National Football League.

The NFL has had a long history of shunning black quarterbacks. It did it once again this year, bypassing Mississippi Valley's Willie Totten.

It was a crime against nature.

If Totten's records were laid end to end, they would stretch from the Mississippi Valley campus in Itta Bena to Commissioner Pete Rozelle's office in the heart of New York. At 6-2 and 200 pounds, he has the size the pros covet, and he played in a pass-oriented offense.





Willie Totten: That he was not drafted, period, is inexplicable (photos by Mark Gail).

So why did everybody look the other way on draft day?

"It's amazing," said Mississippi Valley Athletic Director Chuck Prophet. "Everybody said he wouldn't be a first-round pick. I could understand that; I thought he'd be a fifth- or sixth-round pick."

That it didn't happen that way is incredible.

"I'm not an authority to say who the NFL should draft," said Valley Coach Archie "Gunslinger" Cooley. "But any time an individual owns all the records, Division I-AA or what, there's something good about him. For him not to be drafted is a slap in the face."

No, coach. It's more like a blow below the belt. But it's nothing new. It seems to always happen to quarterbacks from historically black schools. They are either not drafted, drafted and put at another position or brought to camp and forgotten.

You won't get any of the NFL's 28 teams to say Totten was shafted. They'll tell you it was purely a coincidence that he's a black quarterback from a historically black school.

If you fall for that, maybe you'd like to buy a bridge for sale out in San Francisco. There's no way there were 333 college football players better than Totten.

No matter what the NFL highbrows say, they still see the quarterback position as the front of the bus, and blacks are not wanted there. For the few who have been allowed up front, it's been a whirlwind ride.

Ask Doug Williams.

Even though he led the Tampa Bay Buccaneers out of obscurity to the brink of the Super Bowl, they saw fit not to sign him when he became a free agent. And even though everybody and his brother in the NFL seems to be in need of an experienced quarterback, no one has given him a call.

Then there was James Harris. He led the league in passing with the Los Angeles Rams, only to lose his job to hometown hero Pat Haden. And what about Joe Gilliam, who led the Pittsburgh Steelers to a 6-0-1 record and was benched?

The list goes on and on. Now you can add the name of Willie Horace Totten.

"I'm prejudiced in my thinking," said Cooley, "but there has to be something good about him. When things like this happen, it makes you wonder if all the things they've said are true. They say my system is not a great system and my quarterback is not a great quarterback. Why were we so successful?

"If nothing is right with us, what's wrong with the people we're playing? Again, I'm not an authority. People draft what they need. There's got to be something wrong."

What's wrong is that the people who count still have their heads in the wrong place. They have yet to accept the fact that blacks from small schools can play quarterback in the big time.

"Quarterbacks from small black schools are looked on different," said Cooley. "They can never satisfy the parties. They always find something wrong."

Totten does have flaws. What player coming out of college doesn't? But his are the kind that can be corrected through coaching. If it's perfection they want, why even bother with the draft?

Some scouts knocked Totten because of his throwing motion. They say he throws sidearmed instead of over the top and that, in effect, makes him shorter than 6-2 when he tries to get the ball over the outstretched arms of defensive linemen.

Let's not quibble about style. Y.A. Tittle didn't throw over the top, and he won for the New York Giants. Pat Sullivan would wind up like a baseball pitcher, but he won a Heisman Trophy and was a No. 1 draft pick.

But then, Tittle and Sullivan weren't black.

Results, not style or race, should be the issue.

Some scouts questioned Totten's arm and wondered if he could throw deep.

Totten's arm strength should be above question. He averaged 40 passes a game in his college career, practiced twice a day and never had a sore arm.

As for throwing deep, there was no need for him to do it. Valley's offense was predicated on timing and precision passing, not the bomb.

Besides, other than the Los Angeles Raiders, how many NFL teams throw deep?

That's a cop-out.

It appears that a predraft smear campaign might have hurt Totten. A couple of weeks before the draft, word that Totten had given Cooley some problems started making the rounds. No one knows from where the rumor emanated, and there's no way to determine how much damage it did.

But it's safe to say that being labeled a bad actor didn't help.

"He's not the kind of kid to argue with a coach," said Cooley. "His mannerism is not that. He is not fiery. That

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TOURNAMENTS

GIT: On sabbatical to remedy sagging interest

By CRAIG T. GREENLEE
Special To The Review

The only national black college post-season basketball tournament is taking a one-year leave of absence to enhance its appeal.

The Georgia Invitational Tournament was revived last year as a post-season affair after being discontinued in 1978 as a pre-season tournament.

In its first year as a post-season tournament in '85, the quality of play exceeded everyone's expectations. There was only one blow-out and the rest of the games were decided by no more than two points. However, few were on hand to witness the drama. Only 2,000 fans bothered to show for the finals at the 16,000-seat Omni.

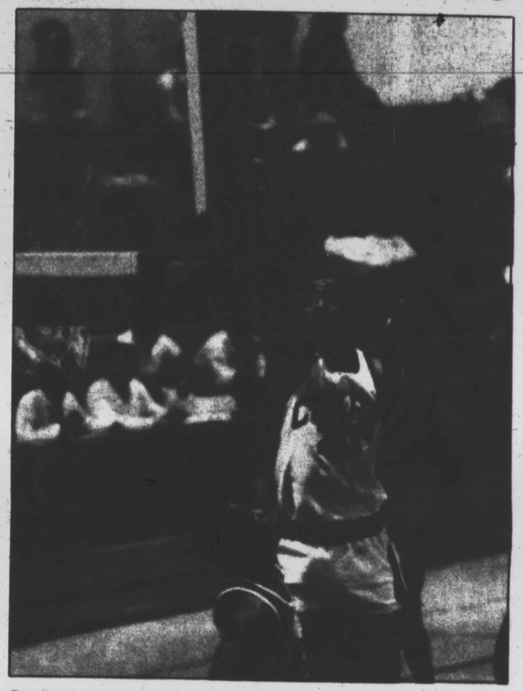
Bearing that in mind, the tournament's organizers are taking a long look at their marketing strategies, says Robert Pritchett, president of Brother Sports and head basketball coach at Clark College. Brother Sports is a community-based organization that brought the GIT back to life. The organization also is involved in developing sports programs for Atlanta youth.

One of the problems the tournament had last year, Pritchett says, is with promotions outside of Atlanta. "Since we're a national tournament, we have to appeal to more than Atlanta," he says. "Last year, we started late with our promotions, even though our billboards and radio announcements were significant. But we didn't tap those areas where people who are most likely to attend the games come from. Those areas include cities and towns of the schools that participated in the tournament."

This time around, promotions will begin in September when the colleges open for the fall semester. This way, Pritchett explains, the media in those cities with schools that have GIT potential can inform people all season long, which will allow people enough time to make arrangements to come to Atlanta for the tournament.

The GIT is really an NIT of black college basketball. Teams that win their post-season conference tournaments get automatic bids for the NCAA playoffs in both Division I and Division II. After that, there are still good teams left, but they rarely get at-large bids, so their seasons end. The GIT was formed so that good black college teams will have somewhere to play even if they don't get the automatic or at-large NCAA bids.

In addition, the GIT plans to establish more activities surrounding the tournament, including possible basketball clinics for high schools, YMCAs and Boys Clubs. The clinics would include coaches and players from each of the GIT teams. On the social side, the organizers are looking at arranging for live entertainment one night during the tournament and setting up discount nights for fans at Atlanta night spots as part of the GIT package.



Despite the presence of such stars as Clark's Ernest Lee, the GIT has not drawn well since its revival (photo by Craig T. Greenlee).

The basketball clinics, Pritchett says, could be instrumental in helping the GIT become a community affair. The clinics will hopefully encourage youngsters to become more familiar with black college basketball, he says.

Pritchett says that, since NCAA Bylaw 5-1-j (Proposition 48) will keep some youngsters from attending Division I schools, the tournament could become a vehicle to help familiarize youngsters with black colleges in Division II. It could become a prime recruiting tool.

Another area the Brother Sports executive committee is looking into is the scheduling of events for the entire week. Last year, the tournament ran Thursday through Saturday.

For '87, the committee is contemplating the following tentative schedule:

- Wednesday -- teams arrive in Atlanta
- Thursday -- basketball clinics conducted
- Friday night -- opening round of play for eight-team field
- Saturday afternoon -- semi-finals
- Saturday night -- live entertainment associated with GIT, discounts offered to GIT spectators at night spots around Atlanta
- Sunday afternoon -- championship finals

Arranging the schedule in this way, Pritchett says, gives people the opportunity to watch some good basketball, involves the community and provides some social outlets for people coming to Atlanta for the tournament.

To help foster a tournament with more people in the seats, the tournament's organizers have decided to go with a smaller arena. At press time, the choices had been narrowed to gyms at Morris Brown College and Georgia Tech.

Morris Brown, in Pritchett's opinion, would make a better locale because it's located in the black community and would be good for the Atlanta University Center. "I would love to see a jam-packed crowd at Brown (about 5,000)," he says.

Another area the committee is considering is the selection process for the tournament. Last year, selections were based on the best available teams according to overall win-loss records, regardless of what teams did in their respective conferences. Also last year, some teams chose not to play in the GIT for various reasons, forcing the tournament to complete its field with teams that had losing records.

Complicating matters is the fact that the schools invited to play come from the four historically black conferences. Two of those leagues -- the SWAC and the MEAC, consist of Division I schools, while colleges in the CIAA and SIAC are Division II institutions.

The difference in schedules between Division I and Division II makes the selection process harder than it would be if all schools played the same level of competition. But they don't and, since the Division I teams play some of the major college basketball powers, their overall records are likely to be poorer than those of their Division II counterparts.

Let's say the best available MEAC team was 9-2 in conference play, but 14-16 overall, because of who it played. How do you decide if it should be invited or not?

Pritchett answers that he favors a formula for Division I schools where their conference records and strength of schedules would be factors in deciding which best available Division I black college would be invited to the tournament.

The executive committee, he adds, is leaning toward using that formula for Division I schools, but first will consult the schools involved for their comments and ideas.

The decision to cancel this year's GIT was made last December. The plans for next year are expected to be finalized by June 1.

Craig Greenlee is a free-lance writer who lives in Atlanta and is a frequent contributor to the Review.