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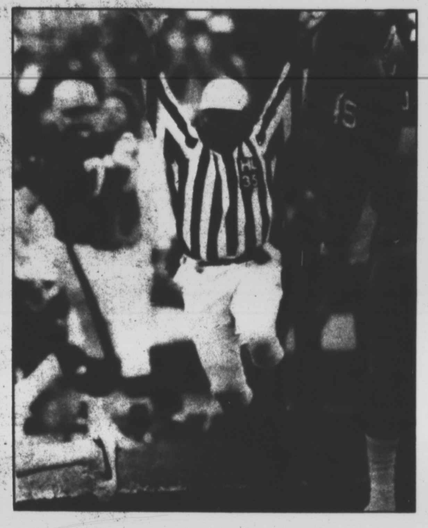
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ALUMNI

Retiring Howard AD was also an NFL trailblazer

By HENRY DUVALL
Special To The Review





When Leo F. Miles is not directing Howard University's athletics program, he is a National Football League official, and he is believed to be the first black to officiate a Super Bowl.

By name, Leo F. Miles may be better known as Howard University's athletic director even though millions of football fans would recognize him as a National Football League official.

Miles has worn an NFL official's familiar black-and-white stripes for 17 years and is believed to be the first black to officiate a Super Bowl.

"I enjoy it. It keeps me part of the game," says the former New York Giants player. "If it hadn't been for football, I probably wouldn't have gotten a college education."

The Washington, D.C., native indicates that it would have been difficult for him to go to college as the youngest of 11 children with his father working as a janitor.

But his high school football coach, who later coached him at Virginia State College, not only helped him become an outstanding athlete but he also emphasized education, Miles recalls.

Injuries ended a promising football career for Miles when he played in 1953 with the New York Giants. Earning a degree helped him venture out into another profession. He chose teaching combined with coaching.

As Howard University's athletic director for 16 years, Miles has been charged with building a competitive sports program at a school that has prided itself more on its academics than its athletics.

Although credited with improving the overall athletics program, Miles has succeeded on a bumpy road, encountering critics along the way.

He says he may be viewed as controversial because "I stand for something. I know how to modify, adjust to change, but I don't compromise basic principles. I don't cheat, and I don't bend the rules."

Anderson calls him a man of "complete integrity."

That virtue is important to the 107 men who dictate the rules of the game in the National Football League.

In 1969, Miles became one of four black pro football officials, actually starting in the former American Football League. Later that year, he was one of six officials chosen to serve as a member of a joint NFL-AFL experimental officiating crew.

Since then, Miles has been in numerous post-season games and has received two inscribed watches and a ring representing his officiating in three Super Bowls.

Art McNally, supervisor of NFL officials, says Miles has been "a top-flight official since he came into the league."

Asked how he views NFL games on television on the one weekend he's off during the season, Miles says he looks at them from the perspective of an official. "I'm conscious of this because I'm always trying to get better," he says. "If you're going to officiate, you can't spectate."

He declined to discuss the use of television instant replays in officiating, noting that NFL officials have been advised not to comment on the issue at this time.

But on the topic of why there aren't any black head coaches in the NFL, Miles replies, "It's beyond my comprehension ..., especially since there have been blacks managing baseball and basketball teams. You have general managers in basketball and even assistant general managers in football."

Miles is one of 10 black NFL officials today, but is looked upon as a pioneer since he is believed to be the first black to officiate a Super Bowl.

He remembers well the excitement. It was Super Bowl VIII on Jan. 13, 1974, and the Miami Dolphins were battling the Minnesota Vikings.

But another memorable game was when he made his debut as a pro football official. There was a fight on the field that he was trying to break up.

"I kind of looked around and didn't see the other officials breaking up the fight," he says. "I asked what do you do when there's a fight. I was told to stand back and take numbers."

This was certainly different from when he officiated high school and college football games. NFL players are much bigger and stronger.

Miles has been injured as an official on several occasions and had to be removed from the field in at least two games in 17 years of pro officiating, he says.

His most embarrassing moment as an NFL official came in Atlanta when he missed a play because of a blinding glare on the field.

He was moving from the sunny to the shady side of the field when the ball carrier was hit by oncoming defenders. But in the process, the player fumbled the ball and Miles didn't see it. He had blown the play dead even though the ball had sailed some 35 yards away.

Miles notes that officiating makes him alert, increases his concentration and has sharpened his decision-making skills when he wears the hat of athletic director. And it's "a form of relaxation for me," he says.

What has been accomplished under his administration at Howard?

- An athletic tutorial program has helped produce a "constant increase" of student-athletes graduating, he says.
- More than 175 scholarships are now offered in Howard's 15 sports, up from some 35 to 40 in football, basketball and soccer available in the early '70s.
- More women are active in intercollegiate sports thanks to the development of a women's program.
- The level of competition has grown since the Howard athletics program has been elevated to NCAA Division I status.
- The Bison soccer team won the NCAA national title in 1971 (later stripped) and in 1974, giving Howard the distinction of being the first historically black university to win an NCAA national title.
- The men's and women's basketball teams in 1981 went on to participate in the NCAA post-season playoffs.
- The Bison track teams have produced 49 all-Americas and two Olympians in the past 12 years.
- The Howard Stadium is currently being renovated while there's talk of building a 30,000-seat, multipurpose domed complex.

Now that he is stepping down as Howard athletic director, what are his retirement plans? Miles hopes to do some consulting work, and he has been

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