Mr. P. walks softly, but he carries a big stick

By GREGORY D. CLAY
Review Staff Writer

Warning: Don't mess with this guy.

You've heard of Mr. T. Now meet Mr. P. He's listed at 6-foot-11, wears a size 16 shoe and talks softly but carries a big stick.

If you think ex-Tennessee State star Ed "Too Tall" Jones is too much and too mean, you ain't seen nothing yet.

The name is James Polk, a senior who weighs 325 pounds and has shoulders as wide as gymnast Mary Lou Retton's body is long -- unusual dimensions for nose tackles, who are usually built like tree stumps. But Polk plays for Grambling.

"A lot of people don't know how to coach guys his size," says Grambling defensive coordinator Fred Collins. "But it really doesn't faze us or dawn on us."

That's because Grambling had Buck Buchanan (6-8, 260) and Ernie Ladd (6-9, 300) back in the '60s. Both went on to star for the Kansas City Chiefs. Ladd then became a pro wrestler, while "The Buck stops here" and there in the Lite Beer from Miller commercials.

It's time to get serious when the Buck stops. No sarcastic nicknames, no pot shots of ridicule, no Fat Boy chants aimed at him. The same goes for Polk.

"I don't think anybody wants to tangle with him," says Collins. "He's quiet, and he doesn't say much. He carries that stick with him most of the time, except when he's on the field. It's like a billy club. Cats don't mess with him."

The Tall And Small Of It

Six-eleven Polk makes guys like Alcorn State's Eric Moon, already tiny at 5-7, 161 pounds, look even smaller. In fact, he even makes big guys look smaller (photo by James Parker).

Polk replenishes his fuel supply during a Freedom Bowl meal. Some pro scouts say he'll need to replenish a lot less and diet a lot more to make the grade (photo by James Parker).

"(I have it) just to be carrying it," explains Polk, who made four tackles and one quarterback sack in the Freedom Bowl All-Star Classic in Atlanta on Jan 12. "No particular reason. It's something I started my freshman year."

Polk is one of 24 football players named to the Sheridan Broadcasting Network's 1984 Black College all-America team. The most familiar names on the team are Mississippi Valley State wide receiver Jerry Rice -- called "one of the four or five best athletes available in the draft" by New England Patriots Director of Player Personnel Dick Steinberg -- and Alcorn State senior defensive back Issiac Holt, who was also Sheridan's Defensive Player of the Year. Valley's record-setting junior quarterback, Willie Totten, was the Offensive Player of the Year.

But Polk is undoubtedly the most interesting player of the year.

"Yeah, he's big enough, isn't he?" joked Dick Haley, director of player personnel for the Pittsburgh Steelers, between practices at the Senior Bowl in Mobile, Ala.

Maybe too big.

"Guys that big are a little handicapped," explained Steinburg, from the East-West Shrine Bowl in Palo Alto, Calif. "He can't be as quick as a guy 6-5. But he has a chance to play because he is a decent athlete."

Says Polk: "I've been thinking about that (the draft) a lot lately. They (pro scouts) told me that I would be drafted, but I don't know by whom."

"Some teams may be willing to take a chance on him," added Steinberg. "He may go in the sixth or seventh round."

Polk runs a 5.2 or 5.3 40-yard dash, which is good for a man of his size, but not swift enough to rush the passer. The NFL puts a premium on the "sackers" today. Lean, quick guys such as the Chicago Bears' Richard Dent, who played at Tennessee State, and the San Francisco 49ers' Fred Dean, formerly of Lousiana Tech, epitomize the trend.

"I might lose a few pounds," said Polk, "but I feel comfortable at the weight I'm at now. My weight is my strength. If I lose that I won't have any strength."

His strength could be his loss on the next level.

The draft record on Polk can be

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INTERVIEW

Moorman: CIAA's the best league in the nation

By SAM DAVIS
Review Staff Writer

Bob Moorman: The CIAA hopes to televise some of its basketball games soon (photo by James Parker).

THE CIAA, LONG RECOGNIZED as one of the best small-college conferences in the country, won't rest on its laurels.

Last year, the CIAA sent a record four teams -- including top-ranked Norfolk State -- to the NCAA Division II basketball playoffs and powerful, albeit tiny, Virginia Union went to the NCAA Division II football playoffs for the fifth straight year.

Last fall, resurgent Norfolk State found its way to the Division II football playoffs and was ranked as high as fifth in the nation during the regular season.

Black College Sports Review talked with CIAA Commissioner Bob Moorman recently about where the CIAA is today and where he expects it to go.

Q: Commissioner Moorman, now that the Supreme Court has ruled that NCAA schools can market their own television football packages, does the CIAA have any plans to pursue a television contract?

A: Our strong suit for television is basketball. It's so difficult for Division II schools to get contracts for football when you have to compete with the Division I schools. So, we're working on basketball and particularly our annual post-season tournament. It's still in the planning stages, but we hope to finalize it soon.

Q: Are you looking at cable television, networks or independent stations?

A: We're looking at a combination of things. If you get on network television, about 90 percent of the time they want to only give you regional coverage. If you can get on national cable television, you're probably going to get less money but more publicity. That helps the conference in areas where the schools are not known, which helps your recruiting. Right now we have a good offer from an independent network that has some cable and independent stations. We just have to work out the particulars on the deal.

Q: What do you feel is the biggest concern for the CIAA and its member schools?

A: Money! The institutions need money and we're always working to get them more money. A lot of our athletic programs aren't run in the black. Some of them are only breaking even. Take, for instance, a school like St. Paul's or Livingstone. Even if they pack the house for a football game, they're really not going to make a lot of money. Football is a very expensive operation.

Q: Are you saying that some of the conference schools should do as Shaw and St. Augustine's did in dropping football?

A: You have to figure out what your priorities are. A lot of schools have strong football traditions and Livingstone is one of them. But, by the same token, look at St. Augustine's. They dropped football and now the rest of their programs are doing real well.

Q: How do you think the CIAA stacks up overall against other Division II conferences and what do you predict for the future?

A: More of the same. The CIAA is the best Division II conference in the country overall and I think we've demonstrated that. Last year we had four teams in the NCAA basketball tournament, we had a team in the football playoffs and teams in track and tennis. We expect to see more of that. Our attendance is up and more teams are making more money.

Q: Norfolk State has probably had as much success as any school in the conference over the past few years. But there's been some speculation that Norfolk might leave the CIAA to join the MEAC. Do you think there is any possibility of that happening?

A: Not really. Any Division II school that is interested in moving up should first dominate Division II before moving up to Division I. A lot of Division II schools decided to move up originally to get the guaranteed television contracts. But all of that is out the window now and it's not going to come back.

The incentives for them (Norfolk State) moving up to Division I just aren't there. They would have to recruit athletes that have 2.0 averages instead of 1.6, putting them out there against the biggies.

The incentives to stay in the CIAA are pretty good. Financially, we might be better off than a lot of Division I-AA conferences. Norfolk State may eventually go to the MEAC, but I don't think it'll be anytime soon.

Q: Much has been said about the number of calls made by CIAA officials -- and the nature of those calls, especially in football. Do you think CIAA officials are on a par with those found in other conferences?

A: We know there is a lot of concern for that, but if a referee sees a player go offsides, then he's got to call it. There's concern for the officiating in all levels of sports. You even have problems in the NFL, where people say that officiating makes the games longer.

We think we have some of the best officials in the country and the fact that we had two invited to officiate in the NCAA playoffs shows it's getting better. Both of our officials were highly complimented by Troy State (Ala.) after the game between Troy State and Central State. The people down there felt so good about them that they were invited back the next week.

We furnished officials for Florida A&M and Tennessee State this year and Florida A&M was so impressed that they asked us for an all-CIAA crew for their games.

Q: With all the success the CIAA has had holding its annual basketball tournament in Norfolk in recent years, why the switch to Richmond for 1986-87?

A: The main reason is because Richmond made the best bid. We asked several cities to send in proposals and it was just a matter of going to the city with the best bid.

Q: Will the move to Richmond allow the conference to increase attendance

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