RECRUITING

# Alcorn: A winning year begets a hefty haul

By DAVID BULLA
Review Staff Writer

**Alcorn State's** rise to the top in the Southwestern Athletic Conference last year had its ramifications, one of which was to make recruiting easier for Coach Marino Casem and his staff.

"This year recruiting was far better than last year," said Casem, whose 1984 team posted a 9-1 record. "We were better able to meet our needs.

"The increased exposure we received, coupled with a successful program (16 winning seasons in the last 19 years), made us more attractive. So we were able to recruit that player with great size and good speed."

Casem's greatest needs were defensive linemen, defensive backs and running backs. Three of his top recruits were linemen, including Anthony Wood, Sterling Garman and Cecil Trotter.

Running backs Ezra Thomas and Cedric Bush are expected to see more than a little playing time this season. Elliott Smith was the top secondary recruit.

"You hope a few in each class will help immediately," Casem said. "We've got about a half dozen this year. But you also know about 90 percent won't, so you just hope they contribute eventually."

**Mississippi Valley State's** top losses included all-America wide receiver Jerry Rice and defensive linemen Lloyd Mumphrey and Robert Sanders. Yet Coach Archie "Gunslinger" Cooley believes he can find adequate replacements.

"No one can replace Jerry Rice," he said. "But our new crop will make names for themselves. Without Mumphrey and Sanders, the defensive line will be watched closely. But I think we have quality talent there."

One of the Delta Devils' best recruits is robust Ryan Burgess of Eudora, Ark. Burrell stands 6-foot-4 and weighs 290 pounds. Cooley and his staff recruited another giant in 6-5, 295-pound Ronnie Webster of Chicago and a talented defensive back in Marvin Prevo.

Cooley said successful 1983 and '84 seasons put some additional money in the athletic department's coffers, giving the MSVU staff the luxury to recruit more extensively. The sixth-year Delta Devil coach was 14-16-1 in his first three years at the Itta Bena, Miss., school, compared to a 16-4-1 showing the last two seasons. That includes a 9-2 ledger last year.

"We recruited in Louisiana, Alabama, Georgia and Mississipi," he said. "We had more money to work with and that made it a better recruiting year for us."

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*-- Alcorn's Marino Casem*

**Southern University** Coach Otis Washington also reported an improved recruiting situation.

"We really got what we wanted," said Washington, coming off a 6-5 campaign. "We needed both offensive and defensive linemen, and we got the physical players who can help immediately."

The Jaguars recruited 22 players, including 15 linemen. Among the best line recruits are brothers Calvin (6-3, 240) and Carl Milligan (6-3, 250), Ken House (6-4, 270) and Darry Brooks (6-3, 220).

Southern also landed a transfer in Jeff Alexander, who had played at Tulane. Alexander should see time at running back.

**Grambling State's** Eddie Robinson, coming off a 7-4 season, likes to concentrate on the long term. He prefers to minimize the role of freshmen and, after losing only six lettermen, Robinson expected only one newcomer to make a contribution this season in cornerback Ricky Branch.

**Jackson State's** W.C. Gorden prefers to work for the long term, too. Even though Jackson returns just nine starters, Gorden will find replacements among his returning players.

"None of this year's crop will contribute right away," said Gorden, whose 1984 team posted the first losing

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# SIX-SHOOTER

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Jackson State's W.C. Gorden on "Satellite": "Totten is a pass receiver's quarterback. He throws a soft ball with a good, tight spiral, which is unique (photo by Mark Gail)."

"Being black is always a strike against you," says Totten. "I feel if a person is producing, he shouldn't be judged by his color but by his performance. But the way things are set up there are more white quarterbacks than there are black.

"I read once where quarterback is a white man's job, but white quarterbacks are proving that to be wrong. On some teams, I don't see how white quarterbacks even play.

"Being black will be a factor against me. I'll just do what I do best -- throw the ball. If they don't want me throwing the ball, I may as well pack and get me a coaching job."

Cooley feels the only thing standing between Totten and an outstanding pro career is the prejudices of owners and coaches.

"If they give him a shot like they do everybody else," says Cooley, "I'm not worried about him. "The only problem is how black they're going to get. He can play football. They know that. The point is who is willing to give him a fair shake and not use what he does wrong as an excuse to sit him down."

Cooley is the first to acknowledge that Totten has imperfections. But those imperfections are few. At 6 feet 2 and 200 pounds, he has the size the pros like.

Also, he is accustomed to reading defenses. He has a strong enough arm to go deep and possesses good touch on the medium routs.

"You never conquer it all," says Cooley. "The thing is how good can he get from where he is. I hope he will get even better. All of us have weaknesses. But the kind of weaknesses he has you have to look for."

Totten, who will graduate with a degree in health and physical education in December, says he will just wait and see what happens.

"I would love to play pro ball," says Totten. "That's always been one of my dreams. I mostly wanted to play in the NFL because that was the only league. But I'm not going to base everything on playing pro ball.

"I know how difficult it is to be a pro athlete. You can have the ability but you might not perform the way the owner and coaches want you to. Things don't always work the way you want them to. If I get drafted, it'll be the best thing to happen to me. If I don't, I can always fall back on my degree."

New England Patriots Director of Player Personnel Dick Steinberg thinks it'll be a while before Totten will have to worry about putting his desire to work.

"We've looked at him in a preliminary way," says Steinberg. "We haven't looked at him close but we know he's a prospect. He has a good arm. He's strong and he's experienced in an offense similar to what he will be asked to do in the NFL."

Even though Totten plays for a small black school and the popular notion is that NFL clubs tend downgrade such athletes -- especially quarterbacks -- Steinberg contends that won't be a factor come draft time.

"We do consider level of competition, all else being equal," he says. "If a player is similar in size, skills and athletic ability to Willie and he played at Illinois for instance, we take the guy from Illinois. But he won't be penalized a great deal -- only if everything else is equal.

"We penalize a kid less for level of competition if he's a quarterback than any other position. It's a different position. No matter what level he plays on, he has to cope with the pressure and be a leader.

"Being black isn't a factor anymore," Steinberg says. "Some will be skeptical, but I think we've progressed beyond that point. I'm sorry people feel that's a problem. Coaches want to win. They have to be concerned about their livelihood. They want the best people they can get."

Considering his desire to play professionally, it would be understandable if Totten were to think of himself first and concentrate on doing whatever is necessary to make himself more attractive to the pros. That's happened to more than a few star players.

But Totten doesn't appear to be a candidate for that role.

"I need to try to keep my composure and not worry about going pro and letting pressure be the main issue," he says. "I need to stay relaxed and keep confidence in myself. After that, I'll reach my final goal.

I'm just hoping I have a good year.

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