COMMENTARY

D.C. doldrums: A struggle on the field and off

By ANTHONY POWELL
Special To The Review

Black college football in the nation's capital has fallen on hard times.

Last year, Bowie State, Howard University and the University of the District of Columbia had a combined record of 2-26-1, with Bowie (0-10) and UDC (0-8-1) going winless.

Howard, under first-year Coach Willie Jeffries, won only two games in '84, beating Virginia State and Morgan State.

But the three black schools in the D.C. area face obstacles that a Grambling, Mississippi Valley or Jackson State wouldn't encounter in the Deep South.

First of all, they have to face competition from professional teams -- the Washington Redskins and Baltimore Orioles -- for attention in the local media. They also must face competition from Division I teams at the University of Maryland, the Naval Academy, the University of Virginia and Virginia Tech for additional space in the local papers.

Even though Virginia Union and Virginia State are closer to Washington, the University of Virginia and Virginia Tech receive more attention than the three local black schools.

Plus, the Washington, D.C., area provides more entertainment options than the Deep South. The Kennedy Center, Capital Centre, Constitution Hall, National Theatre and the Warner Theatre, among other diversions, offer a variety of choices.

There is also a host of clubs, especially in the Georgetown and Southwest Waterfront, that attract huge crowds on the weekends. Would you rather pay money to see a Howard University football game or nationally known singer Whitney Houston performing during the same weekend?

A Norfolk State, Fort Valley State or Florida A&M doesn't face this kind of stiff competition for the entertainment dollar.

"There's more things to do to take their minds off it (football)," said Jeffries.

Added Bowie State Coach John Organ: "It's not that much to do down South. In the North, there's other forms of entertainment and the emphasis (on football) is different."

But the main thing that hurts black college football in the nation's capital is the fact that the three teams simply aren't winning. Winning football, according to the coaches, will bring out the crowds despite the obvious distractions.

Howard's Doug Dickerson reverses direction: Willie Jeffries hopes the Bison program does the same.

"You can't continue to lose, lose, lose," said UDC Coach Bobby Frazier, who used to coach at Bethune-Cookman. "We are not getting big crowds because we aren't winning."

Howard had winning teams in the mid-70s, but the program started to skid and the Bison suffered a 1-9 season in 1983 under Joe Taylor, now the head football coach at Virginia Union. Howard hired Jeffries, one of the best black coaches in the country, to turn around the program. But he suffered a 2-8 season his first year at the helm.

Howard lost its first three games of the '85 season and was blasted 46-0 in its second game against the University of Rhode Island.

"If the team improves, we should get the coverage," said Jeffries. "And if the school got better support, we would do much better."

Jeffries said that South Carolina State, a school that he put on the college football map, will attract more students to a Bison home game than Howard.

Bowie State's problem is that it hasn't given scholarships to its football players until recently. The lack of scholarships turned the Bulldogs into the doormats of the CIAA. Bowie this year offers partial scholarships to its football and basketball players for the first time in the school's history.

"This is the first year we are offering any kind of aid," said Organ.

"You might not see it (improvement) the first year, but you can see a difference in the caliber of players we have."

BSC has the unique problem of being a mostly black school in a mostly white community, miles away from the black communities in Prince George's County -- where the school is located -- and the District. Plus, the Bulldogs have a lot of commuting students who don't have the time to attend home games.

"By them having to come out here for a game, it would cost them money," said Organ.

Being a commuter school also hurts UDC, which hasn't won a game in two years, going 0-10 and 0-8-1. UDC doesn't have any dormitories to house out-of-state athletes, so the Firebirds must rely on local players to build a team.

Local football in the District is not as good as is basketball; the Firebirds won the NCAA Division II basketball championship (1982) with local players.

"I haven't been fortunate to get enough people to build a team," said Frazier, who added that he needs full-time coaches, dormitories and better recruits to turn around UDC's fortunes.

"Bowie and Howard are getting better support on campus because they have dormitories," he said. "Here, when the kids finish classes they go home."

Frazier would like to see a Howard-UDC game, which he feels would bring out the crowds.

The Firebirds already play the Bulldogs on the last day of the season.

"It has to get better," Frazier said of black college football in the nation's capital. "It can't get any worse."

Anthony Powell is a part-time writer for The Washington Post.

MEAC REPORT

DelState demolishes Wildcats, builds tradition

By JERRY McGUIRE
Special To The Review

DELAWARE STATE finally put its football house in order last year.

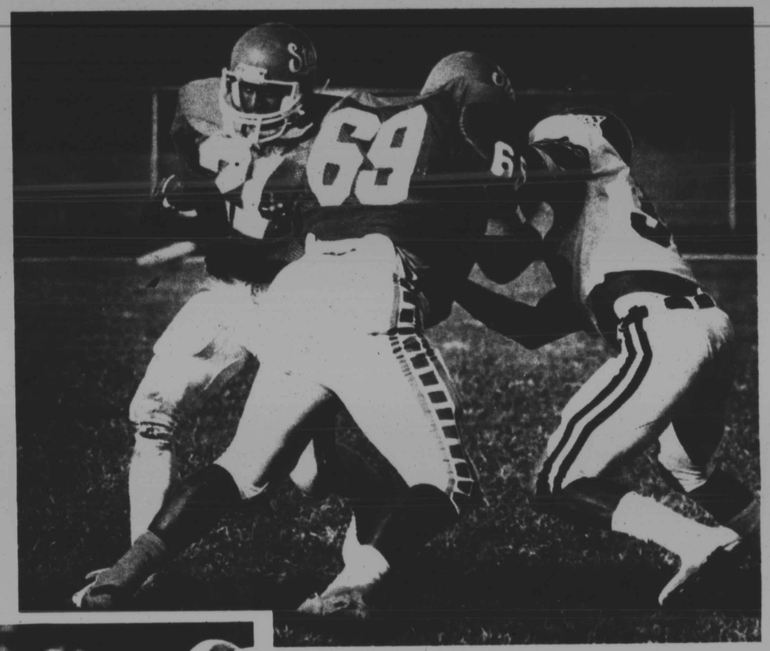
Gone were the memories of losing season after losing season. Gone were the ineptitude and embarrassing defeats. No longer were the Hornets the Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference's whipping boy.

By the end of last season, Delaware State football was known for an explosive offense capable of scoring at any time, and as a program that had become nationally recognized in statistic after statistic in NCAA Division I-AA. The once-lowly Hornets had won more than 70 percent of their games in two years and had gone 7-2 against MEAC opponents during the same period.

But there was one piece of business the Hornets left unfinished in the wake of '84's 8-2 season.

Even after its most successful campaign ever, Delaware State -- a charter member of the MEAC when it was formed in 1970 -- still could not say it had won an MEAC football championship. The Hornets had let that goal slip through their fingers on a steamy September night in Daytona Beach, Fla.

True, Bethune-Cookman and quarterback Bernard Hawk had something to do with it. Hawk threw for 324 yards, and the Wildcats gained 80 more yards and a touchdown on an option pass in a 41-38 win.



On A Roll

Above, Hornet runner Curtis Trott (21) follows a block from guard Marcellus Edwards. Below, reserve quarterback Mike Walker steps into a pressure cooker, and DelState doesn't miss a beat (photos by Gary Emeigh).

But the Hornets didn't feel it was Hawk who beat them. It was the memory of seven turnovers, one of which led directly to a B-CC score, that haunted them for a year.

Something else burned the Hornets, too -- the memories of a savage, bench-clearing brawl at halftime that saw players from both teams get in their share of cheap shots. It nearly turned into a full-fledged riot.

So, like a fighter who'd thought he'd been robbed, the Hornets eagerly awaited the 1985 rematch with Bethune Oct. 5 at DelState's Alumni Stadium in Dover. Even with other games still to come, the Hornet players and coaches openly and eagerly spoke of another shot at the Wildcats.

When that shot came, the taste of revenge was sweet. Had it been a boxing match, it would have been a middle-round TKO.

Even with an untested quarterback at the controls, the Hornets pounded Bethune-Cookman 51-7 in front of a capacity homecoming crowd at Alumni Stadium.

Now DelState (5-1 at press time) needs only a win over Howard in its regular-season finale Nov. 23 to claim the MEAC title outright.

Before whipping the Wildcats, DelState already had posted big conference wins over North Carolina A&T (30-16) and South Carolina State (38-20), plus a 35-0 win over Morgan State that doesn't count in the conference standings.

"I never expected us to beat them

Please See Page 17