DelState *CONTINUED*

Hawk throw for 730 yards against it in the schools' two previous meetings.

"Defensively, I'm not surprised," said Collick, whose team finally allowed Bethune to score on a two-yard Kevin Ross-to-Sebastian Brown TD pass with just over a minute to go. "I've told everyone all along that we've got a good group back there (cornerbacks Keith Harris, Billy Alston and Willie Sheppard, Chew, and free safeties Joe Burton and P.J. Lee).

"We didn't sack Hawk, but we put a lot of pressure on him up front, and I want to tell you that (DelState Defensive Coordinator) Greg McLaurin came up with a heckuva defensive scheme."

The rancor between the two programs surfaced again at the end of the game, when Bethune coach Larry Little bypassed the traditional coach's handshake, instead giving a half-hearted wave to Collick as he walked off the field.

"Well, I can't speak for Larry or his program," said Collick about the lack of post-game decorum. "All I know is that we have to live by our own soul here at Delaware State College. We want to have a first-class program, and we're trying to act first-class all the way."

Little, who had vigorously protested two first-half penalties that took the Wildcats out of scoring position, didn't think it was the Hornets' dominance so much as it was his own team's mistakes that led to the rout.

"We didn't play winning football, and that's what happens when you don't play winning football," said the former Miami Dolphin all-pro guard. "Their big plays killed us.

"It was too bad we gave up the championship as easily as we did. If we hadn't have made all those turnovers, it might have been a different game."

Given the Cinderella performance of Walker, probably not.

With two-year starter Pat Spencer banished from the Hornet program because of a drug-related arrest in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., in May, quarterback was supposed to be a big question mark for the Hornets in 1985.

After Spencer, the only quarterback with any experience at all was Baker, who at 5-11, 175 pounds, was three inches shorter and 20 pounds lighter than Spencer.

But Baker -- who almost lost the starting job in summer camp before Liberty Baptist transfer and former Delaware high school all-stater John Lane was declared academically ineligible -- had run the team well in leading the Hornets to a 4-1 start before taking on Bethune.

The DelState defense made life miserable for the Wildcats in the air and on the ground (photo by Gary Emeigh).

Although his arm isn't as strong as Spencer's, he can run and executes the fakes in the Wing-T to a T. Baker also is an accurate short passer, and he's proven he is a winner.

But after Baker, Collick and his coaches felt they didn't have anyone else who could run the team in an emergency. In fact, Baker didn't run the option play in the Hornets' first two games because coaches feared an injury.

But while Baker developed in the starting role, Walker developed in a backup role. Baker initially hurt his ankle in DelState's 37-17 loss to Northern Iowa, and when it didn't respond to treatment, Walker ran the first-team offense as it prepared for Bethune.

When Walker replaced Baker, he was ready.

"I really wasn't that nervous," said Walker, a New York City native. "I really expected it to be a lot tougher, but it was easy, just like in practice. The coaches did a good job, because all the reads they gave me really worked out. John and all the receivers were wide open today."

"That was the best he's ever played, practice or game," said an almost-shocked John Coveleski, the Hornets' offensive coordinator. "We didn't know if he could run the team or not. But they say the great ones rise to the occasion, and he sure did today,"

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-- Michael Walker

For that matter, so did the rest of the Hornets.

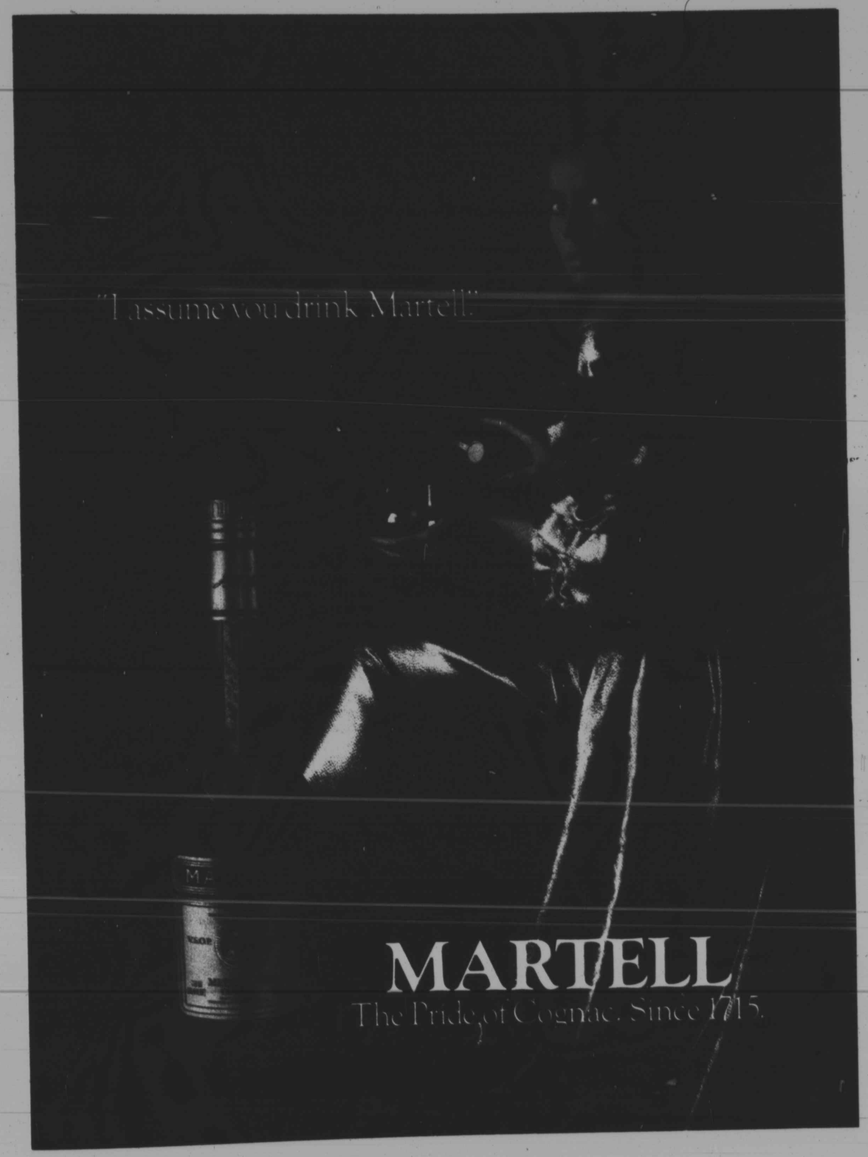
"I wanted to go and win today for the seniors, the guys who'd been here for four years and hadn't won an MEAC title yet," said Walker. "All those guys really helped me today, and I was glad I could help them."

Senior tri-captain and inside linebacker Danny Coppedge, though happy his team had hurdled the biggest obstacle to a league title, still tried to keep the win in perspective.

"We still have to beat Howard," said Coppedge. "And there's still a lot of other goals we'd like to accomplish before the year's over."

For the record, DelState has beaten Howard 62-20 and 45-6 the past two years.

With the season finale a month away, the Hornets will turn their thoughts away from the MEAC and toward earning a Division I-AA playoff berth, which would be the league's first since 1982.

But it'll be a long time before the Hornets forget the day they ended 15 long years of MEAC frustration -- and put the final shingle on the roof of their shiny new football house.

Jerry McGuire is the sports editor of the Delaware State News.