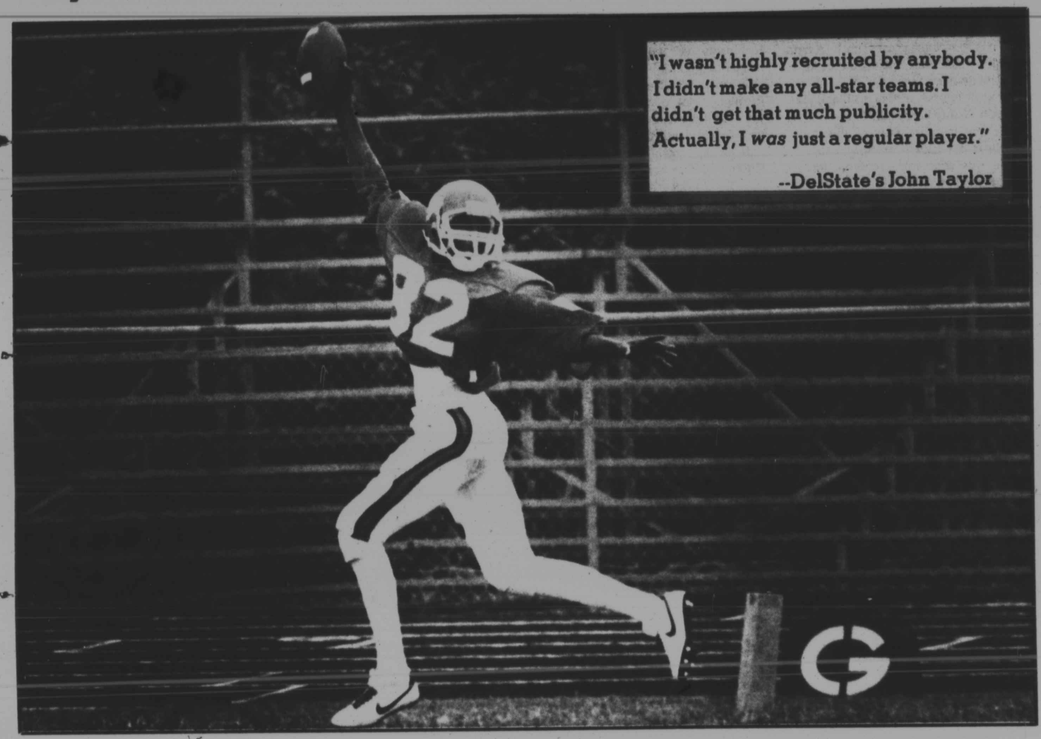
COVER STORY

# Taylor-made for success at Delaware State



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--DelState's John Taylor

Familiar scene: A wide-open Taylor sprints into the end zone for a touchdown (photo by Gary Emeigh).

By DONALD HUNT
Special To The Review

The recruiters didn't exactly knock John Taylor's door down.

When Taylor played wide receiver at Pennsauken (N.J.) High School,, he was considered merely average -- a baseball player who spent his autumns in a football uniform. Nothing more, nothing less.

Now Taylor is one of college football's best wide receivers, an all-America candidate for Delaware State who could be a first-round choice next spring in the NFL draft.

"I wasn't highly recruited by anybody," says Taylor, a 6-1, 185-pound senior. "I didn't make any all-star teams. I didn't get that much publicity. Actually, I *was* just a regular player. My best sport in high school was baseball. I made the all-South Jersey team. I wanted to play baseball in college. But I decided to give football a shot."

Rival coaches in the Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference probably wish Taylor hadn't.

Last year, the Hornets' spectacular receiver totaled 34 receptions for 758 yards and 10 touchdowns, despite a run-oriented offense. This season he's already made 22 receptions for 541 yards while scoring eight touchdowns.

But success hasn't come easily, Taylor says. Teams are much more aware of him this year.

"I can tell other teams are concentrating on me a little more," he says. "I have a lot harder time getting open now. I've also seen a few double-teams on different occasions. But, while they're concerned with me, our other players -- (halfback) Eldridge Comer, (fullback) Reggie Barnes and (fullback) Terrance Hoover -- are coming on strong."

Despite the attention from defenders, Taylor still can be explosive. He has 4.5 speed in the 40-yard dash and he's known for his ability to catch passes in heavy traffic. Taylor's also a fine return specialist on punts and kickoffs.

"That's what makes him so dangerous," says Bill Collick, the Hornets' first-year head coach. "He's a type of player who can beat you in so many ways. He's capable of making the big play by either running a punt back all the way or catching a crucial touchdown pass. The thing that excites me about John is his ability to run after he catches the ball."

Most stars don't relish special-teams duty. But it doesn't seem to bother Taylor.

"I don't mind running back punts or kickoffs," he says. "I'll do anything to help the team win. I really don't get tired out there. I've been doing this for three years. I think playing on the special teams will help me down the road."

That road could lead to professional football, where Taylor's versatility should be an advantage, says Jim Katcavage of the NFL Scouting Service.

"He reminds me of Lynn Swann (the former Pittsburgh Steeler)," Katcavage says. "Taylor's a game-breaker. I think the fact that he can return punts and kickoffs and catch the ball should make him a very attractive player. You never know. He may be able to make it right away as a return





## Taylor-made *CONTINUED*

man. He's got a lot of things going for him."

Taylor gives his quarterback, Jerome Baker, a lot of the credit for his success. Baker, a 5-11, 170-pound senior, has passed for 663 yards this season and seven touchdowns.

"He's done a good job under pressure," Taylor says. "Most of the teams we play try to blitz the quarterback. They feel if they can make it tough on Jerome, then I won't be able to catch any passes. The best way to stop a good passing game is to put pressure on the quarterback. But Jerome has been scrambling out of the pocket and finding the open receiver."

In 1980, DelState had to scramble for respectablity. The Hornets were crushed that season by Portland State 105-0, a loss that made headlines across the country. Portland State's quarterback at that time was Neil Lomax, who plays now for the St. Louis Cardinals.

Following that season, Delaware state hired Joe Purzycki as the coach. Purzycki turned the program around before leaving for James Madison, one of the two teams that defeated the Hornets a year ago. Delaware State's records under Purzycki were 2-9, 4-7, 7-3-1 and 8-2.

Taylor wasn't around when the Hornets were the laughing stock of the MEAC. But he's felt the repercussions, even years later.

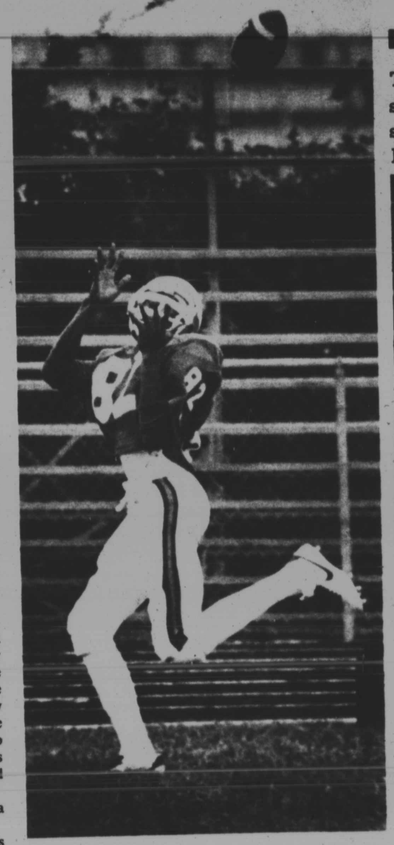
"I think everybody's heard about the 105-0 game," he says. "I wasn't here then, but I don't think anybody will forget about that game. I'm sure the school lost some respect around the league. My first year was a pretty rough season. We lost some close games. But Coach Purzycki wasn't too discouraged. He knew good things were ahead for us. He was a good coach."

Taylor believes Coach Collick uses a similar philosophy.

"He gets the most out of his players," Taylor says. "That's always the sign of a good coach. He uses a lot of players. Coach Collick knows we have some talent on this team. I think everybody misses Coach Purzycki, but we're happy with Coach Collick. He learned a great deal under Coach Purzycki. We haven't changed that much. We're still a very disciplined team that plays hard every game."

The Hornets came very close to winning the MEAC a year ago, but a 41-38 loss to eventual league champion Bethune-Cookman cost them the crown. They avenged that defeat this season.

"We actually had the best overall record in the conference," Taylor says of last year. "We thought we had the best team in the league, too. But we made a couple of mistakes against Bethune-Cookman which allowed the game to get away from us. We would like to win the MEAC this year. We have to get by some pretty good teams. It's not going to be easy. But that's our goal for the season."



### Like A Craftsman

Taylor on a picture-perfect over-the-shoulder grab: Opponents wish he had stuck with baseball (photos by Gary Emeigh).

Like Taylor, the Hornets have surprised the experts this season and may parlay what was expected to be an average year into a championship.

That will be no small accomplishment, given the loss of such talent as offensive tackle Franz Kappel and fullback Gene Lake, Division's I-AA's leading rusher last season with 1,722 yards and 20 touchdowns. Both were all-Americas.

"Franz (Kappel) and Gene (Lake) were great players," Taylor says. "They were a very big part of our offense. I mean, without them we wouldn't have been able to put many points on the scoreboard. But even though they're not here, we still have some key players. Plus, we've been there before. This team knows how to win. We're on a mission this season."

Taylor, a marketing major, plans to enter the business world once his playing days are over. He says he doesn't want to put all his eggs in one basket; he's seen too many athletes get lost in the shuffle.

"I work very hard in my classes," Taylor says. "I want to learn as much as I can. I know a lot of people have been talking to me about the NFL, especially after *The Sporting News* put me on their (preseason) all-America team. But I can't worry about the draft or anything like that right now. You never know what can happen playing football. I could go out next week and break my leg and my career would be history. So you really can't concentrate on playing professional football because the opportunity may never come."

Then again, it may.

*Donald Hunt is sports editor of the* Philadelphia Tribune.