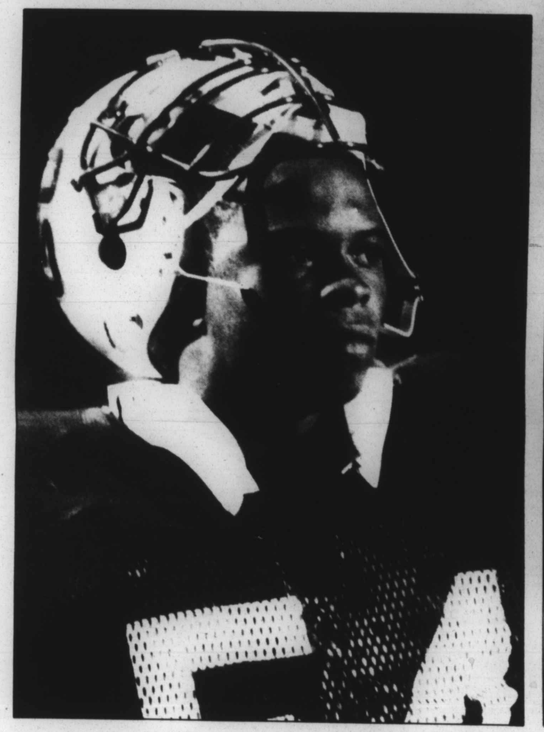
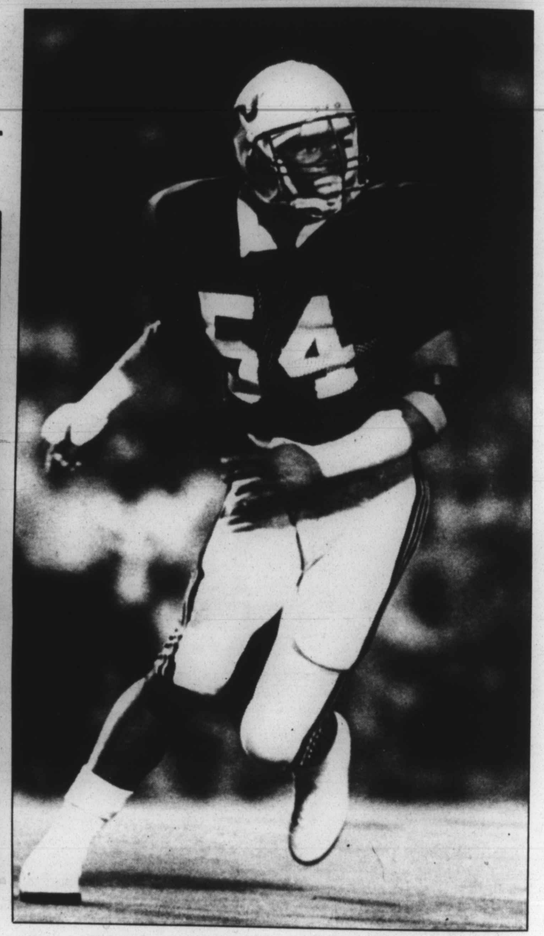
PROFILE

To TSU captain Elam, touchdowns are a crime

Elam's speed and versatility enable the Tigers to use a multitude of defensive fronts, which often confuse and stymie opposing offenses (right photo by Mark Lyons; bottom photo by Craig T. Greenlee).





By CRAIG T. GREENLEE
Review Staff Writer

TENNESSEE STATE'S defensive captain is an outside linebacker who majors in criminal justice – a pursuit that obviously spills over to the grid wars.

To Onzy Elam, allowing offenses to have their way is a crime. Therefore, enforcing the law of the Tiger defense is the byword of his mates who are on the same pace for being stingy as they were a year ago.

Onzy (pronounced AHN-ze) is a three-year starter for TSU, which has ranked in the top five nationally in defense for the past two years. A cerebral guy who meshes speed, agility and brawn, he is the centerpiece in the Tigers' defensive sets.

This season, Elam has attracted great interest among pro scouts and agents alike, who are flocking to the Nashville campus to check him out on film, at practice and under game conditions. Impressed? You bet.

For openers, he's a 6-3, 215-pounder with consistent 4.5 speed in the 40. He bench presses 440 pounds and packs a vicious lick. After recording 78 tackles and six sacks in '85, he's on target to surpass those totals in '86.

Elam presents an array of problems for opposing offenses. His strength and fast feet allow him to quickly fill the gaps on inside runs. He has the speed to stop sweeps whether coming his way or going away from his side of the field. Quarterbacks have nightmares when he blitzes.

Plus he has the quickness and savvy to employ bump-and-run pass coverage against wide receivers.

"Onzy provides a great deal of leadership to this football team," says Bill Thomas, head coach at TSU. "He allows us to do a lot of different things on defense because of his versatility. He moves well, has good instincts and is very competitive."

The Miami senior is very much at home at outside linebacker now. Thomas recruited Elam out of Northwestern High School as a 185-pound strong safety. But during his freshman year, when he was redshirted, Elam bulked up to 200 pounds. The added weight came at a good time, because the Tigers were short in their linebacking corps. He switched positions and has been there ever since.

"I'm much more relaxed now," Elam says of the adjustment. "I know what to do because I know the system inside and out."

Yet, despite his past successes, he realizes there's always room for improvement. "I'm working to get better in my overall play," he says, "especially in the passing game, because I'm involved in more pass coverages now,

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VOLLEYBALL

Rams' Williams: The tie that binds at WSSU

By ROBIN BARKSDALE
Review Staff Writer

Williams helps the youthful Rams keep their composure – while being mindful to stay cool herself (photo by James Parker).

THE COMPETITIVE nature of Winston-Salem State's top volleyball player is elementary, dear friends.

For Carol Williams, captain of this year's Lady Ram team, says it was her elementary school teacher who convinced her that she could master the game. And indeed she has.

"When I first started playing, I didn't think I could do it very well," Williams recalls, smiling modestly. "Mrs. (Chris F.) Lamar (at Prince Ibraham Elementary School in Winston-Salem, N.C.) always encouraged me and told me I was a good athlete and that I'd learn to play the game if I kept trying."

Williams, a senior, is a seasoned veteran on a team filled with underclassmen. She has shouldered the responsibility for guiding the younger players and helping them make the adjustment to the competitive nature of collegiate volleyball. It is a task Ram Coach Al Roseboro says she has handled well.

"She'd have to be considered our 'Miss Everything,' " Roseboro says of Williams, a member of last season's all-CIAA team. "She's a very dedicated athlete and an excellent leader. She's done an outstanding job for us in the last four years."

Though soft-spoken and introspective off the court, Williams dons an aggressive, energetic attitude when standing across the net from her opponents.

On the floor, she leads by example, putting her heart and body into each set shot and spike. A confident performer, she offers on-the-floor encouragement and inspiration to her teammates, and she plays with a philosophy that helps her remain levelheaded.

"Being a leader is not that important to me," she says. "One of my main responsibilities is to hold the team's composure together. You can't get upset with yourself. I have to try to keep everyone composed on the floor. Some people get bothered because they feel you're trying to tell them what to do, but I have to be concerned with holding the team together on the floor and not letting anyone get too upset with themselves."

Williams takes volleyball seriously and is quick to point out that there's more to the game than meets the eye.

"Most people like to just come out and spike the ball real hard," the 5-foot-6 Williams says. "But that's not all there is to volleyball. If you can't get a good pass, you can't get a good set, and if you don't get a good set, you can't spike the ball well."

Williams has grown into her role as the Rams' floor leader and admits that she experienced some initial difficulties adjusting to college volleyball. As a freshman arriving at Winston-Salem State from East Forsyth High School in nearby Kernersville, N.C., Williams says she wasn't quite sure what to expect. What she found was a schedule that demanded a rearranging of her priorities.

"I don't have trouble making time for school and sports now, but at first I had to get used to being in college and to making the road trips," the 22-year-old business major said. "I had to adjust to traveling and playing ball. But it has all come together for me."

And it couldn't have come together at a better time, Williams feels. She says that this year's Lady Rams team is the best she has played for, and she has set her sights on one immediate goal -- upending the reigning conference champion, St. Augustine's. The Falcons have owned the title for two consecutive years and have again fielded a tough team this season.

Williams, despite her team's early-season loss to the defending champions, feels the Falcons can be beaten and hopes her team is the one to hand them a loss.

"St. Augustine's has good all-round athletes, and most of them are from the Bahamas," she says. "Apparently, in the Bahamas, volleyball is a major sport, and they think volleyball and eat volleyball and sleep volleyball. They're a very good team, but when we go out on the floor to play their team or anybody else's, we start out equal and they have just as much chance of missing their sets and spikes as we do. We just have to concentrate and make our shots count. Overall, we have very good athletes. Since I've been here, this is the best group of athletes that I've seen. If you have a good bunch of athletes, you can teach them almost anything. I think this might be our year."

Whatever the outcome of the Rams' season, Williams will embark on a new path at the end of the school year. She will trade her study hours for business hours, but her love for volleyball will not be far behind. In fact, she has plans to try for a spot on the U.S. Olympic volleyball team. Although she respects the competition she will face at that level, Williams is far from intimidated by it.

"One of my dreams is to play on the Olympic team," says Williams, who also plays on three other teams, including a United States Volleyball Association Summer League team. "I'm not being immodest, ... but I feel that, if I get the training that they have, I'd fit right in with them."

Even if she doesn't secure a spot on the Olympic team, Williams says, she will never voluntarily give up the sport she began a love affair with at the age of 6.

"I'll never walk away from it," she says. "Even when I'm old and gray, I'll probably be out there trying to play volleyball."

Robin Barksdale is a reporter for the Winston-Salem (N.C.) Chronicle.