MEAC PROFILE

Howard's Harvey 'Silk' Reed: A star on the rise

By ED HILL JR.
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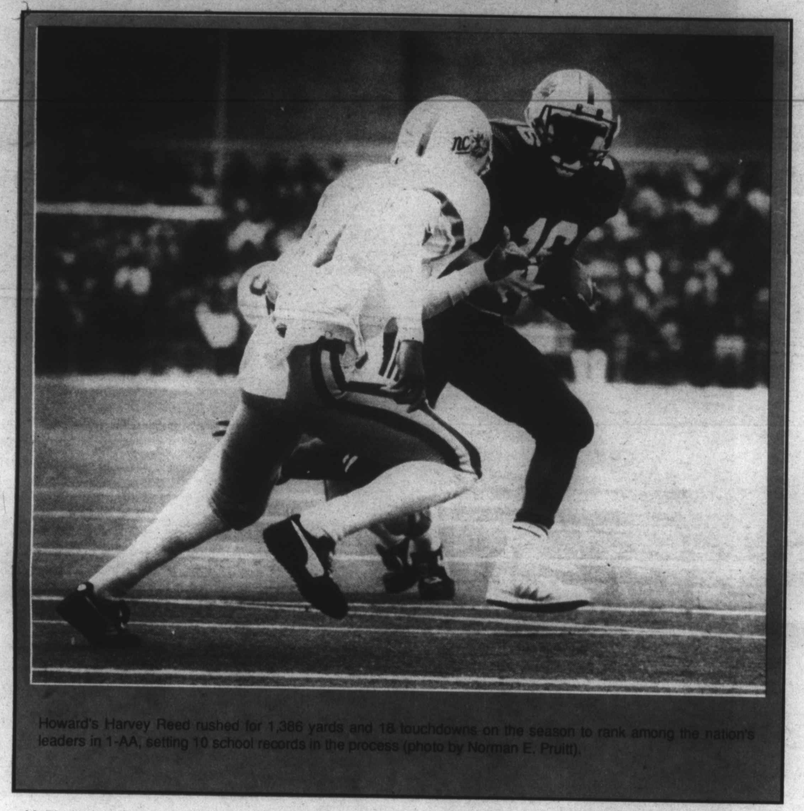
The exploits of Harvey "Silk" Reed are rapidly becoming legendary around the Washington, DC area. With the NFL players' strike currently under way, the topic of conversation in these parts generally gets around to which of Reed's runs rate highest on the all-time list.

There are those who swear that his 71-yard TD run against Delaware State last season in which he started left, reversed his field and then outran two defenders to the end zone, was his best. Others will argue that his 77 yarder against Newberry where he broke the line of scrimmage, shifted gears at midfield and sped past two defenders with perfect angles was tops.

And then there's his latest. A 23-yard touchdown run against South Carolina State in which he tightroped the sideline at full speed for 10 yards and scored standing up, certainly ranks high.

Arguments aside, Harvey "Silk" Reed is one of the premier backs in the country and Howard University is excited about it.

Reed, who was named "Silk" last season by Black Entertainment Television color commentator Lem Barney, almost did not come to Howard. After leading his team, Miami Southridge High School to a 32-2 record in three years and a state runner-up finish, Reed began to attract attention from recruiters like the University of Michigan, the University of Florida, Georgia, Iowa State, Alabama and the University of Illinois.



Howard's Harvey Reed rushed for 1,386 yards and 18 touchdowns on the season to rank among the nation's leaders in 1-AA, setting 10 school records in the process (photo by Norman E. Pruitt).

And although Howard was one of his visits, Reed says it was not his first choice.

"I took visits to Iowa State, Michigan and Florida," recalls Reed, a senior. "Howard was one of my last visits and at that time I had pretty much made up my mind that I was going to be a Florida Gator.

"I basically visited Howard because my teammates Curtis Chappell, Leon Brown, Marvin Jackson and Toney McClain were visiting there. When we made the visit, I was impressed with a lot of the things Howard had to offer, especially its academics."

Despite the impression Howard left on him, Reed says he was still focused on Florida when he returned home. But a strange thing happened to him. Just when he was about to sign with Florida (he says he in fact signed his first name on the contract), he suddenly changed his mind.

"I thought about what Coach (Earl) Humes told me. The other schools talked about being redshirted my freshman year, becoming All-American and winning the Heisman Trophy. Coach Humes told me I could play football, maybe run track and be a good student-athlete. (Coach Humes is the defensive backfield coach at Howard.)

"Plus Curtis, Marvin, Leon and I decided that if we all could go to Howard together we could turn the program around. I mean after all, we had all played together for three years."

Reed then found out what most freshmen find out: there is a vast difference between high school and college. The highly-touted freshman found out that the competition and the academics were on another level.

Adding to Reed's adjustment was the frustration of losing, something he had never experienced before.

"The losing was harder to take than anything," recalls Reed. "After we lost our first three games, I called my mother and told her that I had had enough of the losing and I wanted to come home. She told me that I had made the decision and to stick with it. She told me that if I believed in the Lord, things would work out."

The team ended the season by starting 17 freshmen and ended the season 2-8, but the dye had been cast. Reed finished with 604 yards and five touchdowns to lead his team.

The next season, the team matured after a slow start and finished 4-7 with Reed gaining 640 yards and four touchdowns despite nagging injuries.

Then in 1986, the team and Reed's fortunes turned. Following a slow 1-3 start in which Reed was hampered by injuries and limited to one full game, the Bison went on an unbelievable tear, winning seven straight games to end the season at 8-3, their best record in a decade.

Not surprisingly, Reed was a catalyst. He rushed for 1,386 yards and 18 touchdowns on the season to rank among the nation's leaders in 1-AA. In the process, he set 10 school records.

The Bison and Reed have picked up where they left off. At press time, Howard was 3-0 and sporting a 10-game win streak, the longest in 1-AA. During that streak, Reed has rushed for over 100 yards in each of those games, three times topping the 200-yard mark.

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