FOOTBALL UPDATE

# Jackson's on top but Grambling's in the hunt

Jackson State isn't as experienced as they were a year ago when they went to the Division I-AA playoffs. But the Tigers (2-0-2, 2-0) are showing why they were ranked in the pre-season polls and why they are still the team to beat in the Southwestern Athletic Conference.

Coach W.C. Gorden's defense is the best in the league and the offense is second ranked behind Grambling. Linebacker Cammie Collins leads a defensive 11 that has allowed an average of 205.7 total offensive yards so far this season. Collins has 39 tackles and four sacks. In JSU's 10-10 tie with Florida A & M in the Circle City Classic in Indianapolis, he recorded 10 1/2 tackles and 2 1/2 sacks to be voted the Classic's defensive MVP.

On offense, everything starts and begins with Lewis Tillman, who is being pushed for the Heisman Trophy this season. Tillman is the conference scoring leader (six TDs for 36 points) and is averaging close to 118 rushing yards a game.

Quarterback Shawn Gregory helps keep the defenses from overplaying Tillman with his air game. Gregory is the No. 2 ranked passer in the conference. After four games he had passed for 575 yards and four touchdowns.

The Tigers were headed into the fiercest part of their schedule after the Circle City Classic. A three game stretch against Alabama State, Southern University, and Grambling could very well determine if JSU will retain their SWAC crown. Those three teams were still in the hunt and have the capability of wrestling the title away from the Tigers.

JSU must be wary of not being their own worst enemy. They are the most penalized team in terms of times penalized (56) and yards (525).

Grambling (3-1, 2-0) is looking much better in '88 than they did last season when they went 5-6 and experienced their first losing campaign in 28 years.

The G-men's only loss has been to Howard University in the Whitney Young Classic. They had the Bison down 20-9 at the half, before Howard roared back in the second half to win by a resounding 15 points.

Coach Eddie Robinson's team hasn't had any problems moving the football on people. They are SWAC's top rated offense (367.3 yards a game) and quarterback Clemente Gordon is the No. 1 passer, having thrown for 745 yards and seven scores. Gordon also tops the total offensive yards list, averaging 176 yards per outing.

Richie Crosby is a productive receiver for Gordon. He averages 2.5 receptions a game, but his ratio of receptions to TD is high. He's scored four times and averages 22.2 yards a reception.

Fred Jones is an all-purpose threat coming out of the backfield. Jones hasn't had that many rushing atempts (31), but when he does get the call, he's been very effective, averaging 7.5 yards a try. Jones is also a reliable receiver (234 yards). Combined with his rushing total, he's the league leader in all-purpose yards -- 116.3 a game.

The Tigers served notice to the rest of the league that they were back when they downed Alcorn State in the season opener 27-13. GSU scored 17 points in the second quarter to build a 24-6 halftime margin.

Southern University apparently has recovered from having to drop eight of its players because they were academically ineligible (see Notes & Quotes, page 5). But the Jaguars (3-1, 3-1) have hung tough -- particularly on defense where they have given up just 32 points.

The defense has been especially brutal on enemy passers. Opposing quarterbacks had completed just 29 percent of their passes. Douglas Craft and Harvey Wilson are experiencing fine seasons as pass defenders. The pair has intercepted eight passes between them and are tied for the league lead in that department with four pick-off apiece.

Robert Zeigler has come strong as coach Marino Casem's quarterback. In two games, he's thrown five TD passes and completed 22 of 37 passes for 269 yards. All of Zeigler's scoring tosses came in the 45-7 win over Mississippi Valley State.

Craig Davis is Southern's hot receiver with 18 catches and an average of 4.5 catches per game to top all SWAC pass catchers in that category.

Alabama State isn't out of the running just yet. Not as long as they have Brad Baxter to carry the ball. Defenses are gearing themselves to stop Baxter and the fact that he's working with an inexperienced line hasn't helped. But it shouldn't be surprising that he will start to pick up the pace as ASU's rookie front line gets better as the season progresses.

The Hornets (2-1, 2-1) dropped a 20-12 decision to the Jaguars then got victories over Alcorn State and Texas Southern in the Gulf Coast Classic at Mobile, Ala.

Like Southern, Alabama State also has a miserly thinking defensive group who had given up only 32 points for the season. Lymos McDonald is one of the league's leading tacklers with 61 hits.

Prairie View was breaking even in conference play (2-2), while Mississippi Valley State, Alcorn and Texas Southern were still looking for their first SWAC victories of the year.

The Panthers (2-3 overall) have a tenacious defender in Wendell Smith who leads the conference in tackles with 69. Greg Black is tied for the league lead in interceptions.

-BCSR Staff

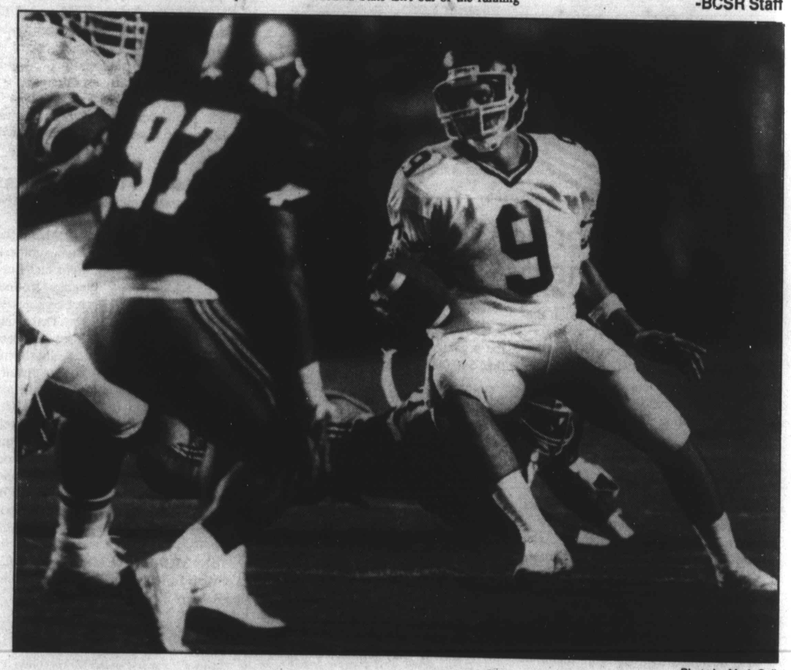

Photo by Mark Gail

Clemente Gordon has emerged as a key ingredient in Grambling's offensive scheme.

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