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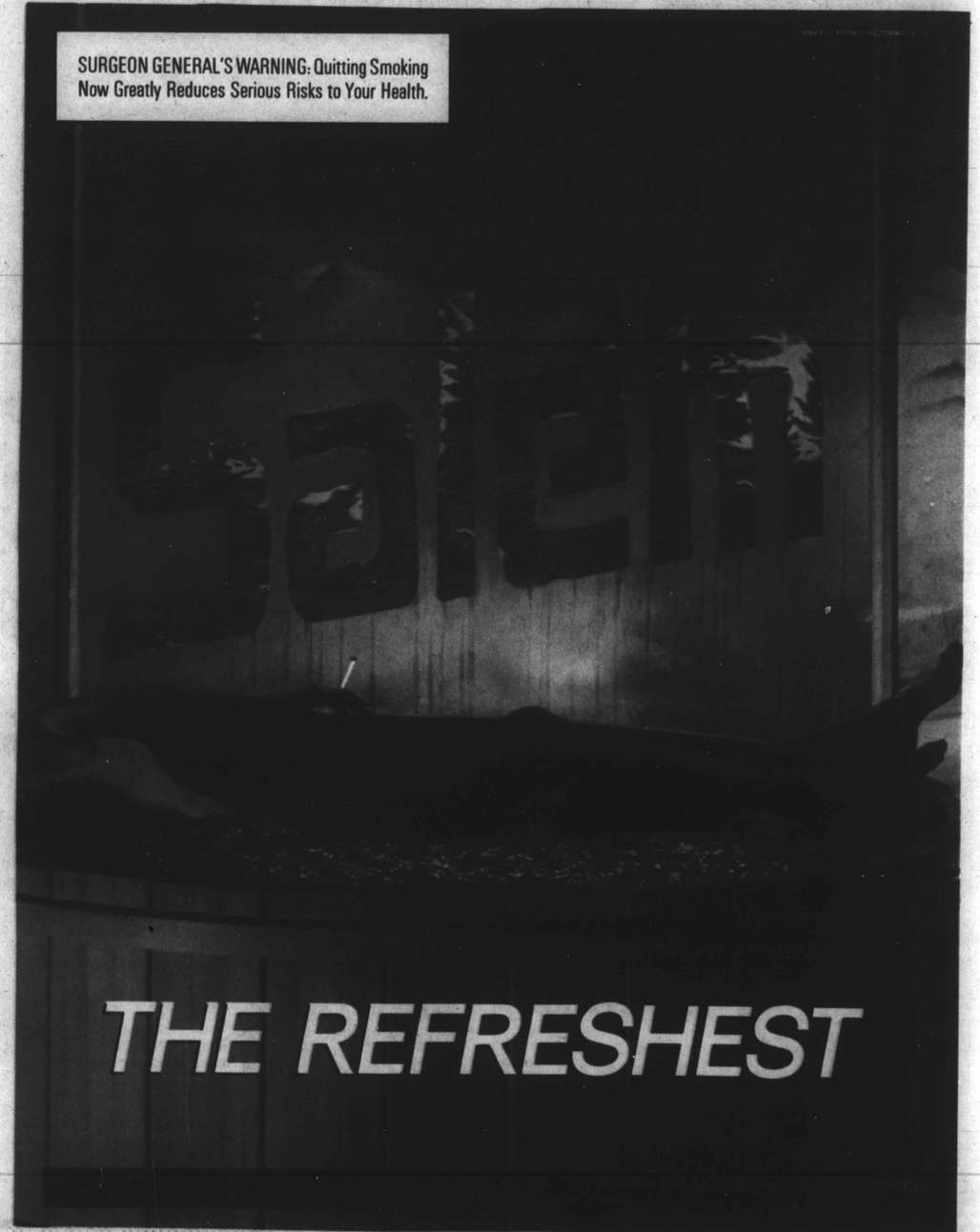

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Absurd rationale

The Bayou Classic, which features Southern University and Grambling State, is the premier football game among black colleges.

Annually, it attracts fans from all over the nation to the Louisiana Superdome on the Saturday following Thanksgiving. It has become more than just a football game. It's an event, a happening.

As such, it deserves to be showcased. Apparently, some other folk don't share that opinion. That's why this year's game was not part of the Black Entertainment Television network's live broadcast package.

The feeling was that televising the game would hurt attendance and the rights fee that BET would have paid was not enough to compensate for losses at the gate.

That's utter nonsense on both counts.

First, to think that fans would prefer to stay at home and watch the game on television is underestimating the game's magnitude. As is the case with any event, the game itself is not the thing -- being there is. That's why the Bayou Classic has become *the* game.

There are other games that have greater bearing on conference standings and national rankings.

When was the last time that anything other than bragging rights for Southern and Grambling was at stake in the Classic?

Still, fans feel compelled to attend because they think the Bayou Classic is the place to go to see and be seen. Television wouldn't change that. In all probability, it would make fans feel even more compelled to attend.

If the game is on live television, it's a Grade A, Five Star, genuine happening. Who wants to just watch it when they can be a part of it?

The classic's organizers who think that fans would stay away because of television are selling their fans short. Fans of other schools -- predominantly white -- attend games even though they're televised live. What makes fans of black college football any different?

Turning down a live television broadcast of the Bayou Classic is a travesty. Both schools missed out on an opportunity to showcase their wares to potential recruits. That's something that can't be measured in dollars and cents.

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Savannah's Sharpe doesn't want to linger in bro's shadow

Photo courtesy of Savannah State College

Sharpe has been a big-play guy at Savannah State. He feels he's as good as his brother Sterling, who is a wide receiver for the Green Bay Packers.

It wasn't that long ago that Savannah State wide receiver Shannon Sharpe was known only as the brother of Green Bay receiver Sterling Sharpe.

But that has changed thanks to the eye-popping statistics the junior from Glenville, Ga., has put together over the last two seasons.

"It used to bother me," said Shannon. "Anytime someone mentioned me, they said his name. It's a great honor to be compared to him. But now, I feel I have my own identity. I think I'm just as good as Sterling."

In '87, he set school records with 60 catches for 1,078 yards and 10 touchdowns. This season, he had 57 catches for 1,031 yards and 12 TDs and was named the SIAC's Offensive Player Of The Year for the second consecutive time.

At 6-3, 220, Sharpe is an imposing threat. He is deceptively fast -- 4.55 in the 40.

"My size helps me a lot," he said. "Defenders look at me and don't believe that I can move that fast. I'm not a 4.3 or a 4.4, but 4.55 isn't bad for a guy my size."

The comparisons between Shannon and his brother are almost automatic. Sterling played his college ball at South Carolina and was the Packers' No. 1 pick in the '88 NFL Draft. Shannon admits that there are a lot of similarities between himself and his older brother.

But he likes to compare himself to San Francisco 49ers star Jerry Rice, because they are both products of small, predominantly black colleges.

"You're not going to get the national recognition playing at small black schools," said Sharpe. "But I feel I'm just as good as the receivers at the large schools. I always think of Jerry Rice and what he's been able to do. My stats are similar to his."

Sharpe ended up at Savannah State because he scored less than 700 on the SAT. He had his mind on playing for Nebraska.

"I would like to play in front of 70,000 or 80,000 people," he said. "But I've learned to enjoy it at Savannah State. Week in and week out, people tell me that I shouldn't be playing here. Maybe I would have been lost in the limelight (at a larger school). My brother told me it's better to be a shark in a pond than a fish in a lake."

It didn't take coach Bill Davis long to realize that Sharpe was indeed a shark. Davis had just taken the Savannah State job and was scrambling to sign players. He signed Sharpe without ever seeing him play football after watching him long jump at a high school track meet.

"We don't get an athlete of his quality every day," said Davis. "I don't let athletic ability overshadow the individual when I'm recruiting. He was receptive. He listened when we talked about what we were trying to do. A lot of guys aren't receptive to small college coaches."

Even though Sharpe is clearly among the elite players in Division II, he's no prima dona. He quarterbacks the scout team in practice to help the defense prepare for the Tigers' upcoming opponents.

"He can play any position," said Davis. "He felt he could get our defense ready. Anything he felt he could do to help us win, he did."

Davis added that unlike many star athletes, Sharpe works hard to improve. He never misses practices and is usually the first one on the field and the last one to leave.

"As far as receiving and running after the catch, I don't know how much better he can get," said Davis.

Added Sharpe: "Football was always something that came natural to me. When I got here, I had to realize that I wasn't going to be the only superstar. But I want to be the best every time I step on the field."

Few will argue that he isn't.

-Roscoe Nance