

THE BLACK COLLEGE SPORTS BLOG

A diary of commentary on the world of Historically Black College and University Sports

YOU BETTER RECOGNIZE

Black college players don't just show up for the Super Bowl. They show out!

by Lut Williams

When Seattle Seahawks third-year wide receiver **Ricardo Lockette** out of **Fort Valley State** was involved in the final and most pivotal play of Sunday's Super Bowl XLIX, it should not have been a surprise.



LOCKETTE: "Well, I'll be . . ." in the Super Bowl.

That play saw New England rookie defensive back Malcolm Butler step up, pick off a pass intended for Lockette at the Patriots' goal-line while simultaneously knocking him down with just :20 seconds left and the Pats clinging to a 28-24 lead. The dynamic play preserved the Patriots' fourth Super Bowl win in the last 14 years.

The dramatic ending has been replayed, reviewed and over analyzed from every angle by every NFL fan, analyst and casual observer. Seattle offensive coordinator Darrell Bevil even went so far as to hint that Lockette could have gone harder or fought harder for the ball.

Regardless of how spurious, self-serving or irrelevant Bevil's take may be, the fact is that Lockette was there, at the center of the action as the game was decided.

Indeed, black college players have been literally at the center of America's most watched game since its unceremonious debut at the Los Angeles Coliseum in 1967. In fact, of the 98 teams that have played in Super Bowls, only three have not had a black college player. And in many cases, black college players have made a huge difference.

Now as the NFL gears up to gloriously celebrate the 50th year of Super Bowl glitz and glamour a year from now, it's time the league and all of America recognized just how central players from America's Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have been to the game's success.

JUST A TASTE

In Super Bowl I, there were 15 black college players combined on the rosters of the Green Bay Packers and Kansas City Chiefs – 12 on the AFL's Chiefs, more than a quarter of their roster, and three on the NFL's Packers. Future Hall of Famers **Willie Davis**, a defensive end for Green Bay, and **Buck Buchanan**, a defensive tackle for Kansas City, both who played for legendary coach **Eddie Robinson** at **Grambling**, graced that field. Packers running back **Elijah Pitts** out of **Philander Smith** ran for 45 yards and two touchdowns in the 35-10 Green Bay win.

A year later at the Orange Bowl in Miami, 11 black college players were on rosters as the Packers (4 black college players) and Oakland Raiders (7) met. Oakland defensive back **Willie Brown**, another future Hall of Famer out of Grambling, was a key member of that Raiders defense. **Florida A&M** product **Hewritt Dixon** was the leading

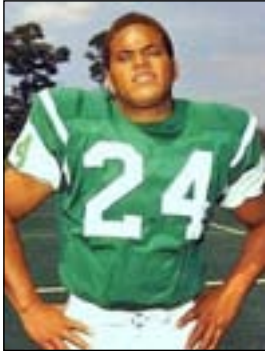


GRAMBLINITES:
Davis (top) and
Buchanan (bottom).

rusher (12 carries, 54 yards) for Oakland in a 33-14 loss. Brown would later return an interception for a record 75-yard score in a Super Bowl XI Raiders victory.

Eleven (11) black college players were again on hand in 1969 at the Orange Bowl when the game we know as the Super Bowl officially became the Super Bowl. Prior to this meeting of the New York Jets of the AFL and Baltimore Colts of the NFL, the game had been known as the more pedestrian AFL-NFL World Championship Game.

The game itself was boring, but the outcome sent shockwaves through the sports world as the upstart Jets from the upstart AFL upset the high-and-mighty Colts behind a brash quarterback named Joe Namath. Namath's protection included **Texas Southern** product **Winston Hill**, who played offensive tackle and helped pave the way for Jets' running back Matt Snell to pile up 121 rushing yards on 30 carries. Defensive end **Verlon Biggs (Jackson State)** and defensive backs **Cornell Gordon (North Carolina A&T)** and **Johnnie Sample (Maryland State)** helped stifle the Colts high-flying attack, holding quarterbacks Earl Morrall (6 of 17, 71 yards, 3 interceptions) and Johnny Unitas to 17 completions in 41 attempts in the 16-7 near-shutout win. Sample, who had a key goal-line interception in the game, is the only professional football player ever to win an NFL Championship (with the Colts in 1958), an AFL Championship (Jets in '68) and a Super Bowl title.



A great **Sample**.

Super Bowl IV at Tulane Stadium in New Orleans was the first time in the early history of the game that one of the teams, the NFL's Minnesota Vikings, did not have a single black college player on its roster. But their opponent, the Kansas City Chiefs, more than made up for it with 13, the highest number of black college players on one team in the 49-year history of the Super Bowl.

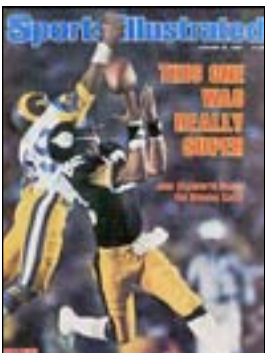
Buchanan was back and was joined up front by another future Hall of Famer, middle linebacker **Willie Lanier** out of the vaunted **Morgan State** program. Still another in the Hall, **Emmit Thomas** out of **Bishop**, was in the secondary along with **Jim Marsalis (Tennessee State)**, **Jim Kearney (Prairie View)**, **Goldie Sellers (Grambling)** and **Ceasar Belsar (Arkansas-Pine Bluff)**. From that list its easy to see why the **Southwestern Athletic Conference (SWAC)** was the conference that then put the most black college players in the league.

And its perhaps easy to understand why that Chiefs defense totally shut down the Vikings in a 23-7 win. In the game, talented former **Prairie View** wide receiver **Otis Taylor** scored the final Chiefs touchdown on an acrobatic and scintillating 46-yard catch and run that broke the back of the Vikes after they pulled to within 16-7 in the third quarter. Taylor, who could have been named MVP of that game, led the Chiefs with six receptions for 81 yards.

Black college players reached double digits through the first seven and in all but three of the first 17 Super Bowls. The number reached its zenith in Super Bowl X in 1976 when the Dallas Cowboys and Pittsburgh Steelers matched wits and hits involving 17 black college players at the Orange Bowl.

Pittsburgh had eleven (11) black college players including future Hall of Fame cornerback **Mel Blount (Southern)** and four others (**Ernie Holmes, Donnie Shell, L. C. Greenwood** and **Glen Edwards**) on the Steel Curtain defense. Hall of Fame wideout **John Stallworth (Alabama A&M)** was among six (**John "Frenchy" Fuqua, Joe Gilliam, Frank Lewis, Sam Davis** and **Mike Collier**) on offense. Edwards, a defensive back from **Florida A&M**, sealed the 21-17 Pittsburgh win, the second of the Steelers' four Super Bowls wins between 1975 and 1980 with a late fourth quarter interception.

Stallworth would be instrumental in Super Bowl XIII back at the Orange Bowl getting three catches for 115 yards and TD receptions of 75 and 28 yards in a thrilling 35-31 Pittsburgh win over Dallas.



STALLWORTH: Four-time Super Bowl champ.

Even as their numbers dwindled, black college players still found a way to be in the middle of Super Bowl drama. But it was not until Super Bowl XX at the Superdome in New Orleans that a black college player would take home the MVP award.

It was there that former **Tennessee State** defensive end **Richard Dent** posted one-and-a-half sacks, forced two fumbles and blocked a pass leading the Chicago Bears to a 46-10 throttling of the New England Patriots. Dent, also a Hall of Famer, would be the first of three black college players winning the MVP award in a four-year span.

In Super Bowl XXII at Jack Murphy Stadium in San Diego, **Doug Williams** set records for passing yards (340) and touchdowns (4), all in the second quarter, and became the first black quarterback to lead his team to victory as Washington routed the Denver Broncos, 42-10. Williams, another Grambling product, also set Super Bowl records for TD passes in a quarter and a half.

A year later at Joe Robbie Stadium in Miami, it was **Jerry Rice's** time to shine. The former **Mississippi Valley State** wideout hauled in 11 passes from quarterback Joe Montana for 210 yards and one touchdown to earn MVP honors as the San Francisco 49ers narrowly edged the Cincinnati Bengals 20-16. Rice's teammate and fellow wideout **John Taylor** out of **Delaware State**, saved his only catch of the day for last, hauling in a Montana pass from ten yards out with :34 seconds left for the winning score.

Though he ceded the MVP award to Montana in Super Bowl XXIV, Rice was equally effective in that game grabbing seven passes for 148 yards and three TDs covering 20, 38 and 28 yards. Rice had ten catches for another three scores (of 44, 15 and 7 yards) in the Niners 49-26 Super Bowl XXIX win over San Diego. Niners QB Steve Young threw six TD passes to win the MVP award. Rice, the greatest receiver in NFL history and a first-ballot Hall of Famer, owns or shares 11 different Super Bowl records.

Hall of Fame middle linebacker **Harry Carson** (**South Carolina State**) was the only black college player on his roster but was literally in the middle of the New York Giants' 39-20 win over Denver in Super Bowl XXI. Offensive guard **Nate Newton** (**Florida A&M**) and tackle **Erik Williams** (**Central State**) were stalwarts on the left side of the Cowboys' back-to-back wins in Super Bowls XXVII and XXVIII.

Grambling coach Eddie Robinson joined Williams for the coin toss in Super Bowl XXXII (1998) in San Diego. Future Hall of Famer **Shannon Sharpe** (**Savannah State**) had five receptions for 38 yards as the Denver Broncos won their first title, 31-24 over Green Bay. Sharpe got his second ring a year later in Super Bowl XXXIII as the Broncos downed Atlanta, 34-19.

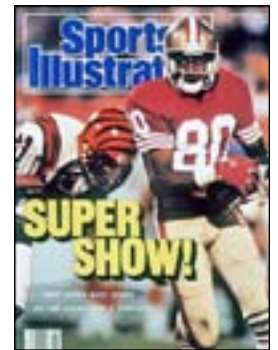
And who can forget the late **Steve McNair's** performance in Super Bowl XXXIV at the Georgia Dome in Atlanta. The former **Alcorn State** great passed for 214 yards and rushed for 64 and bringing the Tennessee Titans to the brink of an upset of the favored St. Louis Rams.

Or Hall of Famers **Michael Strahan** (**Texas Southern**) and **Aeneas Williams** (**Southern**) as they singularly upheld the black college banner as their teams fell in Super Bowls XXXV (Strahan's NY Giants) and XXXVI (Williams's St. Louis Rams). Strahan came back to get his ring in Super Bowl XLII as the Giants shut down the record-breaking New England Patriots offense at Phoenix Stadium in Glendale, Arizona.

Dominique Rodgers-Cromartie stood out for the Arizona Cardinals in Super Bowl XLIII at Tampa's Raymond James Stadium, but for the wrong reason. He let



THE MVPs:
Tennessee State's Richard Dent (above) and Grambling's Doug Williams (r.).



RICE: Cookin'.

Pittsburgh wide receiver Santonio Holmes get behind him in the corner of the end zone for a toe-tapping game-clinching touchdown from QB Ben Roethlisberger with :35 seconds left.

Two years later in Super Bowl XLV at Cowboys Stadium in Arlington, Texas, another former black college defensive back, Green Bay safety **Nick Collins** out of **Bethune-Cookman**, did just the opposite, picking off a Roethlisberger aerial and returning it 37 yards to paydirt helping the Packers edge the Steelers, 31-25.

And two years ago, in Super Bowl XLVII at Met Life Stadium in East Rutherford, New Jersey, **Lane** product **Jacoby Jones** put on a show for the ages. Jones returned five kickoffs for 206 yards including a record-breaking 108-yarder to open the second half. He returned two punts for 28 yards and caught a 56-yard TD pass from game MVP QB Joe Flacco in the Baltimore Ravens' 34-31 win over San Francisco. He set the record for the most combined yards in the Super Bowl with 290 and tied or set six other game records.



JONES: Record-setter in SB XLVII.

THE PLACE TO BE

So, Lockette places his name alongside a long list of black college players that played prominent roles in Super Bowl history. He caught three passes for 59 yards in Sunday's big game and was just inches away from adding his name to a list of black college heroes that have distinguished themselves in the spectacle time and again.

These heroes and players, some sung and some unsung, need to be recognized in some significant way. Why not during the lead up to and at next years' week-long festivities to Super Bowl L to be played in Black History Month, on February 7, 2016 at Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara, California, the spanking new home of the San Francisco 49ers?

Let's bring all the living players from black colleges that played in the Super Bowl to Santa Clara during Super Bowl week, have a bash, and commemorate a black college player of the year award, appropriately named for one of these players, to be given each year to the HBCU player in the NFL who had the most outstanding season.

Are you listening NFL? Who's with me?

