Abstract

Just a few decades ago, the acronym “HBCU” was synonymous with black coaching and athletic achievement. Today, however, it’s much more difficult to find sports fans who know that “HBCU” stands for Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and more difficult still to find those who remember the role these schools played in shaping the college football landscape as we know it today.

“Student Body Left” is a multimedia journalism project that explores the unique relationship between the desegregation of the South Eastern Conference (SEC) in NCAA athletics and the overall decline of sports at the Historical Black College & Universities (HBCU). Up until the 1980s, the HBCUs had some of the most illustrious programs in the South, and routinely sent players to the NFL. They defied Jim Crow by fielding incredible football teams of all-black athletes that challenged white supremacy, and in doing so, promoted civil rights through sports.

But then desegregation happened in the SEC schools (Mississippi, LSU, Alabama, etc.), and not only did the complexion of college football change, so too, did the landscape of football in the South. By and large society heralds the integration of the SEC as a major accomplishment in our society, and while that’s not arguable, the space that HBCU football now occupies in the conversation of NCAA athletics is one of novelty and afterthought. Much of their remarkable history has been forgotten, falling into the shadows of the bigger, formerly all-white SEC schools.

This project focuses on Grambling State and Southern Universities, fierce rivals and schools that once were the pinnacle of HBCU football in Louisiana. Through interviews with former coaches and players from those schools, including James Harris, the first black quarterback to start successfully in the NFL, “Student Body Left” aims to tell the other side of the story of desegregation in the SEC.
“Student Body Left” is broken up into four chapters, each focusing on a specific part of this complex story.

“In the Beginning” focuses on the glory days of HBCU football that occurred under the oppressive order in the Jim Crow South. “Changes” chronicles the efforts taken to integrate collegiate sports not only in the South but also at schools like Ohio State in the North, a task that was met with much resistance.
“Consequences” details desegregation in the SEC and the crippling fallout of that action. “New Directions” takes a look at where the HBCUs stand today, and what can be done to better preserve this illustrious history going forward. Through video and audio interviews, interactive graphics and photos, this hidden history of HBCU excellence takes shape.
In place of a standardized upbringing, the majority of black children saw the college pipeline that Robinson built — and the NFL pipeline that eventually came with it — mean that Grambling, like few others, would stand not so far from the dream school for black athletes in the South.

The Southern black community knew very well what was going on at Grambling, though. In the 1950s and ’60s, high school athletes were handpicked before to Robinson, begging for a chance to readied the Tigers and be a part of his pipeline. From recruitment of “imponer football,” even to this day.

Even college coaches for black students and athletes were solicited, when it became recruiting for this small, out-of-the-way college in rural Louisiana, he readily found outstanding players.

When Robinson took over at Grambling, the Tigers were poor and the budget nonexistent, so he did everything himself: traveled to the player’s schools, scouted and hired the field for games, made sod for the field for road trips through town every game, not even caring for black students and even more thought both offense and defense.

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**Grambling Fun Facts**

- 0
  - Number of points scored on Grambling in 1944 season. Eddie Robinson and the Tigers went 8-0

- 16
  - Number of Southwestern Athletic Conference (SWAC) titles won by Robinson

- 51
  - Number of winning seasons Grambling experienced in Robinson’s 17-year coaching career.
Did You Know? Coach Arnett

“Ace” Mumford Fun Facts

- 11 SWAC titles won at Southern University
- 4 Consecutive undefeated seasons (1947-1950)
- 6 Black National Championships won at Southern University
- 35 All-American award

The story of Aeneas “Ace” Mumford is a tale of resilience, determination, and the breaking of barriers.

Born to a sharecropper’s family in Monroe, Louisiana, Ace was part of a generation where opportunities were scarce for black Americans. Despite the odds stacked against him, he learned to play football and basketball, honing his skills in a time when African American athletes faced significant obstacles in pursuing their dreams.

Ace’s talent did not go unnoticed. He was offered scholarships to integrated schools across the nation but decided to attend Central State University in 1944, where he faced racial discrimination. Despite the challenges, his exceptional ability made him a standout athlete.

Ace Mumford's success paved the way for future generations of black athletes. His journey serves as a testament to the power of aspiration and hard work, breaking barriers and building bridges of unity.

Mike Williams

LSU Demographics

- 1909-1919
- 1919-1929
- 1929-1939
- 1939-1949

AVG

Click on the bars to identify the time periods.

Averages considered by using only scholarship athletes in calculations.

Things went more smoothly at Georgia, which was very quickly rewarded for ending its ban on black players in Athens. In the late 1890s, the Bulldogs started recruiting black players.


[12] Martin, Benching Jim Crow, 32
[18] Martin, Benching Jim Crow, 256
[22] Martin, Benching Jim Crow, 280
[26] Martin, Benching Jim Crow, 282
[27] Martin, Benching Jim Crow, 287
[28] Martin, Benching Jim Crow, 257