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The Atlanta Journal □ THE ATLANTA CONSTITUTION

★ SUNDAY, DECEMBER 17, 1989

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5 NFL rookies took money and ran, suits allege

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And The Atlanta ConstitutionBy Mike Fish
Staff writer

LOS ANGELES — Five of the top 16 players selected in the NFL draft last April, including Deion Sanders of the Atlanta Falcons, are targets of lawsuits filed in Los Angeles by an attorney seeking to recover money he alleges he loaned the players while they were still playing college football, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution has learned.

Along with Sanders, who played collegiately at Florida State, the defendants in the civil suits are Derrick Thomas (Kansas

L.A. attorney says he provided loans to players in college and that Deion Sanders owes \$28,460 of the \$115,029 total

City Chiefs/Alabama), Eric Hill (Phoenix Cardinals/LSU), Broderick Thomas (Tampa Bay Buccaneers/Nebraska) and Hart Lee Dykes (New England Patriots/Oklahoma State).

Ray Newman, a Los Angeles attorney, claims in the suits that he loaned the players a total of \$115,029. Newman said in an interview that the figure is on the "low side" and the sum was only what he could document through canceled checks and receipts.

According to court records, Derrick

Thomas led the players, running up a debt of \$35,160. Sanders was next at \$28,460, followed by Hill (\$26,462), Broderick Thomas (\$17,047) and Dykes (\$7,900).

It is an NCAA violation for players to accept loans. David Berst, assistant executive director for enforcement, said the players would have been declared ineligible had the NCAA been aware of the loans at the time.

The NCAA probably won't pursue the matter, Berst said.

"If we can find out about it while

they're still playing, we declare the athlete ineligible," Berst said. "But it's extremely difficult because almost always it's a secret between the agent and player."

Newman said he started loaning money to football players after attending a banquet and seeing players in ill-fitting and shabby clothes.

"I felt some of the black kids were getting used," said Newman, a black attorney raised in Louisiana. "I was going to be different. Instead, they were smarter than I thought. They were just playing a con game."

"When I met Derrick Thomas, he was

FIVE NFL Continued on E19 ▶

IT'S THE EAGLES!

Ga. Southern wins 37-34, claims third I-AA title

□ Complete coverage, E10-11

By Ernest Reese
Staff writer

STATESBORO, Ga. — A perfectly prepared scenario came to a perfect ending Saturday at Paulson Stadium.

In a game of high drama and high scoring, No. 1-ranked Georgia Southern produced 17 fourth-quarter points to beat Stephen F. Austin 37-34 and claim an unprecedented third NCAA Division I-AA national championship.

A crowd of 25,725 — a record for the stadium and the I-AA playoffs — watched Mike Dowis kick a 20-yard field goal with 1:41 left to give Southern its 15th victory, a number no other NCAA team in any division has ever reached in one season.

"What are we, 15-0? It can't get any better than this," said Southern quarterback Raymond Gross.

It could have been much worse, though. The Lumberjacks (12-2-1) had entered the game confident they could end the Eagles' home winning streak at 36, and in the third period it looked like they would succeed.

Led by quarterback Todd Hammel, Stephen F. Austin became the first team this season to score on the Eagles in the third period. The Lumberjacks put up points on each of their first two possessions to take a 27-20 lead, hurting the Eagles both in the air and on the ground.

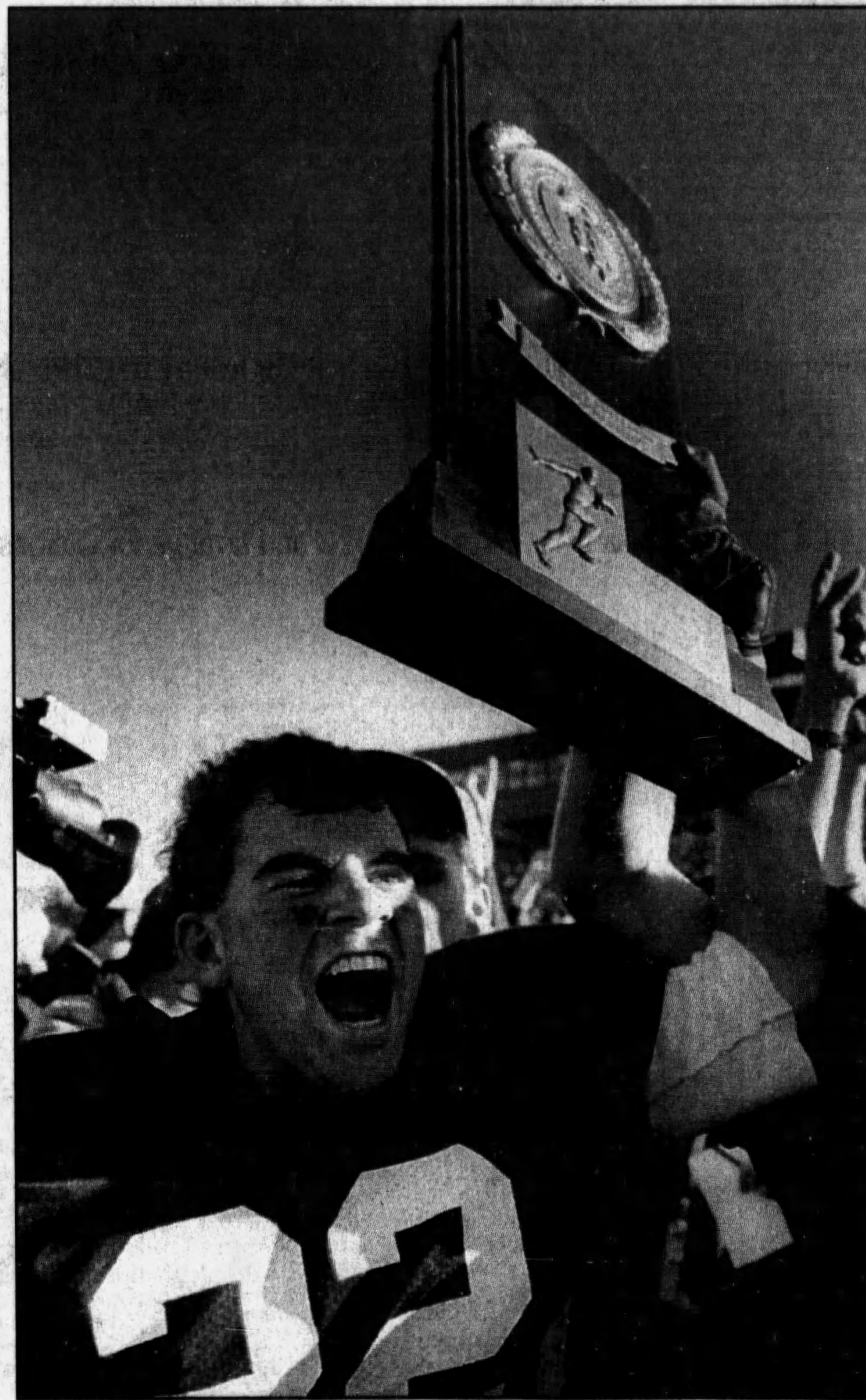
But Gross, seeking to make amends for the fumble late in last year's 17-12 championship game loss to Furman, guided the Eagles to the 17 fourth-period points. His efforts helped give Southern its third national title in five years and its 11th victory of the season at Paulson.

It also lifted a lot of pressure off the junior from Hinesville, Ga. Gross, with tears in his eyes, and his father were among the horde of fans who wept and danced on the field minutes after cornerback Kevin Whitley ended Stephen F. Austin's final threat with an interception with 12 seconds left. It was the Eagles' fifth interception of the day.

"I didn't sleep at all last night. I tossed and turned all night long for some reason," said Gross, who ran for 103 yards and passed for 113. "I think I'll be able to sleep tonight. This win takes the monkey off my back."

The fact that it came before the home crowd was due to the planning of Southern athletics director Bucky Wagner, who was part of the group that bid successfully to have the NCAA award this year's champi-

EAGLES Continued on E11 ▶



Joey Ivansco/Staff

Georgia Southern strong safety Taz Dixon, who made the interception that started the Eagles' winning drive, hoists the Division I-AA championship trophy.

Castoffs make up Southern's cast of champions

STATESBORO, Ga. — Mike Dowis had knocked on the door of major-college football and not a coach had bothered to turn off the projector and see who was there. Then, he tried kicking the door down. Only it turned out to be armored and double-bolted.

Fresh from Savannah Country Day School, Dowis grabbed once at Division I-A — in 1987 during a kicking trial at Georgia Tech. There he failed. Today he will admit Tech made the right choice.

Then he will brighten up and acknowledge that he did, too.

"I'm so glad I'm here," Dowis said. "This was a dream. Everyone dreams of making a kick like this."

With 1:41 left in the Division I-AA title game here Saturday, Dowis knocked in the 20-yard field goal that was the difference in Georgia Southern's 37-34 victory over



Steve Hummer

Stephen F. Austin. Nailed it. Dissected the uprights that moments later would be uprooted by the celebrating mob and carried about whole, like a giant wishbone.

Mike Dowis, Tech reject, was a champion.

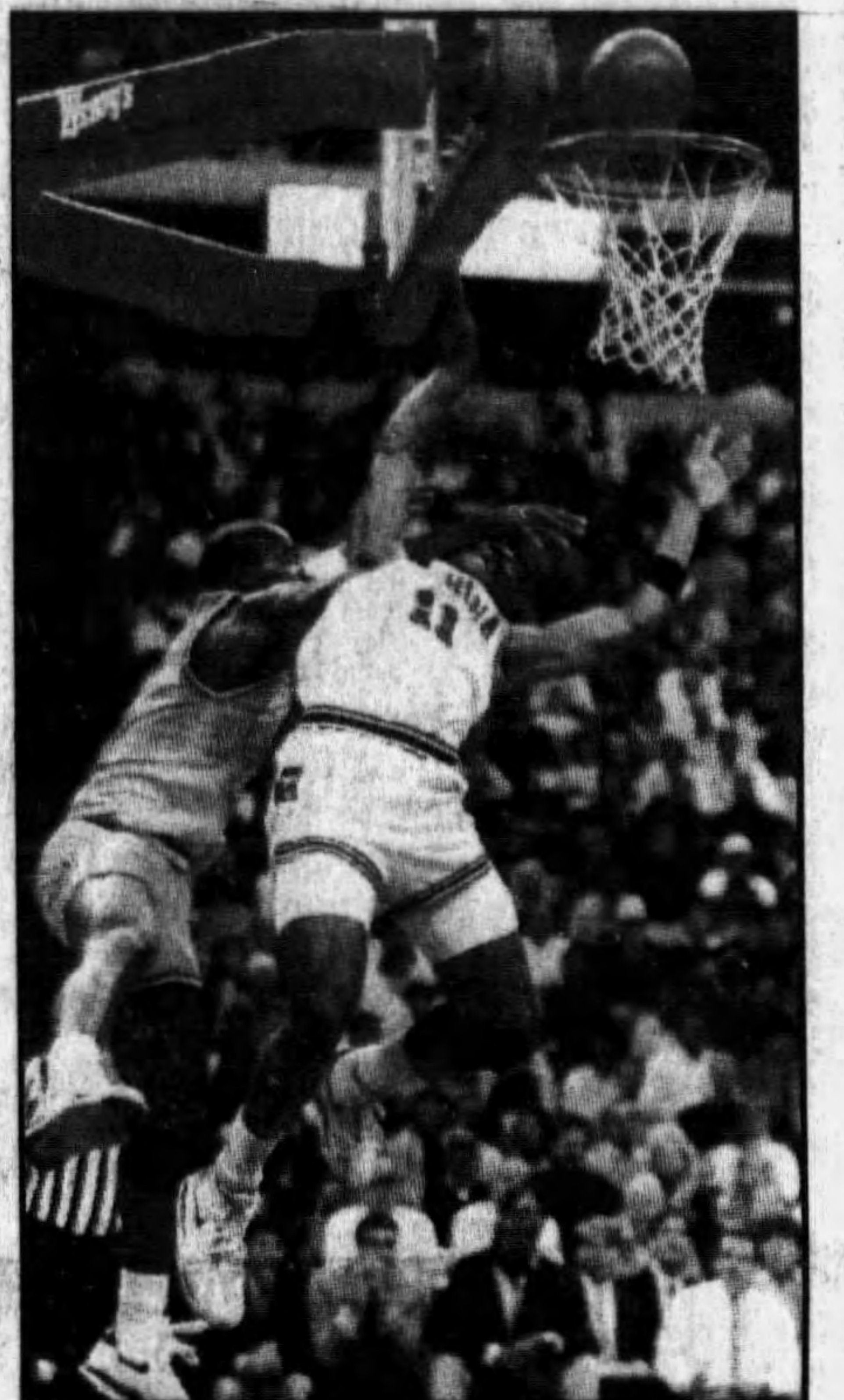
While he was running for more than 2,000 yards at Augusta's Westside High School in 1986, Joe Ross slipped through the recruiters' nets. Georgia Southern called, though.

The square-bodied fullback — holder of the Eagles' season rushing record with 1,354 yards — was Saturday's question mark. The grind of playoff football had left him with a strained knee, one that will require surgical repair Wednesday.

"Winning a national championship is why I came here," Ross said. "There are no other, secondary reasons (like glamour or glory) to come here."

Four days before his scheduled arthroscopic surgery, Ross carried the ball 31 times against Stephen F. Austin. He gained 152 yards. Here was the big stick that Southern kept using on the Lumberjacks until it wore them out. The Eagles had to outscore a weary Stephen F. Austin 17-7 in the fourth quarter to survive this day, and the fullback was their weapon of attrition.

HUMMER Continued on E11 ▶



Johnny Crawford/Staff

Litterial Green of Georgia gets hammered by Tech's Brian Oliver, but no foul was called.

Anderson, Tech put down Dogs

By Darryl Maxie
Staff writer

Known as Georgia Tech's Mr. Clutch for four game-winning baskets in less than three years, Dennis Scott failed in two key situations Saturday at The Omni.

He had a pair of one-and-one free-throw opportunities in the final minute, chances to put 15th-ranked Tech safely out of Georgia's reach. As has been Tech's bad habit with free throws this season, Scott missed both opportunities.

But Tech guards Brian Oliver and Kenny Anderson bailed him out in the Yellow Jackets' 92-89 victory before a crowd of 15,720.

Oliver beat Georgia's Alec Kessler to the rebound on Scott's first miss with 26 seconds left. The possession led to Anderson's two free throws with 20 seconds left, sealing the victory.

Scott led the Jackets with a game-high 32 points on an off-shooting night (11-for-28 from the field) as Tech (5-0) swept the basketball and football games with Georgia (5-1) for the first time since 1985.

Scott missed another one-and-one with four seconds left, but Jody Patton's desperation 3-point attempt to tie fell short as time ran out.

"We fought our brains out," Tech coach Bobby Cremins said. "I was a little disappointed Dennis didn't ice it for us at the free-throw line."

The Jackets survived a 28-point, nine-assist onslaught from Georgia guard Litterial Green. Kessler added 24 points but faulted himself for missing the rebound of Scott's foul shot.

"Those are the kind of plays you have to make to win games," Kessler said.

Oliver's rebound showed Cremins that the senior guard also is capable of handling pressure.

"Brian puts too much pressure on himself and I lose him," Cremins said. "Tonight, he came back to me."

TECH Continued on E14 ▶

LAWSUIT AGAINST NFL ROOKIES

'Prime Time' hasn't paid for some jewelry, L.A. attorney says

"I check out these big swap shops where the rappers and the dudes with the gold hang out. I go in there, all covered up. Yo, like this. Hands in pockets. Jacket closed. No juray, see... Then they lay out the prices. Whoa! Say what? They tryin' to dog me, bad. What time is it, kids? Yo, I whip open my jacket. It's Prime Time! I say: 'You guys think I'm some kind of a fool? Now let's talk some juray.' So much gold be flashin', those dudes about go blind!"

— Deion Sanders, Nov. 13 in Sports Illustrated

You know, the gobs of glitter he wore for the Sports Illustrated cover shot last month. The trademark ring that spans three fingers and carries the word "Prime." The matching three-finger ring on the other hand with the word "Time." Not to mention the gold pinkie ring in the form of a dollar sign.

Well, it seems Sanders has not paid for all that glitters, according to Ray Newman.

Newman, a Los Angeles attorney, has filed suit in Los Angeles County Superior Court seeking \$28,460 from the Atlanta Falcon rookie. He claims Sanders has yet to reimburse him for partial payment of the jewelry and that's a part of his lawsuit.

"I paid for half that stuff," Newman said of the jewelry Sanders donned for the magazine. "All I ask is he pay me what he owes me. Pay me for the jewelry."

The price? Each ring costs \$1,000, Newman estimated.

Newman threw up his arms, a smirk across his face, as he recited some of Sanders's lines from the magazine article. Swap shops? Undercover-like?

The jeweler knew whom he was dealing with, Newman said. He brought Sanders to the jeweler's shop in downtown Los Angeles, a few blocks from Newman's law office.

"Deion said he shopped around and got them down on the price," Newman said. "That's crazy. Deion bought anything he wanted. He bought it from a jewelry store. I took him down to the place. He hasn't paid a penny for it."

"I see him on cable [television] talking about why he doesn't have a black agent representing him," said Newman, who is black.

"He said he couldn't find one. He said the day is coming soon. I laughed. He's a crazy act."

Contacted after a recent practice, Sanders said: "I ain't got nothing to say about that..." Newman had plenty to add.

He contends that one of the fashionable sweatsuits worn by Sanders in the magazine spread was purchased from a Los Angeles friend, "Jack the Ripper." Newman said he paid for the suits and Sanders has yet to reimburse him.

When Newman went to see Sanders at the Florida-Florida State game last year in Tallahassee, Sanders wore a white tuxedo after the game and was being chauffeured in a white stretch limousine.

"It was, 'Hey Ray, could you take care of the limo driver?'" said Newman, who contends he picked up the \$350 tab.

After the game, Newman said, he also paid the breakfast bill for Sanders and a large group of friends.

Newman also intimated that it was he, not Sanders, who paid the attorneys fees in Fort Myers, Fla., last year after Sanders was charged with battery and breach of peace following a Christmas Eve altercation with a jewelry store clerk and a security officer. Sanders pleaded no contest to the charges in February and was fined \$800 and placed on six months' probation.

Peter Ringsmuth, who represented Sanders, refused comment.

"Ask Deion who paid the attorney's bill in Fort Myers," Newman said. "I have a lot of things in my suit. A lot of things."

Sanders, whom Newman refers to as "The Mouth of the South," declined comment on any specifics of the case.

"I don't want to defend myself," Sanders said. "You can't do a damn thing to hurt me, man."

"After practice, I'm going to get in the same [Mercedes] Benz, go to the same damn house and make the same money."

Of the five players he has filed suit against, all of whom were first-round picks in the last NFL draft, Sanders is the only one indicating a willingness for a legal battle, Newman said.

Robert P. Mandel, a Los Angeles attorney, has contacted him on Sanders's behalf seeking documents pertaining to the suit, Newman said. The case has been assigned to Judge Robert Cardenas, although a court date has not been set.

"I know he's asked for a lot of stuff that probably wouldn't be too favorable for Deion if I have to answer it all," Newman said.

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By Mike Fish Staff writer

LOS ANGELES — About all that jewelry Deion Sanders lugs around.

Player	College	Pro team	Draft	Contract	Bonus	Sued for
Derrick Thomas	Alabama	Kansas City	4th overall	\$4.3 million (5 years)	\$1.7 million	\$35,160
Deion Sanders	Florida State	Atlanta	5th overall	\$4.5 million (4 years)	\$2 million	\$28,460
Eric Hill	LSU	Phoenix	10th overall	\$2.4 million (4 years)	\$950,000	\$26,462
Broderick Thomas	Nebraska	Tampa Bay	6th overall	\$4.2 million (5 years)	\$1.7 million	\$17,047
Hart Lee Dykes	Oklahoma State	New England	16th overall	\$2.25 million (4 years)	None	\$7,900

Five NFL rookies being sued by agent

Continued from E1

wearing a pair of tennis shoes, a shirt that didn't fit, not a penny in his pocket. I figure he's poor as hell, a poor mother in the ghetto, sisters and all this. When I finally got down to Alabama, I find out D.T. is driving a BMW."

Broderick Thomas said last week that the players never plotted to jilt Newman after accepting loans. He said there is no foundation to the lawsuits, although he acknowledged that he still owes Newman \$3,000.

Broderick Thomas said the players intended to sign Newman as their agent but backed out because he misled them about the financial consultants he had at his disposal. He said they also were concerned about recruiter Terry Bolar, who has solicited players for an array of agents, including Newman.

"We weren't trying to con him," Broderick Thomas said of Newman. "It's just that they lied. Then we come to find out Bolar was involved in some instances I wanted no part of. [He] had something to do with Norby Walters [convicted earlier this year on federal felony charges stemming from his sports agent business] and those guys."

"Basically, we were about to be some victims of some agents. I wasn't about to be a victim."

Broderick Thomas said he's prepared to argue the case in court if necessary, but Newman said the only response he has had to the lawsuits has been from an attorney representing Sanders.

Sources said Hill and Dykes also have retained counsel.

"I've got canceled checks, canceled receipts," Newman said. "Why else would I fight these guys? I'm not stupid. I'm a lawyer."

Newman is currently under investigation by the Los Angeles County district attorney's office on charges that he overbilled the county for work as a defense counsel for indigent clients. Newman has been suspended from a panel of court-sanctioned attorneys who provide legal services when the public defender's office is unavailable to handle a case.

Newman was paid \$508,000 by the Los Angeles Superior Court in 1988, according to county records. Deputy District Attorney Richard Healey said Newman billed the county for 5,000 hours when 2,000 hours is considered a busy year.

Newman was also among 10 attorneys sued for similar overbilling in 1986. Healey said a settlement of \$25,000 was reached with Newman on Friday for repayment of overbilling, which occurred in 1984-86.

Newman said he never had a contract or an agreement to represent the football players. He said he loaned them money while they were still playing at their respective universities. Those loans, he said, were for "humanitarian" reasons and were never put in writing.

Yet, Newman is registered as an agent with the National Football League Players Association. He also acknowledges retaining Bolar as his recruiter.

Of the five players being sued by Newman, Derrick Thomas, Broderick Thomas, Sanders and Hill were among the first 10 choices in the draft. Dykes was

the 16th player selected. All signed multi-year, multi-million dollar contracts.

"It was a roller-coaster year," Newman said. "I got caught up in it. I got greedy. I could see dollar signs."

"People were telling me I had half of the first round. I got nothing. They took my money. I ended up losing money to all of them."

Dykes, a wide receiver, already had a storied past before his association with Newman. An NCAA official confirmed that the illegal recruitment of Dykes was a factor in four college programs being placed on probation: Oklahoma State, Oklahoma, Illinois and Texas A&M.

Newman said Virginia wide receiver John Ford, a second-round pick of the Detroit Lions, was the only player to pay him back. He said he might also file suit in small claims court against Darryl Henley, a second-round choice of the Los Angeles Rams who Newman claims owes less than the other players.

Dykes and Derrick Thomas were served with papers at the Los Angeles Coliseum after their respective teams played the Los Angeles Raiders last month, Newman said.

"Whenever they needed money, I would loan them the money," Newman said. "I've asked for the money back and they won't even respond. Am I supposed to walk away? I didn't do anything wrong. They made debts and they should pay it."

According to Newman, he picked up the tab for such things as gold jewelry for Sanders and his limo service after last year's Florida-Florida State game. He also claims to have given \$1,000 to Dykes for the purchase of an exotic dog last Christmas and said he helped Derrick Thomas's mother pay her rent last year in Miami.

The story, according to Berst, is a familiar tale of greed and dirty dealing between players and agents. It was just last April that sports agents Walters and Lloyd Bloom were convicted of federal charges of racketeering, conspiracy and mail fraud. Walters and Bloom were sentenced to five and three years, respectively, and are free on bail pending appeal.

"These [players] had it all figured out," Newman said. "They knew after the Norby case that nobody would be stupid enough to sue them. The Norby case gave them a license to steal. My feeling is the damn players are bigger crooks than Norby."

Bolar described himself as a "recruiter" and said he solicited the players for Newman. He now works for Harold Daniels, another California-based agent.

"They call agents sleaze bags, but they [players] shouldn't take from people if they're not going to be with them," Bolar said. "If it was that easy in life, everybody would be in line waiting for a free ride."

"We gave them whatever they felt they needed. But they met another guy that they felt talked even better. It's like a damn circus. It isn't who you trust the most, it's who has the most flash."

Rumors had been rampant about the recruitment by agents of Sanders and Broderick and Derrick Thomas, dubbed the

Three Amigos, before Newman filed his suits. Sources said Derrick Thomas had been dealing with agents since his freshman year at Alabama.

Alabama athletics director Hootie Ingram, who previously held the same position at Florida State, said he was unaware of any illegal association with agents on the part of Sanders and Derrick Thomas. Ingram said Sanders paid tuition for his final year at FSU after signing a baseball contract with the New York Yankees but that he still would have lost his football eligibility had he accepted anything from an agent during the season.

"He signed the same statements that everybody else did," Ingram said. "I had it all documented what he did in baseball. I was concerned about every athlete we had."

According to Derrick Thomas, the three players struck up a friendship and routinely discussed agents while attending various postseason awards banquets and all-star games. He said they planned to sign with the same agent, although Sanders broke with the group and signed with Steve Zucker.

"About a week or two before the draft, we went down to the wire," said Derrick Thomas. "Broderick, Deion and myself each brought two guys to the table that we thought were reputable. Everything was right."

Robert Fraley, an agent from Orlando, Fla., was among those who thought he had an agreement to represent Derrick Thomas. Instead, both Derrick and Broderick signed with two new agents, Los Angeles-based attorney Mark Ukra and Howard Misle, a car dealer from Lincoln, Neb.

"I've heard all the stories," Fraley said. "My assumption is Derrick was being wooed by everyone under the sun in various and sundry ways."

Staff writer I.J. Rosenberg also contributed to this report.

Former Alabama star Thomas bought car with help of agent

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By Mike Fish Staff writer

In the spring of 1986, after his freshman year at the University of Alabama, Derrick Thomas used his association with a Jackson, Miss., sports agent to secure a bank loan of \$20,711.99 to purchase a new BMW 325i.

That may have been enough under NCAA rules to make Thomas ineligible.

Apparently, it also was just the start of Thomas's dealings with agents, along with a string of questionable financial undertakings. Los Angeles attorney Ray Newman, one of several agents known to have associated with Thomas, filed suit in October against the former first-round draft pick seeking \$35,160 that he allegedly loaned Thomas while the All-America linebacker was playing for Alabama.

Court records in Tuscaloosa County, Ala., show the black BMW was repossessed by a Clarksdale, Miss., bank in September 1987. Two months earlier, Thomas had purchased a 1985 black Nissan Maxima for \$13,850.86 from a Birmingham, Ala., dealer. That, too, was later repossessed, according to the dealer.

Attempts to reach Thomas last week through the Kansas City Chiefs, for whom he now plays professionally, were unsuccessful. Gary White, an assistant athletics director at Alabama, said the university last March investigated the first car purchase by Thomas. He said a report was filed with the NCAA.

There is a difference of opinion on whether a violation was committed by Thomas during the first car purchase. Alabama officials said the matter was cleared. A top NCAA official claims that isn't entirely correct.

"If there had been something wrong and we would have been able to uncover that during the course of his career, he could have been declared ineligible," said David Berst, the NCAA's assistant executive director for enforcement. "I didn't have to come to any decision in that regard because Thomas was gone."

Thomas's transactions

May 13, 1986 — Purchased a 1986 BMW 325i from Hallmark Toyota-BMW in Jackson, Miss. No down payment. Car listed at \$19,500. Entered into a loan agreement with the First National Bank of Clarksdale, Miss., for \$20,711.99 (\$26,710.80 to be paid over the life of the loan). Five-year loan with monthly payments of \$445.18.

July 13, 1987 — Purchased a 1985 Nissan Maxima, at a list price of \$13,850.86, from Jim Burke Automotive in Birmingham. No down payment. Financed through GMAC in Birmingham. Car was repossessed in 1988.

Sept. 23, 1987 — BMW 325i repossessed in Tuscaloosa County, Ala.

Nov. 5, 1987 — BMW sold by the bank for \$15,000.

Dec. 14, 1988 — Default against Thomas was entered in Tuscaloosa County Circuit Court, seeking \$7,757.71 with interest of 10.5 percent, plus \$110 in court costs.

January, 1989 — Purchased wheels and tires for a BMW worth \$3,287.66 from Personal Touch Auto Accessories in Los Angeles. Bill remains unpaid.

March, 1989 — University of Alabama officials investigate the 1986 purchase of the BMW. NCAA rules that the university was not directly involved and does not pursue action against Thomas because he already has used up his eligibility.

Wayne Winter, president of the First National Bank in Clarksdale, said recently Thomas was able to secure the loan because of his association with agent Joel Bobo. Bobo and his now-defunct company, Pro Star Management, had a credit line of at least \$300,000 with the bank, according to Jim Evans, a former partner of Bobo's.

Bobo is a former business manager of the Atlanta Hawks. His father, R.E. Bobo Jr., is one of the bank's co-founders and a member of its board of directors.

Winter said Bobo, who at the time was representing former Alabama player Thornton Chandler, contacted bank officials and asked if they would help Thomas, then 19, secure a car loan. Thomas put no money down for the car.

"Sure, it was a factor," Winter said. "[Bobo] told us he had the income. I don't think we ever talked to Derrick Thomas prior to the loan being made."

A copy of the loan agreement,

dated June 15, 1986, shows Thomas signed a five-year loan with monthly payments of \$445.18. According to court documents, Thomas made just nine payments.

Winter said he was led to believe that Thomas received a monthly government check because his father, Capt. Robert Thomas, was shot in Vietnam and, while his remains have never been recovered, has been declared dead by the U.S. government. A Veterans Administration official said the maximum amount paid under the Dependents Educational Assistance Program is \$376 a month.

Court documents also show Thomas purchased at least one other car while at Alabama. A spokesman for Jim Burke Automotive confirmed that Thomas bought a 1985 Nissan Maxima — listed at \$13,850.86 — on July 13, 1987. Barry Hill, a salesman at the company, said he sold the used car to Thomas. Hill said there was no down payment and the car was financed by GMAC in Birmingham.

Asked about Thomas's ability to finance a car, Hill said: "It was no problem. We'd sold a lot of these to kids off the team down there. No problem on that."

How many players? "Quite a few," Hill said. Hill refused additional comment and referred questions to GMAC. A GMAC spokesman in Birmingham said it is company policy not to comment on loans.

In Birmingham, artist Steve Skipper said he has retained an attorney and may sue Thomas as the result of a business deal that went bad. Skipper painted pictures of Thomas, from which Thomas was to receive 60 percent of the profits and Skipper the remainder.

Skipper claims Thomas has all the originals and prints, numbering more than 2,000 with a value he estimates at more than \$300,000, and that he has received very little from the deal. Skipper said that Thomas also promised to donate a percentage of his profits to Vietnam veterans and has yet to do so.

"I don't want to sue Derrick or anything, but I want what is coming to me," Skipper said.

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