



# THE SOUL BOWL

*No rivalry in the state—maybe anywhere—has as much soul as the rivalry between Jackson State and Alcorn State.*

by RILEY MANNING

photos courtesy of JSU AND ASU ATHLETICS





Drum major Abraham Duffie Jr. leads the Boom of the South in a SWAC performance.

**T**hey hit the gridiron once a year to battle it out in the Soul Bowl. Though the winner may go on to compete in the Celebration Bowl in Atlanta, the Soul Bowl, formerly called the “Capital City Classic,” is the biggest game of the year.

“Energy for the Classic is always high,” said Mar’Kaja Ramirez, drum major for Alcorn’s Sounds of Dyn-O-Mite marching band. “We only play them one time, so we gotta make it count. That’s what we hold onto until the next year.”

Former JSU wide receiver and Jackson native Carle Ollie said both teams work all year to prepare for the Soul Bowl. Aside from bragging rights, this victory gives the winner serious momentum going into next season, as well as an edge when it comes to recruiting new players.

“The coaches post last year’s score in the weight room and things like that to keep us motivated,” he said. “Lately JSU hasn’t really been competitive for the SWAC championship, so we’re trying to spoil Alcorn’s run at the Eastern Division.”

From 1992 to 2012, the game was played at Veterans Memorial Stadium in Jackson, annually drawing over 32,000 people to the city for a week of celebration — a city-wide pep rally at the capital, a lively night scene, even a community church service the day after the game. Since 2012, the site of the Soul Bowl has alternated between the capital city and Alcorn’s more rural home town of Lorman, roughly 80 miles away, adding a palpable home-

field advantage.

“The closer you get to campus, the more Alcorn fans you see,” Ollie said. “Cell service drops out. It’s a whole different world from Jackson. You think, ‘Oh yeah, I’m in hostile territory.’”

The football team shares the spotlight for the Soul Bowl. Before the game starts, during the “zero quarter,” the Sounds of Dyn-O-Mite squares off against JSU’s marching band, the Sonic Boom of the South. Spectators stay in their seats at halftime to watch the bands march, and after the game, spectators get right down on the field for a closer look at the real showdown: the fifth quarter.

“Nobody leaves when the football game is over,” Ramirez said. “Fifth quarter is what people judge the better band by. We put it all on the line, and it’s a huge adrenaline rush to get the W.”

## Unrivaled Respect

Underneath the rivalry, JSU and Alcorn share a strong bond as Historically Black Colleges and Universities – HBCUs.

Alcorn alumnus John Johnson attended the university from ‘67-‘71, in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement.

“Even before it was a ‘classic,’ it was one of the more heated rivalries. Heated, but respected,” he said. “Alcorn fans and JSU





Mar'Kaja Ramirez, first female drum major at Alcorn State University, leads her band during a halftime performance.

fans tailgate next to each other, having grilling competitions among each other — you could call it the ‘grill-iron.’ You can feel the camaraderie as HBCUs.”

Amory native Olandress Gilleylen graduated from JSU in 2010. He played football his freshman year, but an injury and his rigorous studies in computer engineering led him away from the team.

“Leaving football was a big personal decision, but I’m so glad I stayed at JSU,” he said. “I didn’t understand how much JSU and the HBCU experience had done for me until I got out. It really prepared me, and I’m proud to be a product of Jackson State.”

## History

Both universities were founded in the 1870’s — Alcorn as the first black land grant college in the U.S. brought into existence by Reconstruction measures to offer higher education for newly freed African Americans. Jackson State was originally operated as a Baptist seminary seeking to educate black Christian leaders. JSU became a state school in 1940.

“HBCUs have had to do so much with so little. Alcorn challenges are JSU challenges, for the most part,” Johnson said. “Lots of kids who go to an HBCU find a different university than what they’ve been told about. They can be themselves, and many of them

flourish.”

Ramirez noted how both universities tend to draw students from the South, many of whom have grown up playing against each other. She said it’s a keeping-it-in-the-family kind of thing.

“A lot of us are home grown,” she said. “(Alcorn and JSU) aren’t far from each other, so we get students from the same areas. That makes us more close-knit. It’s a family cookout vibe, for sure.”

Some real stars have emerged from these two universities. Alcorn has produced three hall-of-fame coaches. Jack Spinks, the first black player to be drafted into the NFL, first donned Alcorn’s purple and gold. Jackson State claims four hall-of-fame players, and boasts 15 Southwestern Athletic Conference (SWAC) titles, most recently in 2007.

“You know, the HBCU culture has spread in ways you don’t even realize. For example, you see DI schools playing music at practice. We’ve been doing that,” Gilleylen said. “Even as a spectator, the feeling you get when you walk into the stadium is second to none, and that says so much about HBCU football.”

Since 1946, Jackson State has won the Soul Bowl 44 times to Alcorn’s 28. Alcorn has edged out JSU three of the last five years, but the last three Soul Bowls were claimed by the home team.

“It’s hardly ever a blowout. They’re usually really close,” Johnson said.

This year, the Soul Bowl will be on November 23 in Jackson. ●