

'The honor of my race, family, and self is at stake'

By Scott Dominiak

At the turn of the century there was much controversy concerning the safety of players in college football. The issue came to a head in 1905 when 23 players, both collegiate and professional, lost their lives while playing the game. By January of 1906 the rules committee began the process of enacting the most sweeping changes since football had emerged from Rugby a quarter-century before. In 1910 the rules committee adopted several new rules in order to make the game even safer. A number of fatalities still occurred, however.

One football fatality was Jack Trice on Oct. 8, 1923.

Trice was Iowa State University's first Black athlete, and the only athlete to lose his life while competing in intercollegiate sports for the school. He was born in Hiram, Ohio in 1902, and attended East Tech High School in Cleveland where he was a star athlete. His football coach, Sam Wilaman, was named head coach at Iowa State. So, Trice and six other players went with him to Ames, Iowa.

Trice majored in animal husbandry and worked several odd jobs in order to finance his education and support his wife and mother. Back then athletic scholarships were not granted. Despite working and playing football, Trice managed to pass 45 college credits with a 90-percent average.

On the football field, Trice was an outstanding interior lineman. After playing on the freshman team in 1922, he was considered by many to have the ability to be an all-conference player. In the 1923 campaign, Trice did not play in the first two games because Nebraska and St. Louis would not play against a team that suited up a Black man.

In the next game at Minnesota, Trice finally got his chance to play. It was a defensive battle, and at the half Iowa trailed 14-10. In the locker room Trice complained of a sore left shoulder, but nevertheless continued to play in the second half.

Midway through the third period Minnesota ran a play off left tackle. Because Trice could not get the runner, he threw himself in front of the Minnesota interference in a roll block. Consequently, while lying on his back, Trice was trampled on.

Trice wanted to continue playing, but he was hurt too badly as Iowa State lost

20-17. Doctors at a Minneapolis hospital said Trice's condition was not serious, so they let him return by train to Ames with the team. Upon reaching the campus he was taken to the University hospital. Doctors discovered Trice had broken his collarbone during the first half of the game. As his condition deteriorated, He developed resperatory problems. A stomach specialist from Des Moines was summoned to the hospital. He thought surgery would be too risky.

On the following day, Monday, Oct. 8, Trice died at 2 p.m. due to hemorrhaging in his lungs and internal bleeding throughout his abdomen. Classes were postponed the next day as funeral services were held before 4,000 mourners on the campus grounds.

Prior to the service that morning, a letter was found in Trice's coat pocket which he had written to himself the night before the Minnesota game. The letter was read to the mourners. It said:

"My thoughts just before the first real college game of my life: The honor of my race, family and self is at stake. Everyone is expecting me to do big things. I will. My whole body and soul are to be thrown recklessly about the field. Every time the ball is snapped, I will be trying to do more than my part. Fight low, with your eyes open and toward the play. Watch out for crossbucks, and reverse end runs. Se on your toes every minute if you expect to make good, Jack."

A plaque honoring Trice with those words inscribed on it was mounted on the southwest wall of the Iowa State Gymnasium.

For years the legend of Jack Trice had all but been forgotten. Then in the early '70s when Iowa state was building its new \$7,000,000 stadium, there was controversy as to what to name it. Finally, after much debate, the Iowa state Board of Regents named it Cyclone Stadium/Jack Trice Field.

The legend of Jack Trice still lives on. On Oct. 8, 1988, 65 years after his death, the Iowa State Athletic Department honored the memory of Jack Trice during halftime festivities of the ISU-Northern Iowa game. Today there is a statue of Trice between Carver and Beardshear Halls, and a memorial scholarship has been created in his name. Also, the plaque honoring Trice at the Iowa State Gymnasium is now mounted at the north end of Jack Trice field near the victory bell.

(Background information on Jack Trice is from an article by Kevin Boone which appeared in the Sept.-Oct., 1977 issue of Black Collegian magazine, and reprinted in the Iowa State program honoring Trice in 1988.)