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The Southern Heritage Classic Celebrates its 25th Anniversary with Football Rivals Jackson State University and Tennessee State University

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Memphis, TN. (June 9) – The Southern Heritage Classic presented by FedEx announced today that the popular event will celebrate its 25th anniversary when football rivals Jackson State University and Tennessee State University go head to head Saturday September 13, at 6 p.m. (CDT) at Liberty Bowl Memorial Stadium in Memphis. More than 50,000 fans are expected to attend. **Starting June 13 at 10 a.m. (CDT), tickets to all Classic events – including the Classic Tailgate spots – go on sale at Ticketmaster outlets or online at www.ticketmaster.com. To charge tickets by phone, call 1-800-745-3000. For more information on the Classic, visit www.southernheritageclassic.com.**

The Classic, which last year ranked 4th in attendance among historically black college and university (HBCU) classic football games in the country, has become a driving force for increasing revenue for Jackson State and Tennessee State. After the 2014 Classic, both colleges – collectively – will have earned more than \$9.8 million since the Classic's inception in 1990. The Classic also has had an economic impact on Memphis where these competing teams play annually. Last year's Classic generated \$21 million dollars to the local economy.

“The Classic has become much more than a platform where two of our historically black colleges and universities come together in Memphis,” said Fred Jones Jr., Southern Heritage Classic founder and producer. “For the two colleges, it's created an annual economic stream that they could depend on. For Memphis, it's been an economic powerhouse to the community.”

Memphis Mayor A C Wharton Jr. said the Classic also has impacted communities beyond the boundaries of Memphis.

“In bringing together universities from Nashville, Tennessee and Jackson, Mississippi in Memphis, the Southern Heritage Classic has for many years been one of the most anticipated and widely regarded events on the Mid-South region’s social calendar,” Wharton said. “What escapes many people, however, is that this game and calendar of events have also become a strong, dependable economic engine for Memphis and the Mid-South.”

Wharton continued, “What Fred Jones has accomplished in building this Classic from a small football game between regional rivals into a week of activities that generates a \$21 million economic impact is remarkable. This is why he deserves appreciation not only from Jackson State and Tennessee State Universities and their fans, but also from the small business owners, Chamber of Commerce officers, hotel general managers, governmental officials, and all of those who have benefited from the financial footprint the Southern Heritage Classic continues to make. To be clear, every Memphian has benefitted from the positive imprint of the Classic.”

While the Southern Heritage Classic and other HBCU classics still attract big crowds, college sports revenue in general has become much more competitive.

“The football classics are historical in their importance to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) as a revenue source for sustainability,” said Dr. Vivian L. Fuller, Director of Athletics for Jackson State University. “As the climate of intercollegiate athletics and sports change so will the classics. Twenty-five years is a true measure of the sustainability and leadership.

“The Southern Heritage Classic, over the previous twenty-two years, has not only been a significant revenue source for Jackson State, but participation in the event has also been a point of cultural and institutional pride for Tiger nation. The pageantry surrounding the Classic, including the concerts, parties, golf tournaments and the battle of the bands all lift the Southern Heritage Classic from a football game to one of the premier events on the collegiate level,” Dr. Fuller said.

Some funding sources also have declined as black students have considered increased educational opportunities beyond historically black colleges and universities.

“College athletics is a much different entity than it was during the days of John Merritt at Tennessee State,” said Teresa Phillips, Director of Athletics for Tennessee State University. “As top student-athletes were given the option to attend majority schools, HBCUs have found it difficult to continue to compete at the highest level. Funding issues are at the center of our circumstance. Facilities and support services abound at top athletic programs. For them, money is not really a concern while it is at the center of our daily challenges.

Ms. Phillips continued, "One of the constants for Tennessee State has been the Southern Heritage Classic. Through the leadership of Fred Jones this event has stood the test of time and has benefitted TSU directly through the strong financial guarantee paid to the athletic program and university band. Indirect benefits have also been noted through corporate relationships for the university and student recruitment. TSU has been blessed by this relationship for twenty five years and we are looking forward to another quarter of a century of involvement with the Classic. It's truly been one of the most consistent sources of external support for our athletic program during my 25 years at the university."

Jones credits the Classic's overall success and ability to evolve to its loyal sponsors. Besides FedEx – the Classic's presenting sponsor – other major sponsors include Allstate Insurance Company; AutoZone; Nike; Governor's Highway Safety Office; Carrier Corporation; and MillerCoors. While sponsorships contribute the lion's share of money for the Southern Heritage Classic, loyal alumni and other fans from across the U.S. also play a large part in the success and longevity of the annual celebration.

"When people say they enjoy the event each year it's real; it's not manufactured," Jones said. "People schedule their vacations and plan their family reunions around the Classic."

"All the Way LIVE at 25" is the theme for this year's 3-day Classic from **September 11-13**. Classic events scheduled for **Thursday, September 11** include Gladys Knight, with special guest, Jammin Jay Lamont. Continuing on **Friday, September 12**, Classic events include V101's The Tom Joyner Morning Show; the Classic Music Festival – which is new this year – with performances by Charlie Wilson, Joe and Mint Condition; plus the Classic Comedy Jam starring Lavell Crawford with Dominique, Cocoa Brown and Jammin Jay Lamont. On **Saturday, September 13**, traditional events before the Classic game with football rivals Jackson State and Tennessee State include the Classic Tailgate – which drew more than 10,000 people last year; the Classic Parade; the Classic Fashions & Brunch; the Ed "Too Tall" Jones Golf Classic; and the Classic College Fair.

About the Southern Heritage Classic presented by FedEx

The Southern Heritage Classic presented by FedEx began in 1990 and last year ranked 4th in attendance among historically black college and university (HBCU) classic football games in the country. The Classic brings fans from across the U.S. to watch rivals Jackson State University and Tennessee State University play annually at the Liberty Bowl Memorial Stadium in Memphis. For more information on the Southern Heritage Classic, visit www.southernheritageclassic.com.

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