

BLACK COLLEGE SPORTS PAGE



North Carolina A&T Sports Photo

GEARING UP FOR 2018 FOOTBALL

PREVIEW OF 2018 SWAC FOOTBALL; HBCU TEAM, PLAYERS GET PRESEASON RECOGNITION

CARTWRIGHT: NC A&T senior running back racking up impressive preseason All-American honors.

UNDER THE BANNER

WHAT'S GOING ON IN AND AROUND BLACK COLLEGE SPORTS

NC A&T LONE HBCU IN 2018 FCS TOP 25:

Defending **Mid Eastern Athletic Conference** and **BLACK COLLEGE SPORTS PAGE** national champion **North Carolina A&T** is the only HBCU team to make the preseason 2018 FCS Top 25 as chosen by *Street & Smith's College Football Annual* which hit newsstands about two weeks ago.



Washington

The Aggies, who finished 12-0 last season, running the table in the MEAC and beating three other FCS opponents including **SWAC** champion **Grambling State** in the *Celebration Bowl*, are selected 15th in the 2018 preseason. Former Defensive Coordinator **Sam Washington** has replaced retired veteran **Rod Broadway** guiding the Aggies.

Last year was A&T's first undefeated season in 93 years of football. NC A&T finished sixth in the final 2017 FCS Coaches poll and seventh in the final 2017 STATS FCS Top 25.

They are picked to repeat in the MEAC this season on the strength of key and experienced returnees at skill positions. Quarterback **Lamar Raynard** returns for his senior campaign after passing for nearly 3,000 yards (2,932) with 27 touchdowns and just seven interceptions in 2017. Raynard completed 63.7 percent of his passes.

The Aggies will also feature senior 1,000-yard rusher **Marquell Cartwright** and junior wideout **Elijah Bell** who had 64 receptions for 953 yards with 11 TD catches. Bell averaged 14.9 yards per catch.

The Aggies will be tested early as they open the season against defending Ohio Valley Conference champion Jacksonville State on August 25th in Montgomery, Alabama in the *FCS Kickoff Classic*. Jacksonville State finished 10-3 overall in 2017 and ranked 10th in the final FCS Coaches Poll and ninth in the final STATS Top 25.

TWO ON STREET & SMITH'S A-A TEAM:

North Carolina A&T senior running back **Marquell Cartwright** and **Grambling State** senior linebacker **De'Arius Christmas** are the only two HBCU players named to the preseason FCS all-American team by *Street & Smith's College Football Annual*.



Christmas

Cartwright, a 5-8, 201-pound redshirt senior, led the MEAC and finished seventh in FCS football last season with 1,190 rushing yards. He scored 14 rushing touchdowns and averaged 99.2 rushing yards per game, 10th best in the FCS.

Christmas, at 5-10, 220, amassed a team best 87 tackles last year for the G-Men averaging 6.7 tackles per game with 3.5 sacks. He was named the SWAC's defensive player of the year.

BCSP Notes

Six HBCU football players earn HERO Sports All-American recognition

BELLEVUE, Wash., – Three players from defending **BLACK COLLEGE SPORTS PAGE** national champion **North Carolina A&T** were named to the 2018 *HERO Sports All-American* teams recently.

Senior running back **Marquell Cartwright** was named to the second team offense while sophomore defensive back **Mac McCain** was named to the second team defense.

Junior wide receiver **Elijah Bell** was named to the third team offense along with **Howard** sophomore quarterback **Caylin Newton** who was designated as an athlete.

Grambling's De'Arius Christmas was the only HBCU player named to a first team. The 2017 **SWAC** Defensive Player of the Year who led the **SWAC** champion **Tigers'** defense was named a first team linebacker.

The three Aggies were key parts of A&T 12-0 **Mid Eastern Athletic Conference** and national championship season last year.

Cartwright led the MEAC in rushing (1,190 yards, 14 TDs), Bell was the league's receiving leader (64 receptions, 953 yards 11 TDs and McCain paced the MEAC in interceptions with six, three that he returned for touchdowns. Those three return TDs led all of FCS football..

Last season, Newton led Howard's resurgence on the gridiron, posting a 7-4 overall mark and 6-2 in **Mid Eastern Athletic Conference** play; thus, placing second behind MEAC and black college national champion **North Carolina A&T**.

Newton helped lead Howard to its first-ever FBS win at UNLV in his collegiate debut. From that point, Newton guided the conference's top-rated offensive unit (447.8 ypg) and rushing offense (217.4 ypg).

Additionally, he became the first freshman in MEAC (MEAC) history to surpass 3,000 yards of total offense (3,185) while averaging 289.5 yards of offense per outing. The Atlanta native also led the MEAC in scoring as he combined for 25 touchdowns en route to leading Howard to its best finish and record since 2012.

Newton earned several postseason honors, including 2017 MEAC Rookie of the Year and 2017 Eastern College Athletic Conference (ECAC) Rookie of the Year.

North Carolina Central rising senior long snapper **Erik Schlecker** earned a spot on the *HERO Sports* FCS Preseason Third Team for achieving a 99 percent success rate on his snaps with only one errant snap in the past two seasons at NCCU. The transfer from ASA College also boasts a snap time average of 0.75 seconds.

To his credit, each NCCU teammate Schlecker has snapped for during the 2016 and 2017 seasons – two placekickers and a punter – has garnered all-conference recognition.



NEWTON: Young Howard quarterback among six HBCU players earning All-American recognition.

Southern names new women's hoops coach

Southern University Athletics Director **Roman Banks** introduced longtime assistant coach **Carlos Funchess** as the program's next head women's basketball coach during an introductory press conference last

Thursday inside the F.G. Clark Activity Center.

During the previous 13 seasons, Funchess served as assistant coach under former head coach **Sandy Pugh** at Southern, where he worked exclusively with developing the Jaguars post players, including All-SWAC performers **Frederika Lewis, Freda Allen** and **Briana Green**.

Since his arrival to Baton Rouge in 2005, Funchess has been instrumental in helping guide the women's basketball program to five SWAC regular season and three SWAC Tournament titles.

Funchess is also known as a tireless recruiter, canvassing much of the Southeast and Texas for hidden talent which has helped Southern become a perennial SWAC title contender.

A native of Magee, Miss., Funchess is a former two-time All-Southland Conference performer and the 1991 co-Player of the Year at then-Northeast Louisiana University (ULM) and received national recognition after his senior season when he won the 1991 College Slam Dunk Contest on ESPN.



Funchess

Graham new Albany State volleyball coach

ALBANY-The **Albany State University** (ASU) Athletics Department has announced the appointment of **Verniece Graham** as head volleyball coach for the Golden Rams.

Graham assumes the role after **Robert Skinner** stepped down from the position. During his tenure, Coach Skinner guided the Golden Rams to ten **SIAC** Championships and eight NCAA Division II playoff berths. He also spent five seasons as the head coach at **Paine College** compiling a combined overall career record of 449-298.

"I have had a wonderful run as volleyball coach here at Albany State," says Skinner who has been at the helm of the program since 1991. "I'm looking forward to giving my full attention to women's basketball and am excited for what's to come for volleyball under the guidance of Coach Graham."

Graham takes over the program after serving as the assistant head coach since the fall of 2008. During her tenure Graham helped guide the team to two straight **SIAC** Championships (2008, 2009). In addition to her coaching duties, she played an integral role in day-to-day operations of the program including budgeting, recruiting and scheduling.

"We are excited to see Verniece lead the volleyball program. I am confident in her ability to sustain and grow the program and uphold a strong commitment to the academic and social development of our volleyball student-athletes," said ASU Athletics Director **Sherie Gordon**.

Graham is no stranger to the athletics program at ASU. She had a standout career during her time a dual-sport in volleyball and softball for the Golden Rams.

Graham was twice named to the All-SIAC Second Team in volleyball and as a libero/outside hitter helped bring three **SIAC** Championships to Albany State (2005,2006,2007).

As a center fielder for the softball team, Graham was a First Team All-SIAC performer and was a part of the 2005 **SIAC** Championship team.



Graham

2018 SWAC Football Preview

Grambling solid; League looking for answers

LUT WILLIAMS

BCSP Editor

OVERVIEW

A number of things are up in the air in the SWAC.

1) Commissioner **Duer Sharp** resigned in late December and the league has yet to choose a replacement.

2) The decision to abolish the championship game after 19 years is under review. It's likely to come back in 2018 at an on-campus venue.

3) The seven-game conference schedule will continue though lateness in finalizing it has caused some disruption in scheduling out-of-conference opponents.

4) Four former assistants and a proven veteran step into head coaching roles.

EAST DIVISION

Experienced junior quarterback **Noah Johnson** (782 passing yards, 4 TDs) and senior running back P. J. Simmons (687 yards, 7 TDs) are expected to be plugged in to keep the high-powered **Alcorn State** (7-5, 5-2) humming towards its fifth straight East Division title. Center **Mustafa Ibrahim** steps into a lead role on the offensive line. The defense has depth and experience with eight returning starters led by LBs **Trae Ferrell** and **Solomon Muhammad** and DB **Brady Smith**.

Donald Hill-Eley had the interim tag removed at **Alabama State** (5-6, 4-3) after leading the Hornets to five wins in their final six games. Freshman **Darryl Pearson** was at the controls for those wins and will likely start at quarterback. A trio of running backs and wideouts **Jamir Hannah** and **Nyrell Lee** return. Linebackers **Malik Bridgers, Ricky Haley** and **Darron Johnson** and safety **Joshua Hill** lead a gang-tackling defense.

After four years under **James Spady**, **Alabama A&M** (4-7, 3-4) selected former **Hampton** head coach **Connell Maynor** to turn

PREDICTED ORDER OF FINISH

EAST DIVISION

1. Alcorn State
2. Alabama State
3. Jackson State
4. Alabama A&M
5. Mississippi Valley State

WEST DIVISION

1. Grambling State
2. Southern
3. Prairie View A&M
4. Texas Southern
5. Arkansas-Pine Bluff

around its fortunes. The offense features sophomore quarterbacks **Aqeel Glass** and **Dylan Smith**, running backs **Jordan Bentley** and **Trevon Walters**, receivers **Isaiah Bailey** and **Marcelus Clash** and an experienced offensive line. Elite pass rushers **Vernon Moland** (10 sacks) and **Yurik Bethune** (5 sacks) play in front of an experienced secondary.

Jackson State (3-8, 3-4) won three of its last four games but coach **Tony Hughes** decided to go in another direction, hiring passing guru **Hal Mumme** to lead the offense. Three new QB candidates will vie to run the offense with wide receivers getting more opportunities and RB **Jordan Johnson** (647 yards, 6 TDs) getting an expanded role. The top 10 tacklers return but they must improve after giving up 170 ypg. on the ground.

Defensive coordinator **Vincent Dancy** is the new head coach at **Mississippi Valley State** (2-9, 1-6) replacing **Rick Comegy**. After finishing with two rushing TDs, minus rushing yards and 55 sacks, it's understandable why the new coach focused on bringing in offensive linemen. The passing offense led the league with **Quinn McElfresh**, **Steven McIntosh** and **Booker Chambers** having productive years catching passes from three quarterbacks, who all return. Linebacker **Patrick Harbin** and safety **Everett Nicholas** are the top defenders.

SWAC'S TOP NFL PROSPECT

At 5-10, 235, Alabama A&M linebacker **VERNON MOLAND** may be as fast as former Bulldog **Robert Mathis**. Mathis had 20 sacks as a senior linebacker and had a marvelous pro career racking up 123 sacks and 52 forced fumbles. Moland led the SWAC with 10 sacks last year and has his sights on matching Mathis's exploits.



WEST DIVISION

New offensive playmakers will have to step forward to continue the run of two-time champion **Grambling State** (11-2, 7-0). **Geremy Hickbottom** and **Charles Wright** are in line to replace Offensive POY **Devante Kincade** at quarterback. Alabama transfer **DeSherris Flowers** and holdover **Lyndermian Brooks** are the top candidates to grab **Martez Carter's** running back spot.

Eight all-SWAC performers – OL **William Waddell**, WR **Darrell Clark**, TE **Jordan Jones**, PK **Marc Orosco**, LB **De'Arius Christmas**, D-linemen **LaAllan Clark** (9 sacks), **Linwood Banks** and **Brandon Varner** – should ease the transition.

A stellar senior class departed **Southern** (7-4, 5-2). The good news is that APR sanctions are over and spring practice will be held for the first time in five years. Safety **Andrea Augustine** is the only returning all-conference player though fellow S **Montavious Gaines** and several other defenders are of all-SWAC caliber. The Jags have an experienced O-line and a promising receiving quartet.

The biggest job is sorting through as many as five candidates trying to replace record-setting four-year starting quarterback **Austin Howard**.

After head coach **Willie Simmons** left for **Florida A&M**, **Prairie View A&M** (6-5, 4-3) turned to former Grambling offensive coordinator **Eric Dooley** as the Panthers' new head man. He'll build the Panthers' offense around 6-4, 235-pound sophomore

quarterback **Neiko Hollins** (1,848 yards, 21 TDs) who had an impressive freshman campaign. **Dawonya Tucker** and **Caleb Broach** will handle running back duties with **Corbin Finlayson** and **Shawn Pierce** anchoring the line. **Anthony Stubbs** is the returning tackles leader with **JuAnthony Parker** leading a deep and talented secondary.

After finishing near the bottom in just about every statistical category, **Michael Haywood** beefed up his young **Texas Southern** (2-9, 2-5) squad with jucos and Div. I transfers. Chief among them is Tulane transfer **Glen Cuilette** who'll compete with **Dominic Delira** at quarterback.

Brad Woodard is the featured back with **Malik Webb** the receiving leader. Linebacker **Julian Marcantel** is a prolific tackler (92 stops) but needs sack leader **Ike Owansanyo** and linebacker **Patrick Howell** to step into lead roles.

The fifth straight losing season at **Arkansas Pine Bluff** (2-9, 1-6) ended the 10-year run of head coach **Monte Coleman**. **Cedric Thomas** returns to lead his alma after spending six seasons as defensive coordinator at **Alcorn State**. **KeShawn Williams** is the league's returning rushing leader with **Tyrin Ralph** a nice change-of-pace back.

Senior **LaEarl Patterson** likely gets the reins to the offense. Linebackers **Jontavis Testa**, **JeKevin Carter** and **Londell Sanders** are solid with **Jalen Steward** a force up front.

THE STAT CORNER

WHO ARE THE BEST PERFORMERS IN BLACK COLLEGE SPORTS

2018 PRESEASON FOOTBALL EVENTS

SOUTHWESTERN ATHLETIC CONFERENCE
SWAC Football Media Day
Friday, July 13, 2018 - 10 a.m.
Birmingham Marriott
Birmingham, AL

CENTRAL INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETIC CONFERENCE
CIAA Football Media Day
Thursday, July 19, 2018 - 9 a.m.
Sheraton Hotel
Roanoke, VA

MID EASTERN ATHLETIC CONFERENCE
MEAC Football Media Luncheon
Friday, July 27, 2018 - 9 a.m.
Hilton Norfolk The Man Hotel
Norfolk, VA