

# Slim pickins for two decades now

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In many ways, **AZEEZ Communications** could not have picked a better time than the fall of the 1994-95 season to launch the **BLACK COLLEGE SPORTS PAGE**.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) were coming off years when only eight (8) players were taken in the 1993 NFL Draft, ending a streak of 32 straight years of double-digit selections, and 1994 when 13 players were drafted, only one in the first round.

It would not be long however before HBCU picks in the single digits would be the norm.

From the 1995 Draft to this year's 2020 NFL Draft is what is covered this week in Part Four, the final installment of our series on *HBCU NFL Draft History*.

## NEW LIFE, MAYBE?

If horizons looked bleak for black college players' prospects in the NFL Draft following the 1993 and 1994 performances, **Alcorn State** quarterback **Steve McNair** changed that.

McNair put HBCU football on the front page of newspapers, magazines and in front of national television audiences with his sterling, record-breaking play for the Braves during the 1994 season. He was the first HBCU player to win the *Walter Payton Award* awarded to the top offensive player in NCAA I-AA football.

McNair finished the season with career-bests of 5,377 passing yards and 47 touchdowns and a boatload of highlight finishes, numbers similar to 2019 Heisman Trophy winner Joe Burrow of LSU. McNair added another 904 rushing yards and ten TDs.

Most importantly however for HBCUs and the BCSP, he put the national spotlight on black colleges and their players as he made a run at the Heisman Trophy earning the cover of *Sports Illustrated* in the process.

He finished third for the coveted trophy behind two running backs – winner Rashaan Salaam of Colorado and second-place finisher KaJana Carter of Penn State. It was the best finish for an HBCU player in college football history besting **Grambling** quarterback **Doug Williams's** fourth-place finish behind Texas running back Earl Campbell in 1977.

As 1995 draft time neared there was much speculation that McNair would be the third HBCU player to go off the boards first overall (following **Grambling's Buck Buchanan** in 1963 and **Tennessee State's Ed "Too Tall" Jones** in 1974) to Cincinnati. But the Bengals chose Carter instead. After the expansion Jacksonville Jaguars chose Southern Cal offensive tackle Tony Boselli, Houston took McNair with the third pick.

But McNair was not the only HBCU player to make headlines in the draft.

**Central State** defensive end **Hugh Douglas** also had an impressive all-American career for the Marauders in the NAIA and followed that up with head-turning postseason performances landing him in the first round, 16th overall to the New York Jets.

While McNair waited his turn in the Oilers' pecking order at quarterback in his rookie season, Douglas posted ten sacks and won the league's Defensive Rookie of the Year award. He finished his ten-year career with 80 sacks and three Pro Bowl selections.

After an impressive workout at the Combine and a star-studded career as a four-year starter at **Fort Valley State**, the expansion Carolina Panthers selected cornerback **Tyrone Poole** with the 22nd pick of the first round. Poole spent 13 years in the league playing for eight teams and was a member of two Super Bowl championship teams.

Every member of the trio spent double-digit years in the league as McNair played 13 seasons winning the 2003 co-NFL Most Valuable Player Award with the Oilers, three Pro Bowl selections and playing in one Super Bowl. He passed for over 31,000 yards and 174 TDs in his career while running for over 3,500 yards and 35 TDs.

While those three garnered headlines at the top of the draft, overall numbers only reached 13 in 1995 with the remaining selectees at or near the bottom of the now seven-round draft.

The following year the numbers rose to 17 with **North Carolina A&T** offensive lineman **Jamain Stephens**, a first rounder to Pittsburgh

leading the way. Stephens stayed in the league six years but never became a dependable starter.

Among the notables from that draft was black college all-time leading rusher **Richard Huntley** out of **Winston-Salem State** who went in the fourth round to Atlanta. Huntley's black college career rushing record still stands at 6,286 yards. He stayed in the league seven years.

Others in that draft were two future HBCU head coaches. Former outstanding **Florida A&M** linebacker **Earl "The Hitman" Holmes** taken by Pittsburgh in the third round, became the head coach at his alma mater after a 10-year NFL career.

Former **Alabama State** wide receiver/kick returner **Reggie Barlow**, now the head coach at **Virginia State** and formally the head coach at his alma mater, was taken by Jacksonville in the fourth round and played in the league eight years.

Thirteen (13) HBCU players went off the boards in 1997, none in the first round. The two with the longest NFL tenures were former **Langston** wide receiver **Matthew Hatchette** who played seven years on four NFL teams after being selected by Minnesota in the seventh round and former **Knoxville** nose guard **Grady Jackson**, a sixth round pick by the Oakland Raiders who had a productive 12-year NFL career.

The 1998 draft class was significant as only the second single-digit haul, with eight going off the boards, since the early 1950s. The gem of that draft was **Jackson State** wideout **Corey Bradford** taken by Green Bay in the fifth round. He played four reliable years with the Packers before spending another five years with Houston and Detroit.

Draft numbers took another dip down to seven overall in 1999 but another **SWAC** product and wide receiver turned out to be the



**LAST OF THE FIRST ROUNDERS?:** (L. to r.) Tennessee State defensive back Dominique Rodgers-Cromartie in 2008 and Alabama State lineman Tytus Howard in 2019 are the only HBCU first round NFL Draft selections over the last 20 years.

The only ones to garner a first round selection during this period are former **Tennessee State** defensive back **Dominique Rodgers-Cromartie** to Arizona in 2008 and **Alabama State** offensive lineman **Tytus Howard** to Houston in 2019.

Over this period, the chances of selection are very slim. Teams are taking fewer chances on what used to be termed 'projects.' That means black college players are being vetted now more than ever.

Here are the ones that have survived the scrutiny and carved out nice careers.

Defensive back **Rashean Mathis** of **Bethune-Cookman** (2nd round to Jacksonville), tight end **Visanthe Shiancoe** out of **Morgan State** (3rd round to NY Giants) and defensive end **Robert Mathis** of **Alabama A&M** (5th round to Indy) were studs out of the 2003's draft of eight HBCU players and had long productive careers.

Two were late seventh rounders in 2004 but didn't distinguish themselves.

Second round picks **Ron Bartell** of **Howard** and **Nick Collins** of **Bethune-Cookman**

## HALL OF FAME WORTHY?:

(L. to R.) Alabama A&M linebacker Robert Mathis and Alcorn State wide receiver Donald Driver put up Hall of Fame numbers in their NFL careers.



CAREER	CAREER
SACKS: 123.0 (19th in NFL)	RECEPTIONS: 743
FORCED FUMBLES: 52 (1st in NFL)	RECEIVING YARDS: 10,137
	RECEIVING TDs: 61



## THE STAT CORNER

WHO'S IN AND WHO'S OUT IN BLACK COLLEGE SPORTS

### NUMBER OF BLACK COLLEGE PLAYERS TAKEN IN NFL DRAFTS - 1994 to 2020

1995	13	2004	2	2013	2
1996	17	2005	6	2014	2
1997	13	2006	3	2015	4
1998	8	2007	7	2016	3
1999	7	2008	5	2017	4
2000	13	2009	4	2018	3
2001	4	2010	2	2019	4
2002	5	2011	4	2020	1
2003	8	2012	1		

SOURCE: Total Football (1997)

## THE STAT CORNER II

WHO ARE THE BEST PERFORMERS IN BLACK COLLEGE SPORTS

### YEARS WITH LARGEST NUMBER OF BLACK COLLEGE PLAYERS DRAFTED

1968	70
1970	67
1969	66
1971	62
1976	53

### YEARS WITH SMALLEST NUMBER OF BLACK COLLEGE PLAYERS DRAFTED

1950	1
1951	1
1954	1
2012	1
2020	1

### YEARS WITH LARGEST NUMBER OF BLACK COLLEGE FIRST ROUND PICKS

1971	4
1974	4
1975	4
1970	3
1968	2
2000	2

### FIRST-EVER FIRST ROUND PICK AND FIRST OVERALL TOP PICK

Junious "Buck" Buchanan  
DL, Grambling  
1963 - 1st to Kansas City

### SECOND-EVER AND LAST OVERALL TOP PICK

Ed "Too Tall" Jones  
DL, Tennessee State  
1974 - 1st to Dallas

### SECOND-EVER FIRST ROUND PICK

Claude Humphrey  
DL, Tennessee State  
1968 - 3rd to Atlanta

### LAST FIRST ROUND PICK

Tytus Howard  
OL, Alabama State  
2019 - 23rd to Houston

## BCSP Notes

### Caylin Newton makes it official, he's going to Auburn

Former **Howard** quarterback **Caylin Newton**, who won **Mid Eastern Athletic Conference** rookie and player of the year in his first two seasons playing for the Bison, will continue his career at Auburn.

Newton made it official via Twitter Friday after keeping the decision under wraps since his departure from the Washington, D. C. program three games into the 2019 season. He played his final season under first-year head coach **Ron Prince** who was placed on leave nine games into the 2019 season and resigned after the season ended. Newton never spoke publicly about the reasons for his departure. Reports of verbal abuse and player intimidation led the



Newton

school to take the action against Prince.

Speculation about Newton's landing spot centered on William & Mary where his former coach at Howard, **Mike London**, is now the head coach, and Auburn, where his brother Cam, now an NFL quarterback and a former overall No. 1 NFL Draft pick, played and won the Heisman Trophy in 2010. "I think I used to think about being in his shadow, but now it's like I really don't care what people think," Newton told AL.com about playing where his older brother starred. "I can't really worry about what people are going to call me. I know who I am."

Newton reportedly was offered an opportunity to compete for the quarterback spot at both schools but chose Auburn, a Div. I SEC program over William & Mary that competes at the FCS level. A release from Auburn said the school is at the 85 scholarship limit meaning Newton will enter as a preferred walk-on.