



Grambling Sports Photo

TIME TO CROWN A CHAMPION

JSU vs. UAPB FOR SWAC TITLE; ODUMS LEAVES FOR NORFOLK STATE; McNEIL TO NC A&T; NFL DRAFT TIME

TOP DRAFT PROSPECT: Grambling State offensive lineman David Moore expected to be first HBCU player taken in 2021 NFL Draft.

SWAC CHAMPIONSHIP GAME XXII



ARKANSAS-PINE BLUFF GOLDEN LIONS (4-0)

WEST DIVISION CHAMPION
SOUTHWESTERN ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION



Head Coach
DOC GAMBLE

TEAM RECORD

2021 Overall: 4-0
2021 SWAC: 3-0 West
2021 BCSP Ranking: 2nd
2021 FCS Ranking: 25th
All-Time vs. AA&M: 7-16
Last Time vs. AA&M: 52-34 W, '19
SWAC Title Games: 2:1 (Last '12 W)
SWAC Championships: 1 (2012)

COACH'S RECORD

Alma Mater: UT-Martin ('95)
Record vs. Alabama A&M: 0-0
Record at UAPB: 4-0, .1000 (1st year)
Career: Same

VS.

ALABAMA A&M BULLDOGS (4-0)

EAST DIVISION CHAMPION
SOUTHWESTERN ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION



Head Coach
CONNELL MAYNOR

2021 RESULTS

2.....Alcorn State (Forfeit).....0 W
31.....@ South Carolina State.....7 W
52.....@ Jackson State.....43 W
38.....Alabama State (B'ham).....14 W

TEAM RECORD

2021 Overall: 4-0
2021 SWAC: 3-0 East
2021 BCSP Ranking: 1st
2021 FCS Ranking: 22nd
All-Time vs. UAPB: 16-7
Last Time vs. UAPB: 34-52 L, '19
SWAC Title Games: 6:1-5 (Last '11 L)
SWAC Championships: 1 (2006)

COACH'S RECORD

Alma Mater: N. C. A&T ('95)
Record vs. UAPB: 1-1
Record at AA&M: 17-10, .629 (3rd year)
Career: 65-31, .677 (11th year)

SAT., MAY 1, 2021 • JACKSON, MS • MISS. VETERANS STADIUM • 2 P. M. CST • ESPN2

SWAC title game set for Jackson, Ms.

LUT WILLIAMS
BCSP Editor

After a football season full of uncertainties brought on by a raging COVID-19 pandemic, the **Southwestern Athletic Conference** appears ready this Saturday to crown a champion.

Undefeated division winners – **Arkansas-Pine Bluff** from the West and **Alabama A&M** from the East – will bring an end to this unprecedented and unpredictable spring season when they meet Saturday at 2 p.m. in Jackson, Mississippi.

But the finale as it turns out could not come without another twist.

The two teams clinched their respective division titles two weeks ago and were scheduled to finish the regular season last Saturday in games that would have gone a long way to deciding which would host the title game. Instead, both teams had their games cancelled as their opponents were felled by COVID-19 protocols. Those cancellations brought the SWAC's season total to 12 games cancelled.

Faced with a rather difficult and complicated tie-breaking procedure for hosting the game, conference officials and the two teams came to a compromise to play the game at a neutral site in Jackson's spacious 55,000-seat Mississippi Veterans Memorial Stadium (See, **HOW DID WE GET HERE**).

THE GAME

A battle of Undefeateds

To say it is a surprise to see Alabama A&M and Arkansas-Pine Bluff in the championship game is somewhat of an understatement. Each has just one title game appearance over the last decade.

In the East, six-time defending champion (and two-time defending SWAC champion) **Alcorn State** was expected to continue its dominance in the division when preseason picks were made back in the fall. But the Braves decided to opt out of the spring season just before it began in February. Additionally, the East had the long shadow of NFL legend **Deion Sanders** cast upon it when he was named the head coach at **Jackson State** in September.

But those things mattered little to Alabama A&M head coach **Connell Maynor** and his

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. – The **Southwestern Athletic Conference (SWAC)** announced last Wednesday (April 21) that the Spring **2021 Cricket Wireless SWAC Football Championship** initially scheduled to be played on the campus of the highest-ranked team at the conclusion of regular season play had been relocated to Mississippi Veterans Memorial Stadium located in Jackson, Miss.

"We've made the decision to relocate the upcoming SWAC Championship game to a neutral site location due to the COVID-19 related game cancellations that directly impacted Alabama A&M and Arkansas-Pine Bluff," said SWAC Commissioner **Dr. Charles McClelland**.

"The canceled games would have ultimately assisted the conference office in determining a host institution for the championship game using our existing hosting tiebreaker policy. Without having the ability to thoroughly evaluate both teams using that policy we reached the conclusion that the only fair and equitable decision that could be made was to move the game to a neutral site location," said McClelland.

During the SWAC Coaches Zoom Conference Monday with both head coaches, Commissioner McClelland confirmed that both bands will attend the game and that seating capacity will be at fifty-percent of Jackson's 55,000-seat Mississippi Veterans Memorial Stadium.

The game is at 2 p.m. CST and will be carried live on ESPN2.

Bulldogs (4-0, 3-0 E). They returned the preseason offensive player on the year in senior quarterback **Aqeel Glass** and a strong nucleus on both sides of the ball.

Glass threw for over 1,000 yards in three games and a league-best 13 touchdowns while leading the league's best offense (486.7 ypg.). Chief among his weapons has been a four-deep receiving corps led by **Zabrian Moore** (31.5

yards per catch, 3 TDs) and **Abdul-Fattai Ibrahim** (18 rec., 277 yards, 3 TDs).

The defense, led by linebackers **Armoni Holloway** (20 tackles) and **Quantravis Kelly** (13 tackles) and defensive end **Marcus Cushnie** (4 sacks) held opponents to just 20.3 points per game.

One indication of their impending success was a dominant 31-7 win over defending MEAC co-champ **South Carolina State** to begin the season. Despite a month-long break between games, the Bulldogs came back to get big wins over **Jackson State** (52-43) and **Alabama State** (38-14) to claim the division crown.

Arkansas-Pine Bluff (4-0, 4-0 W) perhaps had an even bigger hurdle in getting past **Southern** and **Grambling State** who had won the division crown and represented the West in 17 of the 21 league title games, including the last seven. The Golden Lions additionally had to do it with a new head coach, **Charles "Doc" Gamble**, who replaced **Cedric Thomas** after last season.

But coming off its first winning season (6-5) since 2012, Gamble had plenty to build upon.

UAPB impressively got past Southern (33-30) and Grambling (48-21) on the road to open the season and after a close win over **Mississippi Valley State** (24-17), clinched the division with a 36-31 win over **Prairie View A&M**.

After platooning the last two seasons, **Skyler Perry** became the starter at quarterback and only finished behind Glass in SWAC passing stats, throwing for 1,005 yards and 12 TDs. UAPB may be the only SWAC team that equals AA&M in receiving talent as **Josh Wilkes** (19 rec., 293 yds., 5 TDs), **Tylin Ralph** (20 rec., 275 yds.) and **Harry Ballard III** (18 rec., 253 yds., 3 TDs) are a formidable trio.

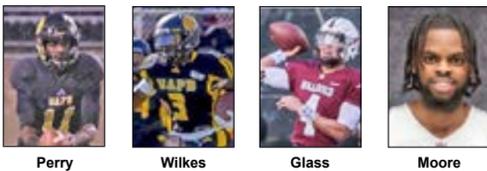
Linebackers **Kolby Watts** (29 tackles) and **Isaac Peppers** (5.5 sacks, 3 forced fumbles) and DB **Jalon Thigpen** (4 interceptions) key a defense that led the league giving up just 108.8 rushing yards per game.

The forecast calls for a 75-degree, sunny day for Saturday's championship tilt. Expect the action on the field to be just as hot and heavy as each team comes in averaging 35.3 points per game. With so much attention on both teams' vaunted passing attacks, the match up could hinge on who runs the ball better.

SWAC CHAMPIONSHIP GAME YARDSTICK

| TEAM STATS | |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------|
| ARKANSAS-PINE BLUFF | ALABAMA A&M |
| 35.3 ppg. (T 3rd) | SCORING OFFENSE 35.3 ppg. (T 3rd) |
| 24.8 ppg. (5th) | SCORING DEFENSE 20.3 ppg. (2nd) |
| 382.5 ypg. (4th) | TOTAL OFFENSE 486.7 ypg. (1st) |
| 363.0 ypg. (5th) | TOTAL DEFENSE 348.3 ypg. (4th) |
| 127.0 ypg. (6th) | RUSHING OFFENSE 125.3 ypg. (7th) |
| 108.8 ypg. (1st) | RUSHING DEFENSE 162.0 ypg. (7th) |
| 255.5 ypg. (2nd) | PASSING OFFENSE 361.0 ypg. (1st) |
| 254.3 ypg. (7th) | PASSING DEFENSE 186.3 ypg. (2nd) |

| INDIVIDUAL STATS | | |
|--|----------------------|--|
| Mattias Clark | RUSHING | Gary Quarles |
| 168 yds., 42.0 ypc., 3.2 ypc. 1 TD | | 249 yds., 83.0 ypg., 4.7 ypc., 2 TDs |
| Skyler Perry | PASSING | Aqeel Glass |
| 79-142-3, 55.6%, 1,005 yds., 12 TDs | | 67-113-3, 59.3%, 1,084 yds., 13 TDs |
| Josh Wilkes | RECEIVING | Zabrian Moore |
| 19 rec., 293 yds., 15.4 ypc., 73.3 ypg., 5 TDs | | 8 rec., 253 yds., 31.5 ypc., 126.0 ypg., 3 TDs |
| Kolby Watts (LB) | TACKLES | Armoni Holloway (LB) |
| 29 tackles, 7.3 tpg. | | 20 tackles, 6.7 tpg. |
| Isaac Peppers (LB) | SACKS | Marcus Cushnie (DE) |
| 5.5, -41 yds. | | 4.0, -32 yds. |
| Jalon Thigpen (DB) | INTERCEPTIONS | Quantravis Kelly (LB) |
| 4, 73 ret. yds., 1 TD | | 2, 13 ret. yds., 0 TD |
| Zack Piwniczka | PLACEKICKING | Spencer Corey |
| 16-16 PATs, 3-5 FGs, 25 pts., 6.3 ppg. | | 16-16 PATs, 3-3 FGs, 25 pts., 8.3 ppg. |
| Tylin Ralph | KICK RETURNS | Brian Jenkins, Jr. |
| 10, 269 yds., 26.9 ypr., 0 TDs | | 3, 43 yds., 14.3 ypr., 0 TDs |
| Tylin Ralph | PUNT RETURNS | Odieu Hilaire |
| 11, 192 yds., 17.5 ypr., 1 TD | | 11, 192 yds., 16.7 ypr., 0 TD |



Perry Wilkes Glass Moore



Peppers Thigpen Holloway Cushnie

UNDER THE BANNER

WHAT'S GOING ON IN AND AROUND BLACK COLLEGE SPORTS

McNEIL TRANSFERRING TO NC A&T:

Five-six outstanding high-scoring guard **Shareka McNeil** is leaving Div. II **Virginia Union** to take her basketball talents to Div. I **North Carolina A&T**.

McNeil, from Charlotte, N. C., played two full years at VUU leading the Panthers in scoring in both her first and second years and leading her squad to back-to-back CIAA Tournament titles. Her twin, **Shameka**, also played for VUU.

McNeill was one of the premier scorers in all of college basketball before a knee injury ended her 2019-20 junior season prematurely. She had outings of 44, 42 and 55 points and was the leading scorer in Division II basketball with an average of 37.7 points per game through seven games before suffering the season-ending injury in her eighth game.

McNeil's real coming out party was at the 2019 CIAA Tournament when she tied the tournament's single-game scoring record with a 59-point first-round performance against Livingstone. For that game, she hit 19 of her 29 field goal attempts, including a 14 of 20 performance from the 3-point line. She followed that up with 38- and 37-point performances in the CIAA semis and finals to lead VUU to a repeat title.

McNeil averaged 12.5 points per game in her first season (2018-19) and 24.7 ppg. as a sophomore. She won CIAA Player of Year honors in the 2019-20 season. VUU and the CIAA sat out the 2020-21 season.

She joins the program of head coach **Tarrell Robinson** at NC A&T who is coming off an MEAC Tournament title and NCAA playoff berth. The Lady Aggies are moving into the Big South Conference next season.

Ann Marie Gilbert, who recruited and coached McNeil at VUU, left in April 2020 to become the new head coach at Detroit Mercy. Gilbert was recently retained at UDM after a three-month internal investigation involving allegations of mental and verbal abuse.

BCSP Notes

Southern head football coach Dawson Odums leaves for Norfolk State

NORFOLK, Va. – **Norfolk State University** Director of Athletics **Melody Webb** announced Wednesday the hiring of **Dawson Odums** as the Spartans' new football coach.

A native of Shelby, North Carolina, Odums comes to Hampton Roads with a championship coaching pedigree and track record of developing student-athletes both on and off the field during his collegiate coaching career, which spans more than 20 years. Most recently, Odums enjoyed a stellar 10-year run in the **Southwestern Athletic Conference** at **Southern University** in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. He was introduced via a Zoom press conference Wednesday.

ODUMS: On Zoom call.

"I am so excited to welcome Coach Odums and his family to Norfolk State University," Webb said. "With his unprecedented success on the field and his ability to successfully build a program athletically and academically, I look forward to having him at the helm of NSU football."

"I am grateful and excited to be the next head football coach at Norfolk State University," Odums said. "I would like to say thank you to (President) **Dr. Adams-Gaston**, Ms. Melody Webb and the Board of Visitors for the opportunity to build the Spartan Nation football program. Together we will rise! Go Spartans!"

Odums directed Southern to a winning record in each of his eight full seasons at the helm of the program, including a 5-1 mark this spring. In his last five seasons, the Jaguars posted a 29-6 SWAC record. His overall record with the Jaguars was 63-35.

According to footbalscoop.com, Odums is expected to receive a six-year deal that will pay him \$225,000 per year at Norfolk State. Odums was given a one-year extension by Southern in January to run his contract with the school through 2022, but that deal did not include a raise. Odums was making \$210,000 per year at Southern.

Odums takes over at NSU from **Latrell Scott**, who stepped down in March to take an assistant's position at East Carolina. In five seasons under Scott, the Spartans were 21-35. They did not play in the fall or this spring because of the pandemic.

After joining the Jaguars as defensive line coach in 2011, Odums was elevated to interim head coach two games into the 2012 season before earning the permanent head coach position following the year. On the field, Odums led Southern to a 53-17 SWAC mark over the last nine seasons. His ledger includes one SWAC championship (2013), one SWAC Coach of the Year honor (2013) and four SWAC West Division titles (2013, '14,

'18, '19).

Odums' other coaching stints include a pair of stops in the MEAC, at **North Carolina A&T** (defensive line coach/special teams coordinator, 2008-09; defensive coordinator, 2010) and **Bethune-Cookman** (defensive line coach, 2005-07). He has also coached at Division II **Clark Atlanta** (assistant head coach/defensive coordinator, 2002-03; interim head coach, 2004). Odums played collegiately at **North Carolina Central** on the defensive line and was a team captain and All-CIAA selection as a senior. He earned his bachelor's degree in physical education in 1997.

Odums and his wife, Audrey, have two daughters, Jasmine and Jaiden.

HBCU players to watch for in NFL Draft

The number of HBCU draft prospects is slim but there are some intriguing possibilities for HBCU players in the NFL Draft which begins Thursday (1st round) and continues Friday (2nd thru 5th rounds) and culminates on Saturday (6th and 7th rounds).

Grambling offensive lineman **David Moore**, **North Carolina Central** defensive back **Bryan Mills** and **North Carolina A&T** defensive back **Mac McCain** are the most likely HBCU players to hear their names called over the three days.

The draft is being held in Cleveland and will be carried on ESPN, the NFL Network and ABC.

Below are profiles of the top prospects:

– **David Moore**, 6-1, 320, OL, **GRAMBLING STATE** - Perhaps the gem of this year's HBCU draft class, Moore is projected as a guard or perhaps a center with brute strength, explosiveness and athleticism. He captured attention of scouts and reportedly moved up the draft boards with a strong showing at the Senior Bowl where he easily handled some of the best defensive linemen in the nation and won the Offensive Lineman of the Week award, voted on by the DLs. Rated amongst the top ten at his position. PROJECTION: Middle rounds (3rd or 4th).

– **Bryan Mills**, 6-1, 175, DB, **North Carolina Central** - Lengthy corner whose size, toughness and confidence showed during workouts and play at the Senior Bowl. Also displayed ranginess and good ball skills. Considered a raw athletic talent not afraid in press coverage who won't back down from competition. Led MEAC with five interceptions in 2019. Rated among the top 20 corners in the draft. PROJECTION: Late rounds (5th thru 7th).

– **Franklin "Mac" McCain**, 6-0, 186, DB, **North Carolina A&T** - Grandson of legendary Greensboro Four member (Franklin McCain), McCain excelled as a cover corner, intercepting eight passes and returning four for TDs during his collegiate career. Ran a best of 4.41 at his Pro Day with 13 reps on the bench and 35.5-inch vertical. Praised for his instincts, patience and ability to break on the ball. Rated just outside top 20 at cornerback. PROJECTION: Late rounds (5th thru 7th round).

LATE ROUNDS OR FREE AGENTS: **Donnie Corley**, WR, **Texas Southern**; **Qwenterio Cole**, S, **Alcorn State**;

