## TEAM PROFILE

## Va. Union to the rest of the CIAA: 'I'm back'

By FREDDIE WILLIAMS Special To The Review

IN THAT new pool-room movie, "The Color of Money," an aging hustler played by Paul Newman unexpectedly regains his long-lost touch with his cue stick.

With eyes sparkling, he triumphantly proclaims, "I'm back!"

Virginia Union University football fans are feeling that same exhilaration

After a couple years of being relegated to the shadows, the traditionrich Panthers have returned to the spotlight of the CIAA Northern Division, and to the NCAA Division II

"We're on a serious mission," said. senior linebacker Mendell Wilkerson. "This year we think we can win all of

A 56-24 victory over Norfolk State at Foreman Field Oct. 25 gave the Panthers an 8-0 record -- their best start since the glory days of the late '70s and

In those eight games, Union has outscored its foes 245 to 57, and outgained them on offense 2,750 yards to 1,131.

Third-year Coach Joe Taylor, who succeeded the ultra-successful Willard Bailey in 1984, has declined to take the bows for the banner season, which has earned the Richmond school a No. 9 ranking in Division II.

"If you've got the personnel, you win; if you don't have it, you lose. That's football," he said.

"The coaches can stay up all night planning things, but if they don't have the players to take those Xs and Os from the blackboard to the playing field, then all the coaching in the world won't get it done."

Taylor, a native of Washington, was the subject of some ridicule his first two seasons at VUU. Panther fans, spoiled by Bailey's overachieving, weren't satisfied with 5-3-2 and 6-4

Making matters worse was the fact that Union lost both in '84 (6-0) and '85 (16-0) to Bailey, who moved to Tidewater to coach his alma mater at Norfolk State.

"There was no Bailey jinx," said Taylor. "Like I've said, the coach with the best players almost always wins."

The 56-24 loss to Union was the worst of Bailey's career. The Panthers dominated his Spartans in every phase of the game.

"We played bad offense and bad defense," said Bailey. "Even the guys on the bench were sitting wrong."

Taylor was an assistant under Bailey



Above, Union quarterback Kenneth Jones, shown here during his Howard days, came south to Richmond with Coach Taylor. Below, Willard Bailey, who finally lost to his old team (photos by Joe Daniels).



at Union for two years before taking the head job at Howard in 1983.

His luck in Washington was all sour. His Bison went 1-9, and he was relieved of his duties after just one season.

Still, he'd left a favorable impression in Richmond and, when Bailey announced his decision to leave, Taylor was the early odds-on favorite for the

"Coach Bailey and I talk on the most offenses use two men, at least, to

phone all the time," said Taylor. "Union-Norfolk is a big rivalry, and always will be a big game for our players and fans. But Coach Bailey and disrupt their blocking scheme and I are good friends."

Much of Union's credit this season goes to a defense that leads Division II in both least yards and points allowed.

Coordinating the unit is former Union all-CIAA lineman Richard Macon. Handling the secondary is Anthony Leonard, a Union Little all-America in 1976 who went on to play three seasons in the NFL with San Francisco and Detroit.

Anchoring the Union line is perhaps the most massive man in all of football, senior nose guard Paul Jones from rural Dinwiddie County.

Union's training room scales, which reach 350 pounds, go "tilt" whenever Jones tries to get aboard them. The only place he can get weighed is on the meat scales at a local meat-packing plant (Richfood), where he holds a summer job.

"Paul weighed in at 382 in August, said Macon. "That's too much. If he could get down to about 330, I think he'd be a heckuva NFL prospect."

Jones lacks great mobility. But he's the strongest man on the team, and

"I don't make many tackles," said Jones. "But that's not my role. If I can cause confusion in there, then I've done my job."

Jones, who does some disc-jockey work on the side, is the most recognizable man on the Union campus. You can't miss him in his 1955 canary-yellow Chevy, which he has completely rebuilt, inside and out,

"I call it my baby," said the easygoing, gentle giant. "It makes you feel good to say you built a car, rather than just bought it."

Wilkerson, who also hails from Dinwiddie County (40 miles south of Richmond), has great bloodlines. His brother, Gary, is a starting defensive back at Penn State. And his cousin, Curtis, is the shortstop for the Texas

The other outside linebacker in the Panthers' 3-4 alignment is junior Leroy Gause, from Wilmington, N.C. Leroy was recommended to Union by his mailman back home.

"My mailman was a relative of Richard McFee (former Union coach)," said Gause. "That's how it

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