MEAC

Howard has the 'right stuff' to repeat

This year's race for the MEAC crown is felt to be a three team race involving defending champion Howard, Florida A &M, and Delaware State. South Carolina State, though, could play the role of the spoiler and become the Cinderella of the group.

One might be led to believe that with the departure of Harvey Reed, the running machine, **Howard University** may not be as formidable in '88 as they were last season when the Bison stampeded to a 9-1 mark.

Reed was one of the nation's premier ball carriers last year, leading Division I-AA by averaging 151.2 yards per contest. Howard topped the nation in team rushing offense (381.6 yards a game) and rushing TDs (4.5 a game).

But when you look at what Head Coach Willie Jefferies has in his current herd, you quickly discover that his team has all the ingredients to win a second straight MEAC title.

For starters, senior quarterback Lee DeBose returns. The ultra-quick DeBose led the conference in passing efficiency and threw for 890 yards and 10 TDs. He also rushed for 346 yards and 3 TDs. The Sheridan All-American and all-conference choice is a three year starter and his team has won 20 of the 26 games in which he started.

DeBose has some seasoned targets to play pitch and catch with. Tight end Jimmy Johnson, 6-3, 240 comes back for a final year. He joined DeBose on the Sheridan team. Derrick Faison is projected to fully blossom in '88. The 6-3, 215 wide receiver caught only 11 passes last year, but five were for scores. Fourteen of the junior's 29 career receptions have resulted in touchdowns. He has also averaged 26 yards a catch while at Howard.

With Reed gone, the running duties will be assumed by Fred Killings, a 5-9, 180, junior. Killings had six TDs in '87 and is noted for his ability to get the tough yards between the tackles. There is, however, an opening in the backfield. Ronnie Epps, a valuable blocker for Reed will need to be replaced.

Nevertheless, the Bison still have an awesome offensive front led by a pair of all-conference performers in senior guard Pat Boyd (6-0, 300) and junior center Dwight Brunson (6-0, 260).

Defensively, James Moore (6-1, 300) and David Westbrook (6-4, 230) will anchor the line, while James Garland (6-2, 215) and Marty Graves (6-1, 230) bring stability to the linebacking corps.

A feisty secondary is raring to take things to the stage with All-American candidate Thomas Jones leading the charge. The strong safety was the team's second leading tackler last season (70). He'll get plenty of help from free safety Robert Hancock. Cornerback Willie Johnson makes it his business to get his hands on the football. He enters the campaign with 10 career interceptions.

As if that isn't enough, opponents will find out that the Bison are still fuming over the NCAA ignoring them as a 1-AA playoff selection. In addition, the players will want get Jefferies his 100th career victory as a college coach. His 15-year record is 94-64-6.

Florida A & M had to scuffle all the way until the end of the year to finish a respectable 5-5-1.They relied on a sturdy defense to pull them through the last three games to avoid a dismal season for themselves and Head Coach Ken Riley.

They should be primed in '88. This is the first year they are eligible to compete for a conference championship since rejoining the MEAC. They will also be looking to produce the school's first winning season since 1983.

The Rattlers' major asset is stopping opposing offenses with vicious hitting and a solid kicking game.

In '87, the defense finished among the top 10 in Division I-AA in three defensive categories, which included allowing a meager 14.5 points a game. During the season, they proved to be almost irrepressible, holding opponents scoreless in the second half in six games.

They return nine starters on that unit and are led by "Grand Master of Sack" Bryan Brewer, 6-3, 230. Brewer walked away with a hefty share of post-season accolades, including the Sheridan All-America team and second team All-America on the Associated Press squad. The junior is rough on QBs and his 22 1/2 sacks over the past two seasons illustrate.

Along with Brewer, Herbert Moore (6-3, 265) and Terrance Lundy (6-3, 270) keep the heat on offensive linemen in FAMU's 3-4 alignment.

The linebacker posts are solid with three experienced folk returning. Lamar Glover and Eddie Metcalf combined for 158 tackles and Dwayne Butler adds savvy to that bunch. The secondary is loaded with a pair of cornerbacks (William Evers and Lowell Crawford) who have been in the starting lineup since they were freshmen. The safeties are murderous against the run and equally effective vs. the air game. Last season, strong safety Kenneth Johnson was in on 77 hits and free safety Matthew Fair had 78 tackles. Both had five interceptions apiece and are said to be rated highly among collegiate defensive backs.

A major factor in the Rattler's defensive scheme is their kicking game. All-conference punter Vaughn Wilson was also named honorable mention on AP's All-America team. He was ranked sixth among 1-AA kickers in net punting average (38.4 yards a kick). But more importantly, he only had 18 of his 70 punts returned all year, including a four game stretch where none of his punts were returned.

When FAMU wasn't able to punch it in the end zone (which was very often last season), Jimmy Vertuno came through, making good on seven of nine field goal attempts, his longest being a 43-yarder against South Carolina State.

In order for the Rattlers to come full circle they will have to put some points on the board. As a unit, the offense didn't carry its fair share last year and that was reflected in the final won-loss record. They averaged 14 points a game in '87 and didn't score 20 points in a contest until their ninth game of the year.

The key here is how well senior quarterback Andre Williams will respond to the challenge. An option type, Williams has been an on and off starter. He scored five rushing touchdowns last year to lead all the backs in that category. As a starter, Williams is 7-2-1.

Riley's squad is likely to be more conservative on offense, employing the ball control approach and allowing the defense to keep opponents in bad field position.

Bryan Moore will team with Sean Gilliam to handle the running chores. Troy Allen and Curtis Green are expected to wage a duel for the starting tight end job.

When the Rattlers do throw the football, the main targets are likely to be Moore and fleet wide receiver Howard Huckaby, a top notch kick returner who runs a 10.2 in the 100 meters. Last season, Huckaby returned two kickoffs for TDs and led 1-AA in kickoff return average with 30.1 yards per attempt.

A & M has all five of their offensive linemen back, three of them have played together for the last three seasons. Charles Gordon (6-5, 275), John Jordan (6-0, 275) and Tony Jamison (6-1, 245) are the leaders on the front line. Robert Frost (6-3, 265) and Terry Beauford (6-3, 270) are the other returnees. Riley can't afford to have any one of those five go down with a serious injury. The Rattlers don't have much depth at those positions.

A 12-7 loss in the season finale to Howard dashed all hopes of a conference title for **Delaware State** last year. The Hornets were 7-3 and figured to be a heavy favorite to unseat Howard this time around.

But that was before they lost three key players because of eligibility questions. Gone are defensive ends Robert Presbury (6-2, 252) and Lybrant Robinson (6-5, 220). Both were twice named to the all-conference team. The pair collectively registered 21 1/2 sacks last season. Also missing will be running back John Stone, who was equally valuable as a runner, receiver, and kick return specialist.

On offense, Del State has built its reputation on an earth stomping ground game. They amassed 2,378 team rushing yards last year.

The quarterback picture seems to be in clear focus going into pre-season camp. Baron Felton, 6-1, 185, junior, earned the job late last season. Felton is expected to keep the job and put an end to Head Coach Bill Collick's quarterback platoon system that has been used in recent seasons. Don't be shocked if the Hornets go to the air more than usual this year.

One reason for that is the presence of wide receiver Tim Egerton, who in his freshman year averaged 18.6 yards per catch. He's also a dangerous return man, having scored twice on punt returns. Some are already comparing the sophomore favorably to former Del State star John Taylor, who is now with the San Francisco 49ers.

The brunt of the ground attack is expected to be handled by Reggie Barnes, who last season averaged 7.3 yards a try and scored nine TDs. Barnes will replace Terrance Hoover who rushed for 1,191 yards and was second only to Reed of Howard.

Barnes isn't likely to have problems finding room to roam. The offensive line is in tact and filled with experience. Cordie Greenlea (6-1, 260), Justin Proctor (6-3, 270), Lee Johnson (6-2, 265) and Charles Loney (6-2, 285) have the size and cohesiveness to make things happen at the line of scrimmage.

Defensively, much of the load will fall on junior linebacker Eric Waynewright, 6-0, 215. The Penn State transfer is being touted as an All-America and his numbers are very noticeable -- 62 solo tackles and five interceptions, two of which were TDs. The absence of Presbury and Robinson leaves the defensive line depleted. The only starter returning is Paul Harris (6-1, 250).

Marvin Bright and Mark Ware will provide leadership in the secondary, but Collick and his staff must find suitable replacements if the Hornets are to remain miserly on defense. They allowed only 148 points in 10 games (14.8 ppg) in '87.

The consensus in Orangeburg, S.C. is that **South Carolina State** will have a lot to do with how the conference race turns out. Head Coach Bill Hamilton's crew

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SIAC

Buckle up for a guaranteed alley fight

The conference is more balanced than it has been in recent years. 'Skegee and A & M didn't run away with the conference. Albany State finished third last year with an 8-3 record. All three squads had good enough records to make the post-season playoffs, but the playoff selection committee apparently felt otherwise.

In other notes, the conference has two new members moving into the Division II ranks from Division III -- Knoxville and College and Miles College.

At presstime, **Tuskegee** coach James Martin was uneasy about his situation. Some key people may not be back because of academic difficulties. Cedric Jefferson, the do-everything, all-purpose back is out because of academic problems, and there could be others, depending on how they fared in summer school.

Nevertheless, the Golden Tigers still have a lot of bite in their defense, which was Division II's stingiest. They held opponents to an average of less than an TD and field goal per game (9.1 points).

Pat McCall (eight sacks) should be in fine form to terrorize passer from his defensive end slot and Darryl Lee is exceptional in roadblocking the middle at nose guard. Linebacker Clarence Williams lives to bury ballcarriers and sophomore James Jacobs is being counted on to be another force in the Tigers linebackers' brigade.

The safeties are solid in the secondary. Jefferey March led the team in hits (105) and Gary Steward picked off seven passes to rank seventh nationally in that category.

Whether TU can reach their '87 level depends on how they are able to compensate for the loss of quarterback Tony Carroll. Carroll was a four-year starter who passed for 4,683 yards and 35 TDs in 33 games. With Carroll wheeling and dealing, TU reached the No. 5 spot nationally before Carroll was injured against Hampton.

Carlos Williams will probably get the starting call from Martin. In '87, Williams saw considerable action in the last four games of the season after Carroll was injured. He hit on 25 of 59 attempts for 423 yards and four scores.

Williams' status as the starter isn't necessarily 100 percent firm. Sophomore Maurice Heard, a Southern Mississippi transfer who is now eligible is well suited for the passing game. As a high school senior in '85, he passed for 1,900 yards and 17 TDs.

With Jefferson unavailable for duty, the running chores will be assigned to Rosselle Daniels, Leroy Berry and Mason Wilson.

Madison Johnson (6-1, 246) and Frankline Tarrance (6-2, 310) will be the leaders on the offensive line.

Alabama A & M lost 13 lettermen, including four All-Americans, but the Bulldogs have a habit of always being able to come through with new talent to take up the slack.

Head Coach Ray Greene isn't sure who his quarterback will be. Leonard Johnson, last year's starter decided that college life was not his cup of tea and won't be returning. Johnson led all A & M rushers in '87 with 657 yards and he scored seven times. Terrence Brown is the only experienced QB left.

In the backfield, Mark Smith comes back as the prime runner, along with Rodney Baxter and Ryan Darden. All-SIAC center Dino Wynn (6-0, 235) is the ring leader of the offensive line.

If the Bulldogs can crank up an aerial attack, they have Barry Wagner and Scottie Moore available. Wagner caught six TDs in '87.

A & M's strong suit, as usual, is stopping people. Free safety Fred Garner had five interceptions and earned All-America and All-SIAC honors last year. Terry Smith adds game experience from his cornerback position. He had 62 tackles and broke up 12 passes in '87. Harvey Clayton, Roger Durr, and Vincent Coleman are expected to make major contributions to the defensive backfield.

Andre Haley (5-9, 220) heads the linebacking troops. Slowed by nagging injuries last season, he still finished in a second place tie for most tackles on the team with 78. Darrell Keith and Bernard Flanagan should see a lot of action at the other inside linebacking posts. Wade Broxie and Jimmy Perkins are likely to inherit berths as the outside LBs.

The defensive line is viewed as a major plus with Carl Dawson (6-5, 240), Barry Wimberly (6-3, 245) and Bobby Montague (6-1, 260) holding down the fort.

Last season was not typical for the usually tough **Fort Valley State** team. They were 5-2 in conference play, but 5-5 overall. Their famed "Blue Death" defense was not up to par, mainly because of players graduating and experienced returnees suffering injuries.

However, those same youngsters, are now battle-tested and a year wiser. Coach Doug Porter can look forward to his defensive unit taking on their usual miserly personality once more.

Defensive end Thomas Ragin (6-3, 240) is the most seasoned of the group, while Jackie Cannon is fierce at linebacker (115 tackles in '87). Bobby Maddox (6-3, 230) is another tough LB in the "Blue Death" mold.

Strong safety John Lipkin is effective against the pass and run (70 tackles, 12 passes broken up) and Kevin Williams harasses receivers and ballcarriers alike (66 hits, four interceptions).

On offense, sophomore Larry Baker will start at quarterback. Baker, a drop back passer, won the job during spring drills . He'll have an experienced bunch to throw to, including wide-outs Rodney Parker, Allen Prince, and tight end Larry Goodman.

Zack Reynolds will also be another reliable pair of hands of the Wildcats' passer coming out of the backfield. Reynolds, at 6-2, 212, is very comfortable as both runner and receiver. Darren Lowe (5-10, 190), rushed for 561 yards last year. He will often be teamed with Reynolds in the game at the same time as part of Valley State's split-T formation.

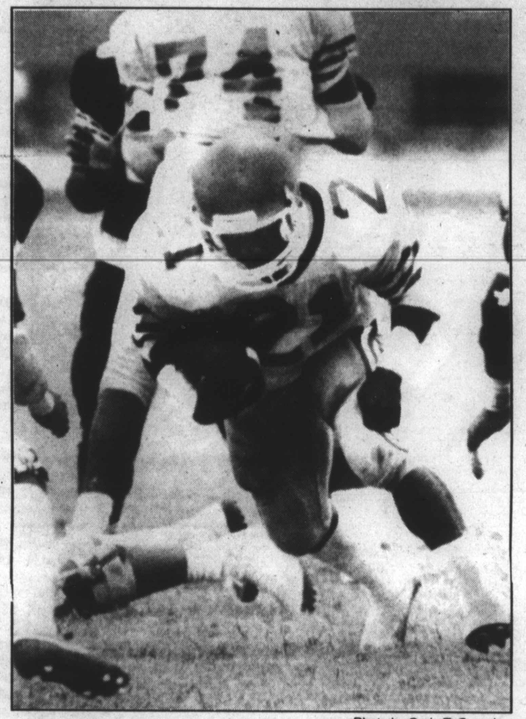

Photo by Craig T. Greenlee

Albany State running back Troy Young has the quick feet to get outside and is sturdy enough to get the tough inside yards.

Georgia Tech transfer Carlisle Davis (6-2, 245) should make a big difference in the Wildcat's offensive line this season. If sophomore Darren Tigner (6-0, 265) has recuperated from knee surgery, Ft. Valley's offense should be that much better off.

You could say that **Albany State** got lost in the '87 SIAC rush. Even though they finished third, they were still awfully good. And with 19 starters coming back, there's no reason to believe they won't be better this time.

The Rams have the people to win, as long as injuries don't take those people away. They aren't very deep, so they must avoid injuries in order to make it to the top of the conference heap.

Very few knowledgeable SIAC observers won't be surprised if coach Hampton Smith's crew doesn't walk off with the '88 conference trophy.

They have a talented and game-tested quarterback in Stanley Williams. Williams was overlooked last year because of Tuskegee's Carroll. But in the meantime, he had rolled up some very impressive numbers of his own -- 1,917 passing yards and 12 TDs.

Wide receiver James Rich (37 catches, 557 yards, 4 TDs) played his final year in '87, so the receiving burden falls into the lap of Hezikiah Bartley, a nimble moving return man who has good hands.

Donald Parham (6-1, 200) will help keep opposing defenses from keying on Williams' passing. The junior gained 527 yards last year and scored eight times. Troy Young is an agile runner

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