FOOTBALL UPDATE

# Albany State can win it if they hold steady

Albany State must avoid complacency in order to capture another conference football title. With two games left to play, the 7-1, 5-0 Rams held a one game lead over second place Alabama A & M, 5-3, 3-1.

In order for A & M to have a chance at the crown, Albany has to lose both of their remaining games and the Bulldogs have to win both of theirs. If both teams finish with identical records, the edge goes to Albany, because they beat A & M earlier this season, 3-2.

What had been a three-team conference race turned into a two-team affair after the seventh week of the season. Morris Brown dropped out of the running when it was discovered that starting quarterback Alij Tapp was ineligible because he broke the SIAC and NCAA transfer regulation (see Roscoe's Notes & Quotes, page 5).

As a result, the Wolverines had to forfeit all games. Their 5-1, 5-0 record immediately changed to 1-5, 0-5. With two games remaining, MBC was 1-7, 0-6.

Winning the title won't be easy for coach Hampton Smith's Rams. Their remaining games are against state rivals -- on the road vs. MBC and at home against Savannah State. Going into November, ASC was ranked 14th in the Division II polls.

SIAC

Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Conference

The Bulldogs, on the other hand, shouldn't have as much trouble out of Clark-Atlanta University (1-6, 1-4) or Tuskegee (3-4, 3-3).

During the second half of the season, Albany has been bullish on the opposition, losing only to Division I-AA Alabama State 16-10. They started out by coming from behind to beat Fort Valley State 28-14. Albany quarterback Stanley Williams threw two TD passes late in the contest to pull it out for the Rams. The following week they lost to Alabama State, then routed Clark-Atlanta U, 56-0 and dumped Georgia Southwestern, 41-0.

ASC has apparently discovered how to employ a solid mix of running and passing. The Rams had over 2,500 total offensive yards -- 1,000 throwing and nearly 1,500 rushing.

Running backs Donald Parham and Troy Young continue to grind out the yards on the ground. Between them, they have scored 10 TDs this season and both average four yards or more per rushing attempt.

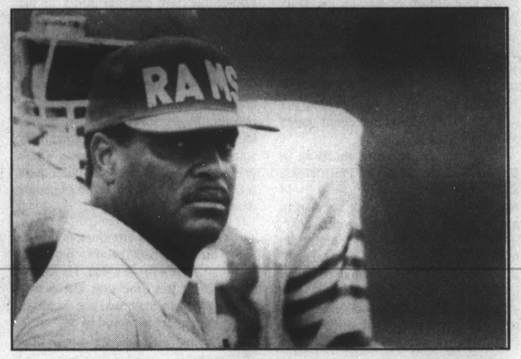


Photo by The Magnificent Eye

**Albany State head coach Hampton Smith has his team primed to reign supreme over their SIAC counterparts.**

In the passing department, Williams is playing heady and steady. He's thrown for 1,046 yards and five TDs, completing 50 percent of his tosses. In 140 passing attempts, he's been intercepted only four times.

The Rams had the third ranked defense in the SIAC and they have been extremely difficult to run against -- yielding less than three yards per rushing attempt. Linebacker Michael Pullins is the headhunter on that unit with 86 tackles. In the ASC win over Fort Valley, Pullins was in on 11 tackles and he recovered a fumble that halted a Wildcats scoring drive.

Alabama A & M had a three game winning streak intact until their 7-0 loss to Alabama State in the Magic City Classic. During the win streak they defeated Fort Valley State 14-3 and downed Morris Brown 17-3. Against Fort Valley, wide receiver Barry Wagner had five receptions for 94 yards and also made a TD-saving tackle on a Wildcat interception.

As usual, the Bulldogs get positive things out of their running game. Rodney Baxter has scored only one TD, but he was averaging 4.7 yards per carry. Mark Smith, on the other hand, has a lower average, but is among the league's leading scorers with six touchdowns, putting him a five-way tie for most TDs scored.

Special teams play has been effective. William Garth was ranked third in the punting stats, averaging 40.3 yards per kick, while kickoff return men Cornelius Cooper and James Baker average 25.2 and 18.2 yards per kickoff return respectively.

A & M has maintained a very stingy attitude defensively. In eight games, they've allowed just 1,366 total yards for an average of 170.8 per game. Against the rush, opponents have found their attempts to be futile. The Dogs have limited rushing attacks to a mere 2.2 yards per carry.

Fort Valley State (3-5, 3-3) broke a three-game losing streak with their 21-14 victory over Tuskegee. They can finish at the .500 mark if they beat Savannah State and Kentucky State.

Running back Curtis Bell is the conference's No. 2 ranked rusher and is third in all- purpose yards (120 per game). Terry Hollingshed is a defensive leader with 73 tackles.

It's been a tough year for Tuskegee, the team that conference coaches picked to be this year's champions. The Golden Tigers have taken it on the chin from the start. After nudging Morehouse 9-8, they took a 37-17 whipping from Hampton and dropped a decision to Fort Valley State. Quarterback Maurice Heard has thrown for over 1,000 yards and six TDs, but he's been intercepted 11 times.

Defensively, Darryl Lee, James Jacobs, and Jefferey March collectively have nearly 250 tackles this season.

Winning has eluded the Morehouse Maroon Tigers for the greater part of the season (3-6, 2-3). The one win they got in October was the forfeit via Morris Brown. The last time Morehouse won a game on the field was in late September when they triumphed over Lane College 39-19.

Morehouse just may have the league's most versatile running back in Eddie Burt. In combined yardage, his total is 1,030 -- 823 rushing, 207 receiving. Incidentally, he's ranked third in conference pass receiving (30 catches).

Nevertheless, moving the football and scoring points doesn't do much good if your defense is porous. The Maroon Tigers have the most generous defense in the league -- especially against the run. Opponents average almost five yards a carry when they run the football. In total, the Morehouse's defense has given up 3,194 total offensive yards.

For all practical purposes, Morris Brown's season ended when Tapp got trapped. All the Wolverines can look forward to now is to be the spoiler when they play Albany in early November. They may also want to spring a few surprises in their season-ending contest vs. Bethune-Cookman.

The defense continues to pressure, however. Defensive end Tony Robinson leads the SIAC in hits and sacks (107 and 12 respectively), while linebackers Allen Freeman and Anthony Campbell aren't far off of his pace. Freeman also tops all league punters with a 43.7 yards per kick average.

Wide-out Lionel Camel has risen to the top of the heap in the pass catching department. After eight games, he's the league leader with 46 receptions for 736 yards.

Savannah State has no pressure on them to win this year. They're on probation and aren't eligible for a league championship. But they aren't playing like it. The Tigers were 6-2, 4-1 as the season started coming to a close. They went on a blitz in October, beating teams as if they had committed the unpardonable sin. For example: they went easy on Johnson C. Smith, 30-6. They partied on Clark-Atlanta University, 54-18, and they conducted an "official" scrimmage against Morehouse, 70-13.

They can have the satisfaction of ending the year at 8-2, 6-1 by beating Fort Valley State and Albany State.

Knoxville College is having the best year among the schools who moved from Division III to Division II. Coach Lonzo Bullie's Bulldogs were 4-2-1 and because this is the school's first year in a new division, they aren't eligible to compete for a league title.

Still, Knoxville had won four straight, victimizing Clark-Atlanta University, Tennessee Wesleyan, Miles College, and Lane College. George Stevens leads the league in rushing (110.5 yards per game average) and all-purpose yards (129 yards per game).

The high-powered Knoxville offense has put up some impressive numbers this season. They have gained 2,296 total yards in seven games-- 328 yards per game. In addition, their rushing attack generates a whopping 5.9 yards per attempt.

The Miles Bears are beginning to get some respect at 2-4-1 and Lane is looking for better days (2-6). Clark-Atlanta University (1-6, 1-4) is hoping they can get this season over quickly and hit the recruiting trail.

**-Lawrence Curry**





FOOTBALL UPDATE

# Jackson State maintains conference dominance

Jackson State has moved closer to clinching another SWAC championship with their 24-17 victory over Grambling. In the process, running back Lewis Tillman broke Walter Payton's JSU career rushing record that has stood for 14 years (see Roscoe's Notes & Quotes, page 5).

SWAC

Southwestern Athletic Conference

Tillman rushed for a career single game best of 224 yards as the Tigers erased a 17-14 third quarter Grambling lead by scoring 10 points in the final quarter. The Heisman Trophy candidate was leading the conference in points scored (60), rushing (1,044 yards - 6.1 yards per carry), and all-purpose yards (1,098).

Jackson (5-0-2, 5-0) continued their conference winning streak that dates back to 1985. They figure to extend their SWAC winning methods for the rest of the season. Texas Southern and Alcorn State comprised the remainder of their conference slate.

Sophomore Shawn Gregory has come on strong at quarterback for the Tigers. He's thrown seven TDs in seven games and is the league's second-ranked passer. His presence has prevented defenses from totally gearing themselves to stop Tillman on the ground.

Coach W.C. Gorden's team is likely to win the SWAC again because of their balance on both sides of the ball. Offensively, they had amassed 2,602 total yards. Defensively, they've given up a little over 200 yards per game (117 rushing, 104 passing).

With the loss to Jackson State, Grambling's only opportunity for the crown is for JSU to lose their remaining conference games. Grambling (6-2, 4-1), in turn, would have to win against Alabama State and Southern.

GSU hasn't been as effective on defense as coach Eddie Robinson would like. But they have been able to put together some serious offense this season. Quarterback Clemente Gordon is the top performer in passing and total yards. He's thrown 14 scoring passes for 1,387 yards, primarily to a trio of receivers who are all ranked in the league statistics. Fred Jones, Franklin Thomas and Richie Crosby are Grambling's version of "The Three Amigos." Collectively they have 63 receptions for 1,121 yards and a dozen touchdowns.

Grambling doesn't have a 100 yards per game runner. But they do have Bryan Tobey and Walter Dean. Together, they average around 111 yards a game. Tobey has scored four TDs and averages 5.5 yards per carry. Dean gets the tough yards inside and carries a hefty rushing average of seven yards per attempt.

Alabama State had the opportunity to knock Grambling out of contention for the SWAC title in their early November confrontation. The Hornets (5-2, 3-2) wanted to prove that last year's 17-7 upset win over the Tigers was no accident. Going into the Grambling game, they were enjoying a three game winning streak.

Running back Brad Baxter was starting to get himself back on track after gaining only 98 yards in State's first two games of this season. Since then, he's gained 564 yards in five games. In SWAC stats, he's second in rushing and scoring (seven TDs) behind Tillman.

Linebacker Lymos McDonald was the top hitman in the conference with 108 tackles, while defensive back Garry Browe was tied for the conference lead in interceptions (Browe and Southern's Harvey Wilson have six pick-offs apiece). Those two were leading a Hornets defense that ranked third among the league's defensive units.

Mark Hurt headed the list of punt return specialists, averaging 18. 5 yards per return. Hurt was also averaging 25.1 yards in kickoff returns, the second-best yards per return average in the conference.

Southern was in the midst of a down year at 3-5, 3-3. After beating Mississippi Valley State 45-7 in their first game in October, the Jaguars dropped four straight. Before losing their Homecoming game to Florida A & M, 45-20, SU managed to score only 10 points in three games against Nicholls State, Jackson and Alcorn.

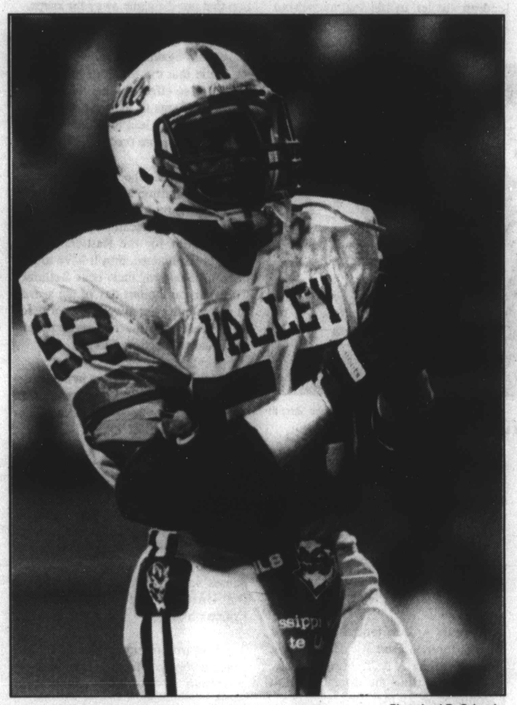


Photo by J.D. Schwalm

**Tony Haggie's handiwork at linebacker is helping Mississippi Valley State's return to respectability.**

The Jags had a chance to break even in the conference and go 6-5 overall, provided they came out as victors against Bethune-Cookman, Texas Southern, and Grambling.

Prairie View could be on the way to their most respectable season in years. The Panthers were 4-4, 3-3 going into November. They gave Grambling a tough battle before succumbing 27-17, and then were whiplashed by Alabama State, 45-7.

However, they got revenge with a 36-7 victory over Mississippi Valley State as quarterback Kevin Phillips threw four TD passes. Wide-out Thomas Moore caught eight passes for 129 yards and two touchdowns.

With only Alcorn State and Langston University left on their schedule, it's very possible that Prairie View could have a winning a season. At the worst they should finish at the .500 mark.

Alcorn State has the role of spoiler at this point of the season. The Braves (4-3, 2-2) could make things tight for Jackson State when the two teams meet on Nov. 19. Alcorn had the league's toughest defense going into the season's final stages. They were holding opposing offenses to 84 yards rushing and 131 yards passing per contest.

The Braves captured victories over Middle Tennessee (21-19) and Texas Southern (28-7) before being stomped by Lamar Tech, 35-6. However, they rebounded by upsetting Southern, 27-7.

Alcorn spotted the Jaguars a 7-3 first half lead then erupted for 24 points in the second half to blow the game open. Running back Maurice James and quarterback Gerry Butler ran at will -- James had 150 yards and Butler totaled 117.

Coach Ken Pettiford's Delta Devils at Mississippi Valley State are doing much better than they were last season when they finished at 1-9. The Devils (3-6, 1-4) hit a tough skid last month, dropping four of five games after splitting four games in September.

MVSU's lone October win came against Texas Southern, 24-15. Ronald Humphrey paced the attack, rushing for 127 yards as the Devils scored three TDs in the second half. The win was the school's first SWAC triumph since 1986.

The good part about the '88 season for Texas Southern is that it ends early. They were 0-9, 0-6 with one game left to play. Playing Jackson State on the road almost assures that a TSU gridiron victory will have to wait until sometime during the 1989 season.

**-Shawn Connors**