



GRAMBLING **BACK ON** TOP

WE'RE NO. 1: Amidst the confetti, subdued Grambling State head coach Broderick Fobbs raises the index finger.

GRAMBLING STATE PREVAILS IN HARDFOUGHT CELEBRATION BOWL, 10-9 OVER NC CENTRAL

CELEBRATION BOWL RECAP



Phil Ellsworth, ESPN Images

BREAKIN' AWAY: Grambling State's Martez Carter (#4) breaks away from North Carolina Central's Jaquell Tayor (#27) enroute to his 201 all-purpose yards that earned game MVP honors.

Grambling State 10, North Carolina Central 9

ATLANTA - It's quite ironic that the 2nd annual Air Force Reserve Celebration Bowl Saturday in Atlanta to determine the 2016 black college football national champion would come down to a celebration

But that's exactly what made the difference in a dramatic 10-9 victory for SWAC champion Grambling State over MEAC champion North Carolina Central in a hardfought game Saturday at the Georgia Dome pitting the No. 1 and No. 2 teams in HBCU football.

NCCU (9-3), who shut out the high-scoring Grambling offense in the first half and led 3-0 at the break, was trailing 10-3 late in the fourth quarter when quarterback Malcolm Bell rolled left and lofted a 39-yard strike to senior wideout Quentin Atkinson in the back of the end zone to pull the Eagles within 10-9 with just 2:14 to play.

In the ensuing celebration however, Atkinson removed his helmet and was flagged 15 yards for unsportsmanlike conduct. Grambling head coach Broderick Fobbs chose to have the penalty assessed on the point-after, forcing NCCU placekicker Brandon McLaren to try his attempt from the 34-yard line. Grambling's Joseph McWilliams got garound the right side of the Eagles line and stuffed the attempt leaving= Grambling with the one-point advantage.

NCCU recovered an onside kick following the PAT but was called offsides on the play. A second onside attempt was recovered by Grambling's Chad Williams with 2:12 left. After NCCU burned its final timeout, Grambling faced a 3rd-and-12 from the Eagles' 44, but quarterback Devante Kincade hit Verlan Hunter in the left flat and he ran by two defenders for the first down. Grambling was able to kneel down to run out the clock.

The win gives Grambling the 2016 black college national title, just three years after back-to-back one-win seasons had the most storied program in black college football in the doldrums. Fobbs has en-, gineered the turnaround getting the G-Men back to the pinnacle in just < his third year on the job What many thought would be a high-scoring game pitting the two champions turned into a defensive struggle with neither team able throw offensive haymakers. The closest thing to splash plays came from exciting Grambling running back/kick returner Martez Carter, who had runs of 35 and 32 yards and 69 yards in returns. He finished the day with 109 rushing yards on 12 carries and 201 all-purpose yards to earn the game's offensive MVP award. Grambling (11-1), who came in averaging 500 yards and 44 points per game, was held to 345 yards and just one touchdown by the game NCCU defense. But that touchdown proved critical as it came on the Tigers' first possession of the second half and gave them their first score and lead of the game After stopping the Eagles on a 3-and-out to start the third quarter, Grambling rode power back Jestin Kelly's running to begin an 8-play, 70-yard drive that was capped by a weaving 32-yard scoring scamper from the elusive Carter. Jonathan Wallace's PAT put Grambling up 7-3 with 9:14 left in the quarter. Two NCCU possessions later, Grambling got the ball back when linebacker Arkez Cooper got a strip sack of Bell at the Eagles' 25. The NCCU defense kept Grambling out of the end zone but Wallace was good on a 26-yard field goal to give the Tigers a 10-3 lead with 2:50 left in the third quarter. Grambling had another chance to pad its lead after Carter returned a fourth-quarter punt 30 yards to the NCCU 11. But on 4th-and-goal at the NCCU 2, Fobbs eschewed a chip shot field goal choosing to run Kelly up the gut for a touchdown. Kelly was stuffed by the Eagles' line turning the ball over on downs.

BCSP FINAL FOOTBALL TOP TEN

1. GRAMBLING STATE (11-1) - SWAC and Celebration Bowl championships get head coach Broderick Fobbs (r.) and the G-Men the 2016 national title and top spot in the final BCSP rankings. After season-opening 31-21 loss to FBS Pac-12 member Arizona, Grambling ran off 11 straight wins going 10-0 in the SWAC, beating Alcorn State for a second time for the SWAC title and knocking off MEAC champion North Carolina Central (10-9) in the Celebration Bowl.

2. NORTH CAROLINA CENTRAL (9-3) - NCCU

ran off nine straight wins between opening season losses to FBS opponents Duke (49-6) and Western Michigan (70-21) and season-ending Celebration Bowl loss to Grambling (10-9). Jerry Mack's squad ran the table in the MEAC (8-0) including third straight win over rival NC A&T in season-ending showdown game for the league title.

3. NORTH CAROLINA A&T (9-3) - Fell to rival NC Central (42-21) in last game of regular season to cede MEAC title to the Eagles. Finished 7-1 in league play. Had big 39-36 win in 4OTs vs. FBS member Kent State in regular season. Also lost at Tulsa (58-21) and to Richmond in first round of FCS playoffs (39-10).

4. SOUTHERN (8-3) - Lost to Grambling in Bayou Classic to finish 8-1 in the SWAC and in second place in SWAC West. Had eight-game win streak before season-ending loss to Grambling. Opened season with losses to Louisiana-Monroe (38-21) and Tulane (66-21).

5. PRAIRIE VIEW A&M (6-4) - Finished 7-2 in SWAC, third in the



FOBBS: Completes three-year journey to the top

West, with only losses to Grambling (36-16) and Southern (44-34). Also lost to FBS Rice (65-44) and Texas A&M (67-0.

6. TENNESSEE STATE (7-4) - Tigers got wins over Arkansas-Pine Bluff, Jackson State and Bethune-Cookman but dropped three OVC games, two by single digits (E. Illiniois 35-34, Murray State 38-31, Tenn Tech 44-16). Also lost to Vanderbilt 35-17.

7. WINSTON-SALEM STATE (9-3) - The Rams and head coach Kienus Boulware ran thru seven CIAA opponents to take South Division title and then knocked off N. Div. champ Bowie State 43-33 to win its second straight CIAA title. WSSU was outscored by LIU-Post 44-41 in first round of Div. II playoffs. Also had early season non-conference losses to UNC-Pembroke (20-17) and Virginia Union (37-14).

8. BOWIE STATE (8-3) - Bulldogs went 6-1 in CIAA play with only a 42-35 loss to Virginia Union to claim North Division title before falling to S. DIv. champ WSSU in league's title game (43-33). Had highscoring early season losses to Seton Hill (50-48) and Central Conn. State (44-35).

9. VIRGINIA STATE (9-2) - In first year under Reggie Barlow, Trojans finished behind Bowie State in CIAA North with 5-2 record with losses to WSSU (35-14) and Bowie State (38-37). Defeated Tuskegee (45-35) in game added to regular season.

10. TUSKEGEE (9-3) - Golden Tigers fell to Kentucky State (10-9) to finish behind the Thorobreds in SIAC West. Also lost to VSU in added game, 45-35. Still earned Div. II playoff berth and beat Newberry (35-33) in first round before falling to North Greenville (45-26) in second round.

Grambling finishes as final No.

LUT WILLIAMS **BCSP** Editor

The road to the final No. 1 ranking in the BLACK COLLEGE SPORTS PAGE TOp Ten was quite a journey for head coach Broderick Fobbs and the Grambling State Tigers.

Coming off a 9-3 2015 season and a runnerup finish to champion Alcorn State in the Southwestern Athletic Conference, Fobbs' G-Men were ranked sixth in the preseason 2016 BCSP Top Ten behind No. 1 North Carolina Central out of the Mid Eastern Athletic Conference and No. 2 Prairie View A&M and No. 4 Alcorn State out of the SWAC

The big question for Grambling was who would succeed quarterback Jonathan Williams, the 2015 SWAC Offensive Player of the Year who threw for over 3,000 yards and 37 touchdowns while earning BCSP first 'Baad Team' status

Well, that question was answered in the form of Ole Miss transfer Devante Kincade.

The junior served notice by leading Grambling to a 21-3 halftime lead over Pac-12 member Arizona to open the season. An injury to his ankle just before halftime is likely the only thing that prevented a huge upset as the Tigers, without Kincade in the second half, fell to the Wildcats 31-21. It would be the only blemish on the Tigers' 11-1 record.

Kincade went on to lead the G-Men to 11 straight victories throwing for over 3,000 yards with 31 TDs and just four interceptions. The offense he directed averaged over 500 yards and 44 points per game and the Tigers were blessed with prolific. They routed SWAC teams by an average and were not able to pull out victories. of 32 points.

close 10-9 win Saturday over MEAC champion North Carolina Central in the Celebration Bowl.

Those 11 wins against just one loss and SWAC and Celebration Bowl titles makes Grambling a clear choice as the 2016 BCSP national champion and final No. 1 team in the BCSP Top Ten

But not by much.

Jerry Mack's North Carolina Central Eagles lived up to their BCSP preseason No. 1 billing.

After sharing MEAC titles in 2014 and 2015 - Mack's first two years on the job - they ran the table in the MEAC (8-0) this year including getting a title-clinching win over rival North Carolina A&T on the last day of the regular season (for the third year in a row) to win the title outright.

They entered Saturday's Celebration Bowl as a decided underdog against Grambling and fought the Tigers right down to the final whistle of the 10-9 decision.

If Grambling is an undisputed No. 1, then NC Central is equally undisputed at No. 2.

After two early FBS losses, N. C. Central fell out of first place and North Carolina A&T moved into the top spot. Riding a record-breaking season from running back Tarik Cohen, the Aggies (9-3) stayed there, winning seven straight games until'its loss to NCCU on the final day of the regular season. A big four-overtime win over BCS member Kent State on the second week of the season solidified their top ranking.

Their 9-2 overall record was good enough however to earn the first FCS playoff berth for the MEAC in the Celebration Bowl era. Unfortunately, the Aggies had to face NCCU and playoff opa defense that was as stingy as the offense was ponent Richmond with its third-string quarterback

vember. Grambling prevailed 52-30 to claim the division title. Southern (8-3), whose only other losses were to BCS members Louisiana-Lafayette and Tulane, has the designation as the second best team in the SWAC and final BCSP No.

Just behind Grambling State and Southern in the SWAC West, was Prairie View A&M (7-4) whose only two conference losses were to the Tigers and Jaguars. The Panthers are the third SWAC team in the top five of the BCSP ranking.

Tennessee State (7-4) begins the second five, at No. 6, after finishing fourth in the Ohio Valley Conference.

Repeat CIAA champion Winston-Salem State (9-3) is the first NCAA Div. II team in the final rankings at No. 7. The Rams proved once again that they are the class of the South Division and the league as they downed high-scoring North Division champ Bowie State in the CIAA Championship Game. WSSU battled gamely before falling at LIU-Post in the first round of the D2 playoffs.

Two other CIAA teams occupy the Nos. 8 and 9 spots. High-scoring Bowie State (8-3) survived a tough North Division race before falling to WSSU in the league's title game. Virginia State (9-2) took that race and took Bowie State down to the wire (a 38-37 loss) before settling for second. An extra date win against Tuskegee cemented the Trojans at No. 9.

Tuskegee (9-3) couldn't win the SIAC West race after losing at homecoming to Kentucky State (10-9) and couldn't take down Virginia State in an extra game to gain playoff status. But the Golden Tigers were good enough to get another Div. II playoff berth and win, this one over Newberry before falling in the second round to North Greenville.

Two possessions later, NCCU got a 46-yard pass from Bell to LaVontis Smith that carried into Grambling territory. That drive was halted when defensive back Jameel Jackson picked off Bell at the Grambling 40.

On its next possession, NCCU began its drive at their own 41 after a 24-yard punt from Wallace. Bell hit Jalen Wilkes for 15 yards before hitting Atkinson with the score that could have been the equalizer.

Grambling had taken the opening kickoff and driven to the NCCU 42 before Kincade was picked off by defensive back Alden McClellan in the end zone. The Eagles got the only first-half points on the ensuing drive as they drove 74 yards in 13 plays to score on McLaren's 23-yard field goal. Grambling responded with a drive that carried to the NCCU 13 but Wallace was wide left on a 30-yard field goal attempt.

Kincade, the SWAC offensive player of the year, was constantly forced to scramble by the penetrating Eagles defense but finished 15 of 31 for 149 passing yards and ran for 20 yards on 12 carries. He was sacked twice. Kelly ran for 65 yards on 17 carries. Hunter led the G-Men receivers with four catches for 35 yards. Cooper led the Grambling defense with six stops, three solos including the sack. Jackson had five solo stops and an interception to earn the defensive MVP award.

Grambling held the Eagles to just 55 rushing yards and 310 total yards. Bell was sacked three times and led the Eagles with just 31 yards on 13 carries. He was 18 of 32 passing for 240 yards and two picks. Smith had four catches for 82 yards to lead Eagle receivers. Linebacker Reggie Hunter led NCCU with 11 tackles, six solos.

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Their closest games were the final two come-from-behind wins over Alcorn State (27-20) in the SWAC Championship Game and a

BCSP Notes

NFL, MEAC and SWAC kick off partnership at Celebration Bowl

The NFL joined the Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference (MEAC) and Southwestern Athletic Conference (SWAC) at the Air Force Reserve Celebration Bowl in Atlanta, Georgia this past weekend to kick off their enhanced partnership.

The initiative - Strength of HBCUs, Impacting Pro Football Since 1948 will celebrate and honor the history and impact HBCUs and their players have had on the game, and work to increase career opportunities for students and athletic administrators at these institutions.

The celebration of the legacy and impact of HBCUs and their players will continue at Super Bowl LI in Houston, the NFL announced yesterday. The NFL will carry on the tradition of honoring legends and historic players at the Super Bowl by recognizing Pro Football Hall of Fame players who attended HBCUs, including Jerry Rice, Michael Strahan and Aeneas Williams (see full list below). The celebration will culminate with an on-field, pregame ceremony with these players at NRG Stadium on Sunday, Feb. 5.

The Aggies finish at No. 3.

Once again, the SWAC West Division title came down to Grambling and Southern's Bayou Classic showdown in New Orleans in late No-

The Golden Kittens finish out our final Top

and reaches deep into the very fabric of football, and we are honored to celebrate their achievements at Super Bowl LI in Houston," said NFL Executive Vice President of Football Operations Troy Vincent. "Our partnership with the HBCUs is an important initiative which celebrates the tremendous legacy fostered by these institutions that continue to contribute a standard of excellence and character for our game."

Hosted in conjunction with the Celebration Bowl, the inaugural NFL Careers in Football Forum introduced 80 students and entry-level athletic department administrators from the 23 MEAC and SWAC institutions to career opportunities in professional football

The NFL has a longstanding relationship with HBCUs. Twenty-nine of the 303 members of the Pro Football Hall of Fame attended HBCUs. Earlier this year, the Pro Football Hall of Fame (PFHOF) and the Black College Football Hall of Fame (BCFHOF), announced a partnership that will result in a permanent home for the BCFHOF as part of the new Johnson Controls Hall of Fame Village on the PFHOF's campus in Canton, Ohio

To learn more about the partnership and the HBCU players that impacted the game, watch the NFL Films-produced tribute - https://youtu.be/fesPPn1mFKs.

"The HBCU influence on the NFL goes beyond the evolution of the game

MEN'S 2015-16 BLACK COLLEGE BASKETBALL (Results, Standings and Weekly Honors)

CIAA CENTRAL INTERCOLLEGIATE	MEAC MID EASTERN	SIAC SOUTHERN INTERCOLLEGIATE	SWAC SOUTHWESTERN	INDEPENDENTS
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