

SWAC CONTINUED



An Alumnus

Among the players Jackson State's W.C. Gorden must replace in '84 is running back Sylvester Stamps. But the Tigers will remain tough (photo by James Terry).

both offense and defense. Talented first-stringers are there, but after that, there are more questions than answers.

ALCORN STATE

The Braves proved in 1983 that you can't keep a good program down long. After drifting out of championship contention for three seasons, Alcorn turned what was expected to be another off-year into a miraculous one, posting a surprising 7-3 record. Now, a year later, the Braves are contenders for the SWAC crown.

Alcorn State's line-up in 1984 will be its most experienced in years, with only five lettermen lost from last year's fifth-place finishers in the SWAC. Some 39 lettermen return, including eight starters on offense and nine starters on defense.

On offense, a returning array of running backs and receivers rank among the Braves' major strengths. In fact, all but one of Alcorn's ballcarriers from a year ago will return, with tailbacks Barry Robinson (464 yards) and Perry Qualls (399 yards) leading the way.

As for the receiving corps, seven of the team's nine pass receivers also return, with Charles Coleman, Donald Walker and Robinson figuring to be the best of the lot.

The quarterback slot is solid, too, with senior Richard Myles ranking among the best in the SWAC. He completed 75 of 152 attempts in 1983 for 1,119 yards and 11 touchdowns.

The line, though, may cause worries for Coach Marino Casem and his staff. Guard Terry Taylor and tackle Clyde

Speaks, its anchors, have graduated, making those positions the most suspect on the team.

Defensively, the entire unit, particularly the front line, lacks any glaring weaknesses. Arnold Campbell (60 tackles), Lorenzo King (38 tackles) and Michael Simpson (46 tackles) will again be called upon to anchor the line, while the team's No. 1-rated player, Issiac Holt (six interceptions, 19 deflections), and Erick Moon (20.6 yards per kickoff return), will pace the defensive backfield's "Soul Patrol."

After last year's success, the Braves' chances look bright for this season. But Casem warns, "It's a new year and we must concentrate on letting that success carry over into this season."

JACKSON STATE

Jackson State's Tigers, like the Tigers of Grambling State, seem to have become accustomed to "reloading" each year rather than "rebuilding." Despite the loss of 12 starters (six on offense and six on defense) from last year's 8-3 team, things are still looking up for the Tigers in 1984.

The return of record-setting John McKenzie at quarterback, can't-miss pro prospect Chris Burkett at wide receiver, all-American candidate Frank Sutton at guard and bone-crushing Ladell Wills and Jackie Walker at the linebacker slots, could very well propel JSU to its ninth SWAC championship and fourth title in five years. Unquestionably, the fate of the Tigers rests most heavily upon the shoulders of

McKenzie and Burkett.

A 6-1, 170-pound senior pre-med major, McKenzie set new JSU single-season records in completions (142), attempts (284), yards (2,067) and total offense (2,127), marks which, in the SWAC, ranked second only to Mississippi Valley's Willie Totten.

McKenzie's chief target last year was Burkett, a 6-5, 210-pound senior who ranked second to MVSU's Jerry Rice in receiving, catching 42 passes for 772 yards and nine touchdowns.

Also helping to solidify Jackson State's offense, which ranked third in the SWAC last year with an average of 349 yards per game, are Sutton, one of Division I-AA's best at the guard position, and running back Carl Blue, who ranked sixth in conference rushing in '83 with 491 yards and four touchdowns.

While the Tigers' offensive prospects appear bright, the defense may be a step behind. Three starting defensive linemen from the SWAC's No. 2-ranked defense a year ago have graduated.

The strength of the JSU defense is at the linebacker slots, where Wills and Walker reign supreme. Wills led the team in tackles last year with 106, including 12 quarterback sacks, while Walker ranked second with 80 stops and totaled two interceptions.

JSU's defensive secondary will be stacked, experienced and paced by all-SWAC cornerback Darrell Woods, while the kicking game will be strong with the return of senior Eric Dozier, who connected on 31 of 32 extra-point kicks to lead his team in scoring with

67 points.

TEXAS SOUTHERN

Statistically, Texas Southern looks awfully impressive -- 70 of last year's 78 lettermen return as well as 16 of 1983's 22 first-stringers. Throw in a roster of 17 recruits who are marveled at by the folks in Tigerland and TSU could very well be in the hunt for the conference crown.

There are, however, a few matters at hand that must be taken care of before the Tigers stock their trophy case. Foremost will be the program's adjustment to a new coach who brings with him his own new set of philosophies and strategies.

Lionel Taylor, the old American Football League's all-time leading receiver with 563 receptions, 7,105 yards and 51 touchdowns, was summoned to replace ousted Coach Joe Redmond, who had held the TSU head post from 1981 to 1983. Although Taylor inherits a veteran team to initiate his career, his most immediate problems will be to find a quarterback and reconstruct an offensive line. Harold Smith, last year's starting quarterback, has graduated and Johnny Holley, the backup, left school prematurely for personal reasons, leaving a void at the punter's spot, too. Johnny Cole, a junior without experience, or redshirts Ken Clay or Rudolph Johnson, will fill in.

On the line, all-SWAC tackle Boyd Jones has graduated, as well as right and left guards Billy Dorn and Greg Poitier. Tackle Darrell Allison and