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NCCU Beats NC A&T for MEAC Championship, Bid to Celebration Bowl

North Carolina Central University was tired of sharing. After earning conference co-championships in each of the last two seasons, NCCU captured the Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference title outright and a bid to the second annual Air Force Reserve Celebration Bowl with a 42-21 victory over rival North Carolina A&T State University inside an overflowing O'Kelly-Riddick Stadium on Saturday.

For NCCU (9-2, 8-0 MEAC), the 20th-ranked team in the FCS Coaches Poll, it is the first time in the gridiron program's history the Eagles have won three straight conference championships. And like the previous two, this regular season ends with a triumph over its nationally-ranked rival.

North Carolina A&T (9-2, 7-1 MEAC) entered the contest at No. 9 in the coaches poll and with the nation's fifth-ranked run defense, but NCCU senior quarterback Malcolm Bell and sophomore running back Dorrel McClain combined for 240 yards and five touchdowns on the ground. The Aggies had not allowed a 100-yard rusher all season... until Saturday. Bell rushed for a game-high 131 yards and two touchdowns, while McClain tallied 109 rushing yards with three trips to the end zone.

Bell added 184 yards and a touchdown on 10-for-18 passing to finish with 315 yards of total offense. His scoring toss traveled 24 yards to the left hand - and only the left hand - of junior receiver Khalil Tinson for a spectacular catch. Senior wide receiver LaVontis Smith had a team-best for receptions for 83 yards.

And while the NCCU offense posted the most points against the Aggies since 1984 and the second-most in the 88 matchups of the series, the Eagles also soared defensively. Tarik Cohen, the nation's third-leading rusher with 1,436 yards prior to Saturday, was held to just 82 yards and an average of on 3.6 yards per carry.

Senior linebacker LeGrande Harley amassed a game-high 10 tackles, including 1.5 of NCCU's eight stops behind the line of scrimmage. Sophomore safety Alden McClellon collected eight takedowns, including a hit for a loss with a forced fumble, a fumble recovery and a pass breakup. Fellow sophomore safety Davanta Reynolds also had eight tackles with 2.5 hits for a loss. Yet another sophomore safety Jaquell Taylor and junior cornerback Mike Jones recorded interceptions for the Eagles.

NCCU has now won 15 in-a-row against MEAC teams and boasts a 21-3 record versus league foes in three seasons under head coach Jerry Mack, including a 3-0 mark against the Aggies.

With the outright MEAC title in hand, the Eagles will prepare to take on the SWAC champion in the second annual Air Force Reserve Celebration Bowl inside the Georgia Dome in Atlanta on Dec. 17 at 12 noon, televised on ABC.

Name of segregationist governor may not stay on NC school

GREENSBORO (AP) - A middle school in Guilford County now named after a governor who was a segregationist could be renamed for a desegregation champion.

The News & Record of Greensboro reports (<http://bit.ly/2f79dIA>) members of the county's education board are seeking comments on the name change for Aycock Middle School to Swann Middle School.



NCCU Eagles Celebrate MEAC Championship (Photo NCCU Athletic Department)

N Carolina election board takes Bladen protest, not others

By Gary D. Robertson

RALEIGH (AP) - North Carolina election officials declined Nov. 20 to step in and resolve dozens of local voting complaints as Republican Gov. Pat McCrory's campaign had requested, although they did take over one protest in Bladen County alleging absentee voter fraud.

The State Board of Elections met by phone as county election boards hoped this coming week to tally their final ballot results that could affect too-close-to-call races for governor and state auditor. Unofficial results from the state board show Democrat Roy Cooper leading McCrory by 6,600 votes from nearly 4.7 million cast.

The five-member board, three Republicans and two Democrats, debated but didn't grant the request by McCrory's campaign to take over jurisdiction of at least 50 protests covering 35 counties. Most current protests allege some votes shouldn't be counted because the voter died before Election Day, is a convicted felon or voted in multiple locations. At least six protests allege absentee fraud.

Campaign manager Russell Peck wrote the state board late last week saying it should rule on the

protests, rather than county boards of elections, to prevent uneven local rulings and "facilitate a quicker resolution of the issues raised by the protests."

But board members decided they wanted local boards to hear evidence and make decisions. Their rulings could still be appealed to the state board, whose members are appointed by the governor.

"It would be a mistake for (us) to take up local protests," Democratic board member Joshua Malcolm said, adding local boards "need to make fact finding decisions."

Republican member Rhonda Amoroso, however, said the pending protests need to be settled because the public may view them and believe "we have a systemic issue here of fraudulent voter activities." If someone who is ineligible to vote is able to cast a ballot, she added, "it puts a cloud over the integrity of the election process in our state."

The state board did agree it would provide legal guidance to county boards considering protests and scheduled a meeting Nov. 22 to take suggestions about what exactly the legal advice should be.

The Bladen County

protest, which the state board also agreed unanimously to take over, and related documents allege a handful of people may have signed and filled out roughly 150 absentee ballots. State board staff already has been involved in the case, elections director Kim Strach said.

Save for a protest over the counting of 94,000 early votes in Durham County - rejected unanimously by the local board last Friday - the number of ballots at issue in the other disclosed protests are less than the current margin in the governor's race. McCrory's team has said the protests have unveiled potentially widespread fraud that needs to be addressed before all votes are tallied.

Cooper's campaign has pointed out the outgoing attorney general's lead over McCrory has widened since the 5,000-vote margin on election night. The campaign considers the extensive protests a sign of the governor's desperation.

"Gov. McCrory is doing everything he can to undermine the results of this election and the will of the people. But we won't let him," Cooper says in a video released Nov. 20.

A deadline last Friday for boards of elections in

all 100 counties to complete their tabulations came and went as protests slowed down their process.

Boards also were awaiting details from the state before deciding whether provisional ballots cast by people who believed they registered to vote or updated their registration at Division of Motor Vehicles offices since last year should count. A federal judge ruled these should be counted unless DMV officials proved they declined to register. About 1,500 such votes will be counted, according to a state board list.

Democrat's lead widens in North Carolina governor's race

By Gary D. Robertson

RALEIGH (AP) - Hardly anyone in North Carolina is willing to guess when their excruciatingly close governor's race will be resolved. A Friday Nov. 18, deadline came and went with Democratic Attorney General Roy Cooper's unofficial advantage growing to about 6,600 votes over Republican Gov. Pat McCrory, from nearly 4.7 million cast.

McCrory is fighting for his political life in a battleground state that Donald Trump and Republican U.S. Sen. Richard Burr won by relatively comfortable margins.

After endless legal battles over how, when and where people can vote, they're fighting now over whether to count 60,000 provisional ballots and thousands more absentee ballots that have remained sealed since Election Day.

Still more delays are in store as McCrory's campaign supports allegations of hard-knuckled fraud lodged by voters in more than half the state's 100 counties.

If Cooper's margin remains below 10,000 votes, McCrory can call for a statewide recount, and with the possibility of other legal challenges and conceivably even legislative intervention to decide a contested result, few outside Cooper's campaign are ready to put a date on the naming of the next governor.

"This is unprecedented," said Brad Crone, a longtime Democratic consultant and North Carolina history buff. "This is new waters that we're sailing into."

The two Republicans and one Democrat on each county's elections board have been meeting this week deciding whether to toss out or unseal and count each of the remaining ballots.

The largest challenge was unanimously dismissed Nov. 18 by the board in heavily Democratic Durham County, where a handful of computer cards got overloaded with ballots cast by early voters, forcing officials to hand-count 94,000 votes from the paper record.