

CLAA Football Season Preview

The 1977 CLAA football season might provide one of the most competitive years in the history of the conference for the championship. In the hot pursuit for the championship, the CLAA coaches poll picks Hampton Institute to be out on top. Hampton, who had a 7-4 mark and second place in the CLAA last season has 50 freshmen returning. If Hampton does finish first in the conference it will be the first title they have won since 1931. Top players on the roster include quarterback Russelton who had 30 touchdowns passes last year; defensive end Reggie Doss, All-CIAA; wide receiver Reggie Midgett and defensive back Sam Moore; linebacker Calvin Young and Cente Nat...

will be three members of the starting secondary (Tony Knight, Milt Basnight, Jim Flowers) and a standout starting tackle (Steve Minor) and plugging the gaps left by their departure is a must if the unit is to maintain the "hardnosed" reputation it earned in three seasons of high caliber championship play. "We'll be rebuilding on defense, too," Coach Price points out. You have to when you lose players who were key contributors to your past successes." Predicted to place third in the Conference is Virginia Union who will approach the 1977 season with a great degree of optimism and extreme caution. The optimism is with Judge Thomas, a 6'3", 195 lbs running back. Judge is expected to return this season as one of the top running backs in the nation. Assisting the offensive punch will be wide receiver Royce Hart and offensive guard Maurice Perry. One of the big pluses for the Panthers will be place-kicker and punter Michael Crawley. Anchoring the defense is free safety Frank Dark, linebacker Calvin Young and defensive tackle Walter Brown. Picked to place 4th by the coaches poll, Johnson C. Smith's coach Eddie McGirt had nightmares in 1976 losing five of seven games by five points or less. He lost to Union by one; Hampton by two and Fayetteville State by four, which wrecked his conference record. The aim this season is to turn these squeakers around. Tony Kooce returns to lead the Golden Bulls running attack along with Ernest Williams. Willie Jones returning to his cornerback position will lead a defense that must be

strengthened through recruiting or transfers. Ronald Corley, the huge All-CIAA defensive tackle was lost through graduation. A preseason favorite in 1976, the Golden Bulls are now the big question mark. The key point is; however, coach McGirt does not usually put two poor seasons back to back, so look for much improvement. "I am not here to predict, I am here to win," said new Virginia State football coach Thomas Morris. Morris inherits 27 lettermen from last season's 4-7 team and a talented group of offensive performers. Coach Morris can afford to be somewhat optimistic with ALL-CIAA running back Rufus Crawford and Crawford's running mate George Leonard and quarterback Maurice Banks returning to lead the Torjans offensive attack. ALL-CIAA defensive tackle Chris Moore and linebacker Curtis Pleasants gives Coach Morris some confidence on defense. The Trojans must improve their passing game and their all around defense to be a contender. Fayetteville State posting a 7-3 record for the past two seasons have been rated to place 7th in the CLAA. Defense is the Broncos strongest game allowing only 8.4 points per game last season and finishing number one in the conference. Returning on defense this year are Stephen McNeil, Clarence Ashley, Gerald Costen, Tony Baldwin, Beroge Hawkins and Ed Williams. On offense the Broncos have high hopes on quarterback Edward Davis and All-NAIA Ronald Crawford, Andre Sloan, Mike Smith and Chester Harriston on the

passing attack, with Marshall McRae at running back. The line will be anchored by ALL-CIAA-NAIA Burnis Travis, Lorenzo Grays, Raymond Donnell and Randolph Newkirk. A new head coach, a new offense and a lot of new faces fill the scheme of the 1977 season for the Elizabeth City State Vikings. There is optimism that the Vikings can begin a climb back from their dismal 3-7 record of a year ago. Tommy Holmes gained the reins of head coach when veteran mentor Tom Caldwell stepped down after the '76 season to become assistant athletic director. Holmes recruited heavily to fill gaps in the Vikings' defense. Ten starters return to bolster an offense which blossomed to help the Vikings win three of their final four games in 1976. But, Holmes has installed a new veer offense to replace the pro-set. Leading the offense will be all-star candidates, quarterback Johnnie Williams, flanker Mike Hill, split end Jeff Jones and tackle Luther Banks. The much maligned defense will count heavily on new faces along the line, but the line-backing corps should be one of the best in the CLAA. Anthony Whitehurst, Lester Farrington, Lavert Adams and James Pugh are all excellent players who love to hit. Vernon Miller will bolster the secondary. The defense lost four starters and freshmen could step into the slots. Forty-three freshman prospects are expected to make their bid for a spot on the team. Rated to place 9th in the CLAA Football Coaches Polls, Livingstone College prides itself on defense and was third in the

conference in total defense in 1976. Offensively the Fighting Bears only lost three men from last year's squad through graduation. The Bears should have good depth at the running back positions. Up front the Bears will have ALL-NAIA Center, Samuel Brower. The Bears will anticipate help from the incoming freshmen to give them more depth up front. Defensively, the Bears will have both units in-tact with ALL-CIAA Herman Cuthrell and David Smith at end and ALL-NAIA and All American Johnny Stoutamire and David Walker at cornerback. The tackle and guard positions will also be strong. Shaw University had a record of 2-7 last season but will be looking to be a contender for the crown this year with gifted wide receiver Bo Darden, who caught 57 passes for 763 yards in 1976. He will be the primary target for Cecil Alexander, the quarterback that came on during the latter part of the season to pass for 1,067 yards. Coach Horace Small who has the luxury of Gay Walker must build a running game to go with the passing and a stronger defense if he hopes to knock on the door of the throne room. Expected to place last in the conference, Saint Paul's has 20 returning starters and is looking forward to a great winning season. The Tigers offense will again feature the one-two-three punch of All-CIAA quarterback Sam Cosby, All-CIAA receiver James Woodson, and the versatility of Willie Hagwood who caught 47 of Cosby's

passes last season. The Tiger offense will also be bolstered by the running of Earl Spellman, Mark Springs, and freshman sensation Thomas "Chick" Coleman. The big loss on the Tigers' offense will be big 6'3", 245 pound James Wade, but with the experience of the Tiger line a newcomer could develop fast. Heading the list of returning linemen will be center Archer Collier, Guards Tim Harris and Gerald Knight; tackle Louis Harris and tight end Archie Askew. With thirty-five lettermen, several other experienced players, and a tough group of high school recruits the Tigers are hoping to put together a team to be reckoned with. Although the coaches have made their picks, the conference is so strong this year any of the 11 teams could emerge as the CLAA champions. Here is how the coaches pick them: (1) Hampton Institute; (2) Norfolk State College; (3) Virginia Union University; (4) Johnson C. Smith University; (5) Virginia State College; (6) Winston-Salem State University; (7) Fayetteville State University; (8) Elizabeth City State University; (9) Livingstone College; (10) Shaw University; (11) Saint Paul's College.



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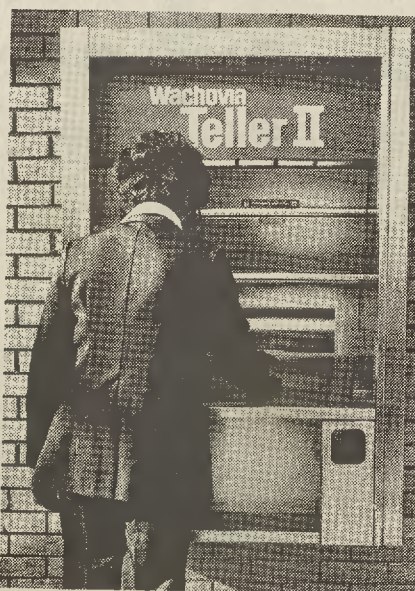
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