

# black college sports

by Barry Cooper

Like virtually every other black college conference in the country, the Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference is saddled with a number of problems right now, but MEAC commissioner Kenneth A. Free never dreads going to work. He says the best is yet to come for the seven-team league.

"Everybody says I'm optimistic," said Free. "But what should I be?"

This year is a crucial one for the MEAC, which will lose three teams to the Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association at the end of the year. Moving to the CIAA will be Maryland Eastern-Shore, Morgan State, and North Carolina Central.

The departure of those three schools would reduce the MEAC to a four team league. That would make it tough for the conference to survive, and Free knows it.

"We are trying to attract two more schools," Free said. "That would give us a seven-team league. We think Florida A&M might come with us, and we have talked with Bethune-Cookman (Fla.) College."

The biggest problem facing the MEAC right now are the stringing scheduling requirements facing Division 1 teams. And the MEAC is a Division 1 conference. That's why Eastern-Shore, Morgan State, and North Carolina Central decided to move to the CIAA, which is composed of Division 2 schools.

"They are leaving on their own accord so that they will not hold the conference back in meeting Division 1-AA requirements," Free said. "The decision for them to decide not to go into Division 1 wasn't much of a struggle. They saw that they couldn't do it economically."

Division 1 basketball teams must play 85 per cent of their games against other Division 1 teams, and Division 1-AA football teams must play more than half of their games against Division 1-A or Division 1-AA opponents. (Division 1-A is composed of the nation's largest schools, like Notre Dame, Southern California, and others. Smaller schools like Howard, Delaware State, and Florida A&M are in Division 1-AA).

Because its schools did not meet the scheduling requirements in basketball, the MEAC schools are listed as "unclassified" with the NCAA this year. That means none of the schools will be eligible for the Division 1-AA playoffs in football this year, or the Division 1 basketball tournament in March.

Not being eligible for the football playoffs is a real blow to MEAC member South Carolina State, which is 4-1 and has one of the best black college teams in the country.

But the likeable Free says he hopes his conference will have its Division 1 status back by next year. He said he is trying to solve the basketball scheduling problem.

"Things are going fine," he said. "I think things are better now than ever since I have been here. Things will really get to moving as soon as we get some new people in."

"Basketball was where we were hit with our scheduling dilemma. With three Division 2 schools in the conference (Morgan State, Maryland-Eastern Shore, and North Carolina Central), teams were only playing six games against Division 1 opponents in the conference. And to meet the 85 percent requirement, you have got to play something like 18 games or so against each Division 1 team. We just didn't make it this year."

It became apparent to Free that his league would have to go outside the conference for more Division 1 basketball games, and will probably have to continue doing so. The logical place to start would be the basketball-rich North Carolina-Virginia-Maryland area. But Free said that is easier said than done.

"It would be ideal to get some of the white schools that are in this area," Free said from his office in Durham, N.C. "But they won't play us. And other schools want you to come to their place, but they don't want to come to yours."

Some of the schools that are already in Division 1 are taking advantage of those that are trying to get admitted to Division 1. They know teams like those in the MEAC need Division 1 games. So they say, "play us here or else." And that is exactly what the MEAC will be forced to do.

"I think our teams will be playing a maximum of eight games at home," he said. "That's just the way it is going to be. We'll be on the road a lot."

Free wants badly to land FAMU and Bethune-Cookman. FAMU is already a member of Division 1, and Bethune is said to be seeking admission. Those two additions could make for a strong conference. Free said he is doing everything he can to help the schools make of their minds. A&M has already withdrawn from the Southern intercollegiate Athletic Conference, and plans to join either the Southwestern Athletic Conference or the MEAC by December 1. Bethune is still a member of the SIAC.



Armstrong



Lovett



Mahan

## Hampton Running Backs Pace CIAA Rushers

**HAMPTON** -- Times are changing. After years without an adequate running back, Hampton suddenly is blessed with several top notch runners. The team that has been averaging just over 200 yards per game on the ground over the past four years is now leading the Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association CIAA- in rushing.

In Hampton's long football history that dates back to 1901, no runner has ever managed to garner 1,000 yards on the ground. Some years were so lean in fact that the rushing leader for the entire 1971 season had just 187 yards. The 1969 rushing leader had 197. The all-time rushing leader for the Pirates is Willie Holland who, in 1961, dashed for 1,083 yards.

But the 1979 team boasts two outstanding running backs which has caused head coach Walter Lovett some sleepless nights. Prep All-America Dennis Mahan rushed for 113 yards before sustaining an injury and Anthony Armstrong has posted back-to-back 100 yard games. Included in the stable of runners are fullbacks Donnell Jones and Willie Pair who are both effective runners and blockers.

It's the talented backfield that is troubling Lovett. "I woke up at 3:00 in the morning in a cold sweat. I dreamed that we changed to the wishbone offense to take advantage of Mahan and Armstrong ... and we fumbled 10 times." But that wasn't the end of it. "Then I dreamt that we were using both Mahan and Arm-

strong and they both got hurt on consecutive plays." So is the life of the head coach.

Mahan and Armstrong have combined to total five of Hampton's 11 touchdowns this year. The two backs total 50 carries for 359 yards - and average of 7.2 yards per carry. Mahan has one 100-yard game to his credit and Armstrong has two 100-yard games.

In addition, Armstrong has won the NAIA District 19 Offensive Player of the Week honor two consecutive weeks. Against Eliza-

beth City on Sept. 29, he has the chance to be, the first Hampton running back to have three straight 100 yard games.

All of this brings us back to Lovett's dilemma: which halfback does he use now that Mahan is healthy?

"Maybe we could trade one of them for a quarterback, a receiver and two defensive backs to be named later," Lovett jokes. But the coach knows that it could well be another sleepless night worrying about the two runners.

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HOBBIES: Tennis, skiing, bridge, backgammon.

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QUOTE: "Through my work, I try to show people ways in which they might better their lives. In the end however, the responsibility for self-improvement lies with each person."

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