

CIAA

Rams have eyes on another prize

Get ready for an everlasting debate. For the first time in a decade, the CIAA will not stage a championship game pitting the Northern Division winner against the Southern Division victor.

Instead, the champion will be determined by conference and/or overall record. The league opted for this format so that a round-robin schedule will be put in place in time for the '92 season.

Still, it appears that there's only two logical choices in predicting this year's division winners — Norfolk State in the north and Winston-Salem State in the south. Of course, there are others who definitely feel differently. But that's why they have these pre-season reports and that's why they play the games in the first place.

Here's a look at how the CIAA stacks up for the '91 campaign.

NORTHERN DIVISION

Norfolk State

With 18 starters returning, optimism is running very high in Spartanland. Coach Williard Bailey's crew came close to being the dominant force last year, but fell just a wee bit short.

This time it figures to be different.

As always, you can bet your last money that Norfolk will impose its ground game on opponents. There's no reason why they shouldn't. In '90, the Spartans rushed for nearly 2,000 yards, second-best in the CIAA.

Blessed with an offensive line that weighs as much as a half-ton pick-up truck, the Spartans are sure to overpower folks in the trenches. Jason Winningham (320 lbs.) and Anthony Kearney (330 lbs.) join Doug Edwards and Jonathan Bizzell up front.

Lawrence Pinckney (576 yards) will get most of his yards between the tackles while tailback Karlsten Skinner works the outside.

Joe Bryant appears to be the likely starter at quarterback. But in case he falters or is injured, Kermit Buggs is a very able replacement.

Gary Morris (29 catches, 508 yards, 6 TDs, 17.5 ypc) leads a reliable group of receivers which includes Mike Howard and Travis Ramseur.

The defense, which was the CIAA's stingiest a year ago (allowing 17.3 ppg), is set to resume its miserly ways in '91.

Free safety Leroy Haynesworth is the ring leader of a feisty secondary

that allowed only 9 TD passes last season. Joining Haynesworth are Anthony Williams, Jesse Chavis and Rod Brown.

NSU has a solid set of linebackers in Daryl Franklin, Chris Booker and Henry Lawson. But on the line, there are some question marks. Morris Jones is expected to bolster the Spartans' defensive front.

Predicted Order of Finish

Northern Division

1. Norfolk State
2. Virginia Union
3. Bowie State
4. Hampton University
5. Virginia State
6. Elizabeth City State

Southern Division

1. Winston-Salem State
2. North Carolina Central
3. Fayetteville State
4. Livingstone College
5. Johnson C. Smith

Virginia Union

The Panthers are missing a few key people that helped produce a 10-0 regular season record last year. But there's enough skilled people coming back to make Union a strong contender for league honors this year.

Offensively, coach Joe Taylor's team is almost unstoppable with CIAA Player of the Year Carl Wright at quarterback. Wright did very few things wrong last season, completing 55.4 percent of his passes for 2,484 yards and 21 TDs.

Wright gets tremendous cooperation from a solid supporting cast which includes all-star center Marcus Hodges. Rodney Hounshell (853 yards, 8TDs) has established himself as one of the circuit's most dangerous pass catching threats. His 53 receptions led the CIAA last season. In the backfield, fullback Jerome Johnson is productive and consistent (863 yards, 7 TDs, 6.6 ypc). Kurt Greene, who scored 11 touchdowns last season, just may be the league's best all-purpose running back (551 rushing yards, 347 receiving yards).

With that nucleus, Union fans can expect their favorite team to score 30

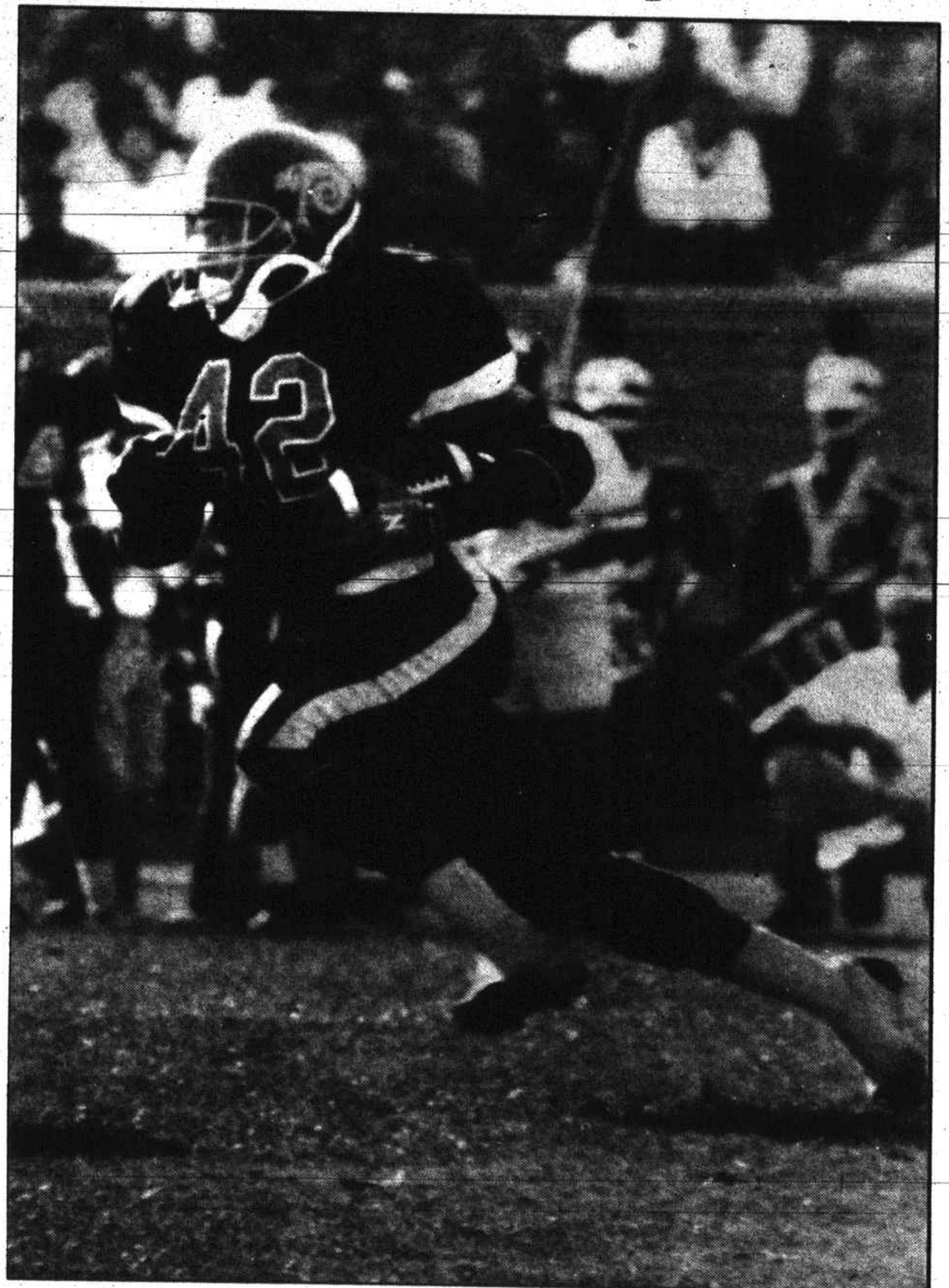


Photo by Max Dunhill

Ronald Beverly is one of four highly productive running backs for Winston-Salem State's Rams.

or more points and gain 400 or more total yards a game like they did last year.

Defensively, Union isn't quite as spectacular as the offense. But they are respectable overall, being one of those bend but don't break type of defenses. VUU does give up a lot of yardage (171.5 rushing and 322.5 total was next to last in the league stats). But they do manage to keep people off the scoreboard enough to win consistently.

The secondary is the defense's strong suit. Cornerman Paul Deberry, plus safeties Arthur Brown and Myron Knox, an all-rookie pick, all ranked among the CIAA interception leaders last season.

Ellis White is the major returnee at linebacker who will benefit from the

experience of line vets Ricky Deberry and William Dixon.

In the final analysis, how well Union fares this year depends on how they handle a very tough schedule. In addition to the usual conference scraps, they square off against two Division 1-AA schools — Grambling (in the Whitney Young Classic) and Morgan State plus Central State, last year's NAIA champion.

Bowie State

The sour taste of a disappointing '90 season should serve as strong motivation for coach Sanders Shiver's Bulldogs to make an about face this time around.

The Dogs finished last season in

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