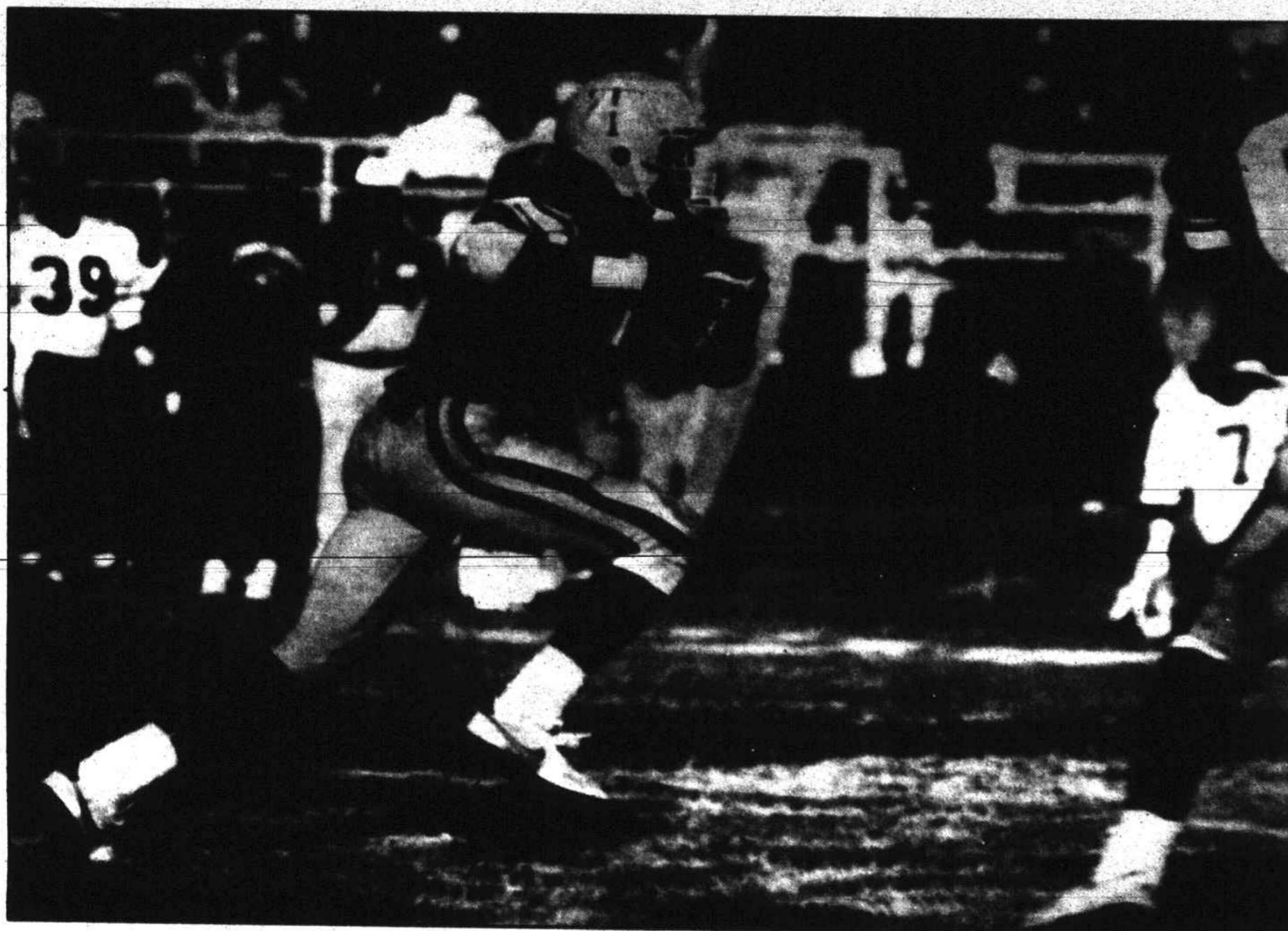


MEAC

A&T is definitely the team to beat



Aggies quarterback Connell Maynor, MEAC Offensive MVP, poses special problems for defenses because of his ability to elude the pass rush. *Photo by Max Dunhill*

North Carolina A&T caught a lot of people by surprise with their second place finish to league champ Florida A&M. The Aggies were right on track to win it all in '90, but they lost to A&M by two points in Tallahassee, their only league defeat.

That rivalry will continue this year when the two teams meet on A&T's home turf in October. Still, it's not wise to figure that A&M won't be in the running by the time the smoke clears in late November.

Delaware State has some holes to fill and if they do, the Hornets will do a lot of damage. South Carolina State's Bulldogs are hoping they find a quarterback who can take them all the way. If not, it's likely to be a so-so season for the Dogs' followers.

Howard University needs bench strength to steer clear of the infirmary. If so, the Bison can surge and bolt past everybody else. Bethune-Cookman is always in contention. If the Wildcats are able to maintain consistency, they could end the year with far more wins than any of the pre-season pundits predicted.

Morgan State is bent on revitalizing its team spirit under rookie coach Ricky Diggs. And based on reports from spring practice, it looks as though the Bears will have a new attitude and renewed desire to battle opponents for 60 minutes every Saturday.

North Carolina A&T

The Aggies are about the enter Phase IV of coach Bill Hayes' masterplan to transform A&T into a full-fledged powerhouse.

In three years, Hayes has revamped a program that was headed to the bottom of the sea. Last season, the team finished up as one of the nation's most improved squads at 9-2. In the process, they were also tied for No. 19 in the 1-AA polls at the end of the '90 campaign.

A&T is loaded from top to bottom on both sides of the football. And there's sufficient depth to help take up the slack in case of injuries.

QB Connell Maynor, the MEAC's offensive MVP, is the centerpiece in the A&T game plan. Maynor was 1-AA's passing efficiency leader, throwing for nearly 1,700 yards and 16 scores, while running for 11 TDs.

Maynor's ability to avoid the rush and break down defenses is what separates him from his league counterparts. If you're playing defense and he's the QB, you're guaranteed that every play will be an adventure.

Still, the Aggies are far from being a one-man act. Craig Thompson (39 receptions, 600 yards, 9 TDs) is arguably the conference's best tight end. And Barry Turner and Kevin Acker are very able at running back.

The Aggies weaponry works in good order with lots of help from a front line that excels at

Predicted Order Of Finish

1. North Carolina A&T
2. Florida A&M
3. Delaware State
4. South Carolina State
5. Howard University
6. Bethune-Cookman
7. Morgan State

wiping out anything that gets in the way. Richard Lide and Tyrone Brown are the best of the Aggies offensive linemen.

Defensively, A&T is just as imposing. The Aggies didn't give up very much of anything last season. They allowed 15.9 ppg which made them the No. 1 scoring defense in the conference.

The defensive line is as hefty as the offensive line. Knox Thompson is the prime force at defensive end and Rodney Edwards is just as proficient at his linebacker slot. Dee Moye is another all-conference star who commands respect for the secondary.

Florida A&M

The Rattlers enjoyed the fruits of victory in '90. Now they want to monopolize the top spot.

And since they have QB Antonie Ezell coming back for his final college fling, their chances to derail the Aggie express are as good as anyone's.

Ezell puts the heat on opposing defenses with his arm. His 2,231 total yards and 20 touchdown passes were league highs. Ezell also contributed six scoring runs of his own.

Terry Mickens, James Thurman and Tim Daniel get a lot of attention from the Rattlers' passer. As a tandem, they average close to 20 yards per reception. Rushing-wise, Pat Reddick will get more opportunities since Amir Rasul has finished his college career. Reddick was the team's second-leading runner last season, gaining 573 yards.

But for all of the potency that FAMU's offense has, it will go for naught if the offensive line (which lost four starters to graduation) isn't able to function effectively. Wally Williams, a center, is the best of the returning trench types.

That doesn't mean that FAMU will be lacking up front. There are several players who saw action in '90 because the Rattlers used a rotation system for their linemen. So it's really a matter of how quickly people adjust to playing full-time.

The defense is a mixed bag going into the season. The secondary has a pair of outstanding safemen in William Carroll and Craig Hall. Carroll finished '90 as the league's co-leader in interceptions with nine.

But Carroll and Hall will find that they will have their hands full if the Rattlers aren't able to generate sustained pressure on enemy quarterbacks. FAMU coach Ken Riley is counting on Sean Brantley to provide some of that pressure. And if Maress Scott, a defensive end, can return to his form of '89 when he registered 9 1/2 sacks, A&M will be good shape. Scott missed last season in order to get himself squared away academically.

Delaware State

If the Hornets can pull together defensively, they should be in the hunt to make a serious run at the MEAC crown.

Offensively, coach Bill Collick's group has all the tools to run amok every Saturday. Just about everybody is back on a unit that was 1-AA's best rushing outfit last year, averaging almost 299 ypg.

The Hornets have four backs who have proven that they are more than any match for any defense trying to stop them. The quartet of Mike Murray, Doug Reed, Herb White and Wendell Watson averaged close to six yards per rushing attempt.

Deeper still, DSC opponents can look for more of the same from the ground crew because the earth movers who made it happen last year are back again. Rod Minstead, a guard, is the team's premier offensive lineman.

That's good news for Eric Jones, the lead-