

A & T SET TO REPEAT AS MEAC CHAMPIONS

As the Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference (MEAC) enters its 23rd season of football, North Carolina A&T State University will be defending a championship that became extremely elusive in the last decade and the beginning of the current one. There has been a repeat champion only five times in the league's history, and the title has changed hands five of the past eight years. Although NCA&T has won two straight, the Aggies shared the title with Delaware State College in 1991 and won it outright last season at 5-1 only after Florida A&M University (4-2) suffered an unexpected loss to Bethune-Cookman College to end the 1990 regular season. Florida A&M, which finished in a second-place tie with SC State (4-2), handed NCA&T its lone MEAC loss in 1992. FAMU had won the title in 1990, and the Rattlers had to win all six conference match-ups to accomplish it.

Delaware State secured the championship outright in 1989 but had shared the title with both Bethune-Cookman and FAMU in 1988; showing the competitive edge of the league. Further evidence of MEAC parity was displayed last season as Howard University and DelState tied for fourth place at 3-3 behind the FAMU-SCS second-place jam. Rounding out the order of finish was B-CC at 2-4 and Morgan State University at 0-6.

Delaware State won its first outright title in 1985. Bethune-Cookman accomplished the same in 1984, while FAMU had shared the MEAC crown with South Carolina State in 1982. North Carolina A&T snared its first undisputed championship in 1986 and shared with South Carolina State in 1975. Bethune-Cookman's 1984 title ended a four-year reign by South Carolina State (1980-83). South Carolina State, with nine conference crowns to its credit, also had a five-year streak (1974-78) snapped by Morgan State in 1979. Morgan won the inaugural MEAC title in 1971 and tied South Carolina State in 1976. In the years with on-the-field ties, South Carolina State defeated the co-champion all three times head-to-head, while Bethune-Cookman downed both DelState and FAMU in 1988.

Morgan resigned from the MEAC following the 1979 athletic season but was readmitted in 1984.

North Carolina Central University, which won MEAC championships in 1972 and 1973, also resigned in 1979, opting to rejoin the Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association (CIAA). Both Bethune-Cookman and FAMU began MEAC football play in 1980, while the others are all charter members. FAMU, however, resigned in 1984, but was read-

mitted in 1986. The only member institutions without a football championship are Howard University and the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, which dropped its football program in 1979. Howard had won the 1987 title with a 5-0, 9-1 record but later forfeited its victories, and second-place Del State was declared the champion. The ninth current MEAC member,

at-large berth was awarded in 1992. South Carolina State defeated Tennessee State in the 1981 first round before losing to eventual champion Idaho State. In 1982, South Carolina State beat Furman in an opening-round contest but dropped a second-round decision to Louisiana Tech. North Carolina A&T received the MEAC's berth in 1986 and absorbed a loss

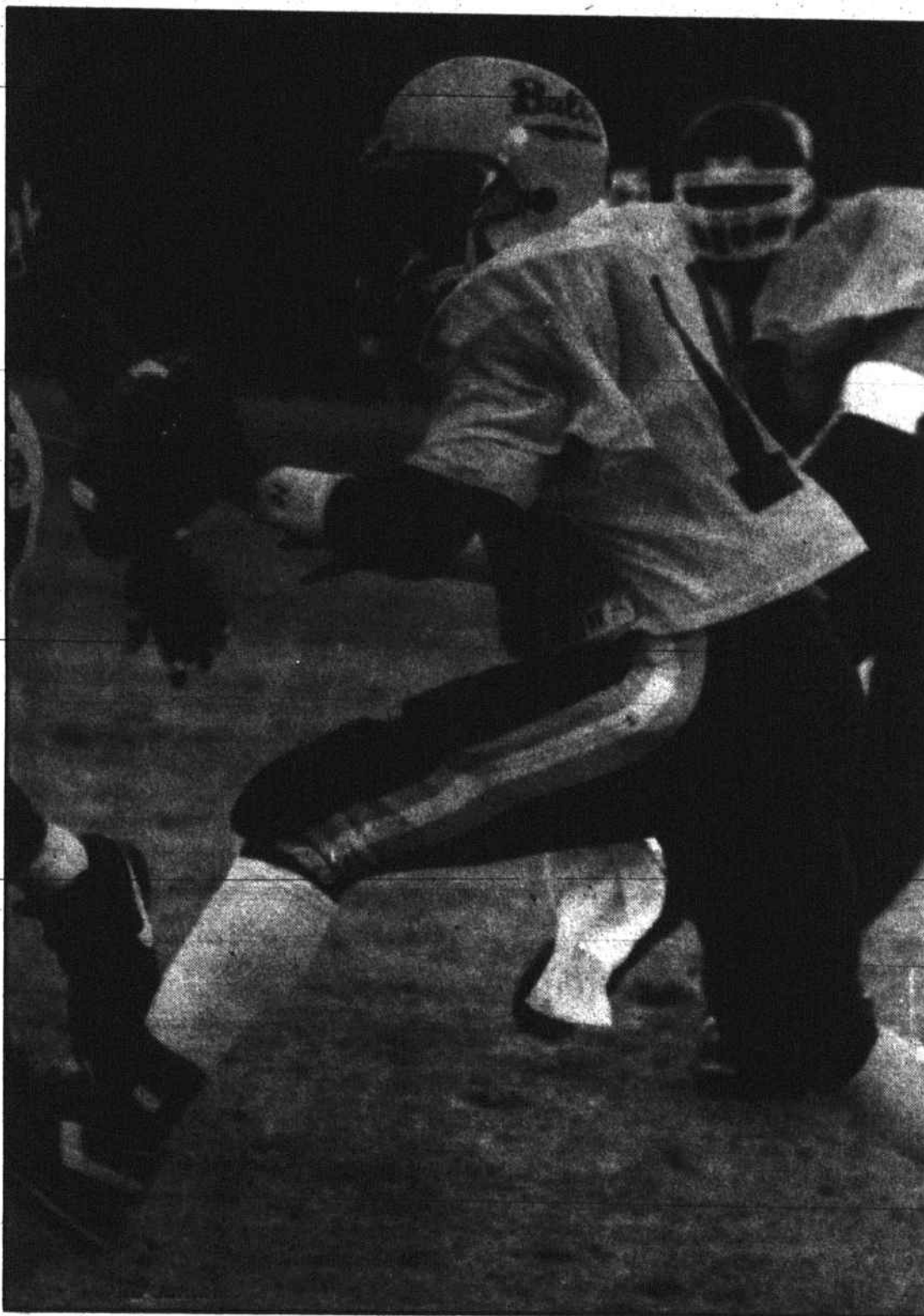
yearly.

There are no head coach changes in the MEAC following the 1992 slate. The league coaches are Sylvester Collins, second year at Bethune-Cookman; William Collick, ninth year at Delaware State; Ken Riley, eighth year at FAMU; Steve Wilson, fifth year at Howard; Ricky Diggs, third year at Morgan State; Bill Hayes, sixth year at NC A&T; and Willie Jeffries, 11th year at SC State. Jeffries had previously coached SC State from 1973-78 before leaving for Wichita State (1979-83) and later Howard University (1984-88).

MEAC TEAM KEYS 1993

BETHUNE-COOKMAN COLLEGE WILDCATS (4-7, 2-4) closed out last season with a strong victory over rival Florida A&M and return 58 lettermen, including 16 starters. However, among the four lost on offense was star quarterback J.D. Hall. Looking to seal the void will be senior Michael Jackson and Tony Kerrin, who also serves as the punter. Jackson completed 25 of 59 passes for 268 yards and a touchdown. B-CC's top two receivers return in tight ends Devon Cole (30 catches for 358 yards and two TDs) and Willie Felton (28-403-5). Wide-out John Jones (25-397-2) also returns. Kelvin Daniels, who rushed for 350 yards and three TDs on 72 carries, will lead the runningbacks. The offensive line appears to be in good shape, and kicker Paul Thurmond returns. Defensively, B-CC will be guided by linebacker Terrance Carey, who led the team in tackles with 7.9 per game, and deep back Tyrone Laster, the MEAC tri-leader in interceptions with six. Help should come from linebackers Vidal Mills (4.4 tackles per game) and Willie Smith, and DBs Leotis McNeil and Julius Gordon. David Watkins, who had 24 unassisted stops and two sacks, is the top lineman in camp.

DELAWARE STATE UNIVERSITY HORNETS (6-5, 3-3) coming off a "high-low" year that saw them win six of their first seven contests and lose the final four, will try to recapture the positives with the return of 45 lettermen. Leading seven starters on offense will be double-threat senior quarterback Erik Jones. He passed for 1,302 yards and eight touchdowns and ran for 349 yards and three scores on 134 keepers. Jones completed 68 of 135 passes and suffered just eight interceptions and will be throwing mostly to wide receivers Derrick Neal and Curtis Thomas. Neal averaged 30 yards with his 11 receptions and scored



Wesley Tate, Johnson C. Smith University's quarterback.

Coppin State College, has never fielded a football team.

The MEAC plays under National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I and is a member of Division I-AA football, which has 89 schools in the fold. Automatic entries into the national I-AA championship series were granted to the MEAC in 1981, 1982 and 1986, while an

in the first round to Georgia Southern, which went on to win the national title. NCA&T received the 1992 at-large and lost to the Citadel in the opening round. Despite some remarkable records during the years between appearances, none of the MEAC teams received an at-large entry into the playoffs until 1992. The league hopes to maintain that positive image