

TURKEY DAY CLASSIC, THEN PIONEER BOWL



MONTGOMERY ADVERTISER PHOTOLLOYD GALLMAN

Tuskegee's Richard Fitzhugh (3) finds a hole in the line against Albany State Oct. 21 in a 17-10 Golden Tigers' win. Tuskegee will play Alabama State in the Turkey Day Classic Thursday.

# Tuskegee hitting stride with new coach

By Herbert L. White  
herb.white@thecharlottepost.com

Tuskegee football coach Willie Slater has a couple of opportunities to learn what his first Golden Tigers team can do.



Slater

Tuskegee will close the regular season Thursday against Alabama State in the Turkey Day Classic in Montgomery, then finish the season against Johnson C. Smith in the Pioneer Bowl on Dec. 2 in Charlotte.

"Every week, every game is a new experience for me, but it's been great," Slater told the Montgomery (Ala.) Advertiser. "All I can do is the best I can do. I try not to

worry about what people say. You're going to please some people sometimes. Other times, you're not going to please folks. I just do things the best I know how, and we'll see how they turn out."

Slater, who succeeded Rick Comegy, has done pretty well in taking Tuskegee to a 7-3 record. While the Tigers stumbled with upset losses to Miles and Clark Atlanta, they took down SIAC arch rival Albany State and upstart Lane (Tenn.).

"When we want to play and decide to play, we can play," Tuskegee quarterback Kevin Huff said. "Clearly, we lost two games we probably should have won. But then we beat Albany State. We've had some great athletes at Tuskegee in past years that haven't been able to accom-

plish that.

"We've got a lot of young guys on this team, but we've come together. I love what we've been able to do, and I'm glad I've got two more games with these guys."

The win over Lane was Tuskegee's biggest so far. Both teams were playing for a Pioneer Bowl berth, and Tuskegee scored the final 14 points in a 42-28 victory.

"The kids played hard," Slater told the Advertiser. "We were determined to win that game. We played better than we have been in some areas and you could see it on the field. The offensive line played better; the receivers were more consistent and we didn't have as many mistakes. We've just got to build on that."

Tuskegee's focus is on

preparing for rival Alabama State. The Tigers have won two straight Turkey Day Classics and six of the last seven, including last year 28-27 in overtime.

Slater, who is coaching his first Turkey Day Classic, understands its importance.

"They told me about this game the first day I got here ... and the second, and the third and the fourth and so on," Slater said. "It's funny. The fans always seem to want to talk about the games you lose and they want to talk about Alabama State. I don't get many questions about the games we win."

• Former Carolina Panther Dameyune Craig, who holds the professional record for most yards passing in a game, is the Tigers' quarterbacks coach.

# Pioneer aims to earn its place in bowl season

The countdown is on for Pioneer Bowl IX.

What? You've never heard of the Pioneer Bowl? You'll read plenty about it in The Post over the next couple of weeks. If this were television, we'd even put a little clock at the bottom of the page to let you know how far off kickoff is.



HERBERT L. WHITE

But you won't need that, because we're here to school you. The Pioneer is the only bowl game that puts black colleges together in a post-season game. No, it's not the Super, Rose or even a car parts bowl. On the other hand, it's not the Astro Bluebonnet, either, which means it's still in business. The Pioneer is our game, our little piece of the bowl season rock.

This year, the Pioneer has a chance to be special to Charlotte. That's because the home team is none other than Johnson C. Smith, former poster children for bad football on a grand scale. But not this year. The Golden Bulls have seven wins in 10 games, they've won with guts and guile and have started to rally an entire campus around them. A win would be huge here.

On the opposite sideline will be Tuskegee's Golden Tigers, the winningest program in black college football. Tuskegee has a serious pedigree that includes hall of fame coach Cleve Abbott and Ben Stevenson, arguably the best HBCU player from the

first half of the 20th century. Today, the Tigers produce NFL standouts like Drayton Florence and Frank Walker, a couple of new schoolers who do what they do on Sundays.

Tuskegee has the same record as Smith, but the Tigers have higher standards. That's because they expect to be the best program in black college football every season, or at the very least, Pioneer Bowl champion since the Tigers don't participate in the Division II playoffs. Here's proof that the standards in football-mad Alabama are high: Some Tigers fans grouse that first-year coach Willie Slater is still the wrong man for the job. Seems like you just can't please some folks.

JCSU says would like to get to that place some day, and they might with Daryl McNeill as coach. Want proof? Twice he took over Smith's program after the Bulls went winless the season before. He has a combined 14 wins in the second campaign.

Smith also has history. The Golden Bulls didn't invent football, but they did invent black college football, which has a special place in African American culture.

For those reasons and others, the Pioneer Bowl is worth giving a look. Four bands — the real reason non-football purists watch black-college games — will duke it out before kickoff. And then there's the game itself, with the upstart Golden Bulls against the resident aristocrats from Tuskegee.

My time's up. Clock says 11 days until kickoff.

**click, click,**

**Don't Let Time Pass You By!**

**The Charlotte Post**

**Subscribe Now and receive a years**

**worth of NEWS!**

**(704)376-0496**

The award winning newspaper covering Charlotte's African American community with news, travel, health, sports, auto, arts, entertainment, religion and more. 12 sections each week. Monthly, The Post includes pages for children, teenagers and young adults and annually publishes special editions on Martin Luther King, Jr., top high school seniors, autos, weddings, and home improvement. Special features including Black History, Women's History, Wedding & Travel, and Back-to-School.