

BLACK COLLEGE SPORTS PAGE

CHANGES AT THE TOP

FINAL BCSP DIV. I AND DIV. II TOP FIVES; GRAMBLING AND SOUTHERN LAND VENERABLE, VETERAN COACHES



Celebration Bowl Trophy

GO BISONS! U. S. Vice President and Howard alum Kamala Harris cheers on her Bison at Saturday's Cricket Celebration Bowl in Atlanta.

Overheard at the Celebration Bowl:

"Well, the funny thing was, I told the team at halftime we played our worst half of football all season and we're down six (16-10). For us, we just had to settle down and play. Championship games are a little unique. We talk to the guys all the time about 'it's the next game up,' you know, 'no game is bigger than any other game,' but it's a championship game. We came out with championship jitters. We just had to get out of our own way in that first half, settle down and once we were able to do that we came out and played really good football."

Florida A&M head coach Willie Simmons on the Rattlers being a second-half team

"When you get into clutch situations, you kinda know what the offense is going to present to you when it comes to screens, draws, quick outs. They've got limited time so they're trying to move the ball fast and save as much time as possible. So, I went with my hunch and just made a play on the ball and God allowed me to come up with the interception."

Florida A&M linebacker Isaiah Major on his game-sealing interception

"Everything that you saw on tape . . . I like to call some guys 'erasers.' Even when guys are wrong, they have speed and athleticism to make it right. So, when you're playing against a team like that, they stay optimistic — a tipped ball here could be a pick, speed off the edge can cause a quarterback to step up and make an errant throw."

Howard head coach Larry Scott on the FAMU defense

"I feel like we're a very battle-tested team. We've been in these moments before. Hats off to our defensive line. I feel like they played an amazing game. Like Coach Scott said, you can't win many games when you turn the ball over three times. So, that's on me."

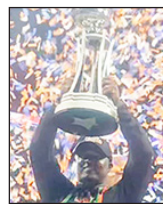
Howard quarterback Quinton Williams on his turnovers costing the Bison the game

"The HBCU culture on display here was just unbelievable. To have the vice president (Howard alum Kamala Harris) to come to the game, do you know just how big that is? And the atmosphere with the bands, the halftime, the band competition, people not just representing the two teams playing but many other HBCUs, it was all love. We have NFL and MLS games here and they are at each other's throats. Everything here went off here without a hitch. This was as good of an event as we've ever had here."

Mercedes Benz Stadium official about the Celebration Bowl and events surrounding it

2023 FINAL BCSP DIV. I TOP FIVE

- FLORIDA A&M (12-1)** - Head coach Willie Simmons's Rattlers are the 2023 BCSP Div. I national champions after defeating MEAC champion Howard 30-26 Saturday to win the season-ending Cricket Celebration Bowl in Atlanta. FAMU ran the table in the SWAC and had its only loss to FBS member South Florida (38-24) in the second game of the season. QB Jeremy Moussa and LB Isaiah Major took home SWAC offensive and defensive players of the year respectively and 13 Rattlers were all-SWAC.
- Howard (6-6)** - The Bison of head coach Larry Scott stood tall against Northwestern (23-20) and Eastern Michigan (33-23), had a one-point loss to Hampton (35-34) and a blowout loss at Harvard (48-7). In MEAC play, they overcame a road loss at SC State (27-24) to knock off defending champion NC Central (50-20) paving the way for their first MEAC crown since 1993. They then lost a close Celebration Bowl to FAMU (30-26). QB Quinton Williams led the offense and DB Kenny Gallop Jr. was MEAC Defensive POY and Aeneas Williams Award winner as top defensive back in HBCU football.
- North Carolina Central (9-3)** - Trei Oliver's defending MEAC and BCSP national champ Eagles were ranked above Florida A&M before a devastating 50-20 loss at Howard late in the season. The only regular season loss before that was in the program's historic trip to UCLA (59-7). At 9-2, they earned an FCS playoff berth but loss at Richmond (49-27). Senior QB Davius Richard repeated as MEAC Offensive POY.
- Prairie View A&M (6-6)** - Bubba McDowell's Panthers finished 6-2 in the SWAC West losing to Grambling (35-20) and Florida A&M (45-7) but were able to take the division title with wins vs. Southern (27-21) and Alabama State (21-14) to close out the regular season. They lost again to FAMU in the SWAC title game (35-14). Other losses were to Abilene Christian (45-16), SMU (69-0) and Houston Christian (39-0).
- Alcorn State (7-4)** - The Braves, under Fred McNair, were tied with Prairie View at 6-2 in the SWAC West but lost in their head-to-head meeting with the Panthers, 23-20. They ran off five straight wins before a devastating 44-10 loss to a 2-7 Texas Southern team. Braves began the season at 0-2 with losses at Southern Miss (40-14) and Stephen F. Austin (38-10).



SIMMONS: Hoists Celebration Bowl trophy.

2023 FINAL BCSP DIV. II TOP FIVE

- BENEDICT (11-1)** - The Tigers of third-year head coach Chennis Berry repeated as undefeated SIAC champs (8-0) dominating Albany State 47-10 in the title game. They repeated with an undefeated regular season (11-0), the top seed in NCAA Div. II Super Region II and as BCSP NCAA Div. II national champs. They also repeated with their only loss in the second round after a first round bye in the playoffs, falling this time to eventual Div. II national semifinalist Lenoir-Rhyne (35-25). Ten Tigers made all-SIAC led by Loober Denelus, the SIAC's Defensive POY. Benedict led NCAA Div. II in scoring defense giving up just 10.6 points per game. After the season, Berry left to become new head coach at SC State.
- Virginia Union (10-2)** - Dr. Alvin Parker's Panthers avenged their only regular season loss, 10-7 to Fayetteville State, by knocking off the South Division champ Broncos 21-10 in the CIAA Championship Game to win their first CIAA title in 22 years, since 2001. They took the CIAA North Division crown with a 7-1 record. For the second straight season, they fell in the first round of the Div. II playoffs, this time to eventual Div. II national semifinalist Kutztown (38-14). Junior RB Jada Byers again led the CIAA in rushing (1,186 yards) and scoring (18 TDs, 109 points).
- Fayetteville State (8-3)** - The Broncos and head coach Richard Hayes won their sixth straight CIAA South Division title with an 8-0 mark and earned their sixth straight trip to the CIAA Championship game where they fell for the fifth time, this time to Virginia Union, 21-10. They opened the season with losses to UNC Pembroke (19-17) and eventual Div. II national playoff semifinalist Lenoir-Rhyne (24-10).
- Virginia State (8-2)** - Henry Frazier III's Trojans finished behind Virginia Union in the CIAA North with only a surprising loss to Elizabeth City State (17-16) and falling to VUU (30-20). Had a big 33-24 win over MEAC member Norfolk State to open the season.
- Albany State (6-5)** - New head coach Quinn Gray's Golden Rams finished 6-2 in SIAC play to emerge from a crowded field behind Benedict to earn a championship game berth opposite the Tigers where they fell 47-10. Allen (39-27) and Edward Waters (31-27) beat them in SIAC play.



BERRY: Raises SIAC trophy again.

FAMU pulls out Celebration Bowl win

LUT WILLIAMS

BCSP Editor

ATLANTA, GA, Dec. 16, 2023 – Grad senior quarterback **Jeremy Moussa** threw three fourth-quarter touchdown passes to allow SWAC champion Florida A&M to come back from an early 14-0 deficit and pull out an exciting 30-26 win over MEAC champion Howard in **Cricket Celebration Bowl VIII** Saturday.

The win, just the second for the SWAC in eight season-ending contests vs. the MEAC, means the Rattlers (12-1) are the 2023 **BLACK COLLEGE SPORTS PAGE** Div. I FCS national champions. An announced crowd of 41,108 at Mercedes Benz Stadium witnessed the back-and-forth affair.

The win for the Rattlers in their first time in the Celebration Bowl and third year since leaving the MEAC to join the SWAC, comes 35 years to the day after the Rattlers under head coach **Rudy Hubbard** won the first NCAA I-AA (now FCS) championship in 1978. Hubbard's team also finished 12-1.

"We've said all season long that Rattlers never quit and we proved it today," said victorious FAMU head coach **Willie Simmons** during the postgame presentation of the trophy.

After a sluggish and mistake-filled first half and scoreless third quarter, the Rattlers came to life.

They began the fourth quarter down just 16-10 but took their first lead at 17-16 when Moussa hit running back **Kelvin Dean Jr.** for a TD from 21 yards out. The scoring play came after Moussa completed an 18-yard pass on 4th-and-5 from the Howard 39. It capped a 12-play, 83-yard drive that began late in the third quarter and came with 13:45 left in the final stanza.

After a Howard three-and-out, the Rattlers struck again. This time they needed only three plays to cover 70 yards with Moussa hitting Dean again, this time on a wheel route that covered 53 yards. After **Cameron Gillis's PAT**, FAMU led 24-16 with 10:48 to play.

Howard struck quickly, scoring the next ten points to take a 26-24 lead. First, Bison QB **Quinton Williams** completed two passes



BCSP Photo

ALL SMILES: (L. to r.) Florida A&M head football coach Willie Simmons, President Dr. Larry Robinson and Athletics Director Tiffany Sykes clutch the championship trophy after the Rattlers' 30-26 win over Howard in Saturday's Cricket Celebration Bowl VIII.

for 44 yards to **Nah'Shawn Hezekiah** to set up **Aaron Bicketon's** 40-yard field goal. On the second play on the ensuing FAMU possession, Howard defensive back **Carson Hinton** stepped in front of a Moussa pass in the flat and rambled untouched 27 yards to paydirt with 7:14 left on the clock.

FAMU needed just four plays to retake the lead as Moussa hit running back **Terrell Jennings** for 15 yards and Dean for 13 yards before connecting with wideout **Jah'Mare Sheread** behind the Bison defense for a 38-yard TD. A two-point attempt failed leaving FAMU up 30-26 with 5:46 on the clock.

Howard would get two more possessions but both ended in Williams interceptions. He first threw into triple coverage and was picked off by FAMU DB **Kendall Bohler**. After three running plays and a punt, the Rattlers gave the ball back to Howard with 1:50 left.

On first down however, Williams's screen pass was picked off by FAMU linebacker **Isaiah Major** sealing the win. FAMU picked up one first down before kneeling three times to run out the clock.

"One thing we pride ourselves on not doing is beating ourselves," said Howard head coach **Larry Scott** in the postgame press conference. "We kind of did that a little bit and hurt ourselves in that regard. However, I'm proud of this football team and what we started here, what we accomplished and what we'll continue to build upon."

Dean, who finished with three catches for 87 yards and the two scores, was named the

game's offensive MVP. Moussa was 19 of 32 for 289 yards and the three TDs but also threw two interceptions. Jennings led FAMU rushers with 68 yards on 19 carries and one TD. Major was named the game's defensive MVP after posting six tackles and the game-sealing interception. Junior linebacker **Johnny Chaney Jr.** led the Rattlers defensive effort with 11 tackles.

Williams had trouble figuring out the Rattlers' tough defense. He finished with just 14 completions in 27 attempts for 106 yards

and three picks. The Bison also managed just 87 rushing yards on 28 carries. **Kenny Gallop Jr.** and **Robert Jones III** had seven tackles each to lead Howard.

The Bison (6-6) had a promising start. **Ian Wheeler** returned the opening kickoff 63 yards to the FAMU 27. Four plays later, running back **Jarrett Hunter** scored from the 8 to put the Bison up 7-0. FAMU gave the ball right back to the Bison as Moussa was strip sacked by **Christian White** with Hinton recovering at the FAMU 37. The Bison needed six plays to cover the distance with wide receiver **Kasey Hawthorne** scoring from the Wildcat formation on a 3-yard run. Less than five minutes into the game and Howard was up 14-0.

FAMU got its only first-half touchdown after a 32-yard Bicketon punt put the Rattlers in business at the Bison's 46 late in the first quarter. Nine plays later, Jennings went over from 3 yards out to cut the lead to 14-7 less than three minutes into the second quarter.

After a Howard punt, the Rattlers got the ball back at their own 16 with 10:57 left in the period. Moussa was sacked on back-to-back plays, the second coming as he retreated to the end zone and was taken down by Howard defensive lineman **Darrian Brokenburr** for a safety. Howard was then up 16-7 with 9:37 left in the half.

FAMU got its final points of the half as Gillis nailed a 41-yard field goal :11 seconds before halftime. It came after Williams was picked off by **Deco Wilson** at the Rattlers' 38. The scoring drive covered 39 yards in 11 plays.

UNDER THE BANNER

WHAT'S GOING ON IN AND AROUND BLACK COLLEGE SPORTS

GRAMBLING STATE LANDS JOSEPH:

Grambling State University has named **Mickey Joseph** as the 15th head football coach, announced by Vice-President and Director of Intercollegiate Athletics **Dr. Trayvean Scott** on Monday morning.

"I'm deeply invested in the opportunity to lead the Grambling football program back to dominance," Joseph said at his introductory press conference Monday. "We are going to restore the order. They need to fear Grambling. And that's what we'll set out to do."

Joseph brings a wealth of coaching experience spanning three decades inside and outside the HBCU arena. His most recent stop was at the University of Nebraska, his alma mater, where he served as associate head coach, wide receivers coach and passing game coordinator during the 2022 season. He completed the 2022 campaign with a 3-6 record as interim head coach for the Cornhuskers.

Prior to NU, he spent five seasons on staff at LSU. In 2017, he joined the Tigers as wide receivers coach. He was elevated to associate head coach in 2020. Joseph was a key member of LSU's 2019 national championship staff.

In 2016, the Marrero, La. native worked as running backs coach at neighboring Louisiana Tech helping the Bulldogs to a 9-5 record and win in the Armed Forces Bowl.

Joseph is no stranger to Grambling State. From 2014 to 2015 he served as wide receivers coach and special teams coach for the G-Men. When he arrived at Grambling, the Tigers were coming off a 1-10 record in 2013. In the two years he spent with the G-Men, Grambling finished 7-5 (2014) and 9-3 with a SWAC West Championship in 2015.

Prior to Grambling, he was the special teams coordinator and wide receivers coach at **Alcorn State** in 2013, helping the school to a 9-3 record, its most wins in 30 years.

He spent five seasons at **Langston University** from 2008 to 2012, elevating to head coach in 2011. He led the Lions to 13-7 record in two seasons. He coached quarterbacks at Nicholls State (2001-03) and two seasons as running backs coach at Central Oklahoma (2004-05). He also served as a graduate assistant at Tulane (1999) and **Alabama State** (2000).

Joseph played quarterback at Nebraska from 1988-91. As a junior Joseph led the Cornhuskers to a 9-3 overall mark after accounting for 21 touchdowns (11 rushing, 10 passing). In his four years at Nebraska, the Cornhuskers posted a 39-9-1 overall mark and appeared in the Orange Bowl twice, the Citrus Bowl and the Fiesta Bowl.

Joseph was the top recruit coming out of Archbishop Shaw High School in Marrero when he was recruited to the University of Nebraska. In 1987, he was awarded Gatorade Player of the Year and First-Team Parade All-American. The standout football player was also a two-time All-State MVP and three-time All-District MVP.



DEAN: Offensive MVP had two TDs.

BCSP Notes

Graves the new man at Southern

Southern named interim head coach **Terrence Graves** as the school's new head coach last Wednesday.

Graves had replaced Jaguars head coach **Eric Dooley** on an interim basis after Dooley was abruptly relieved of his duties just short of two years on the job on Nov. 14. Graves, who had been the assistant head coach, then led Southern to a 27-22 win over Grambling State in their season-ending *Bayou Classic*. Ironically, before coming to Southern, Graves served as Grambling's interim head coach two seasons ago and led the G-Men to a 29-26 win over Southern in the *Bayou Classic*. He's the first coach to lead both teams to Bayou Classic victories.

Graves, 53, a 31-year veteran assistant who has served three stints as

an interim head coach (**Miss. Valley State** in 2013), is the 21st head coach in Southern history and the fourth head coach in five seasons.

Graves played at **Winston-Salem State** under former WSSU and Southern head coach **Pete Richardson** and has had several stints over 13 years with the Jaguars as a graduate assistant under Richardson (1994-95), special teams and linebackers coach (1996-98) and defensive coordinator (2000-03 and 2005-09). He was at Grambling from 2014-21 under **Broderick Fobbs**.

Graves has been a part of five **Southwestern Athletic Conference** championship teams and three Black national titles, two at Southern (1995, 1997) and one at Grambling (2016).



Graves



indianapoliscolts.com Photo

BURYING THE COMPETITION!

Indianapolis starting defensive tackle **GROVER STEWART (#90, ALBANY STATE)** buries Pittsburgh quarterback Mitch Trubisky (#10) in the opening series of their game Saturday. Stewart was credited with a half-sack and had three other stops in the Colts 30-13 win.

BCSP Profile



DEFENSE

- #90 **GROVER STEWART**, DT, Indianapolis (8th season, **ALBANY STATE**) - In 30-13 win over Pittsburgh Saturday, Stewart had four total tackles, one solo, and a half-sack for -2 yards. He was in on 25 (43%) plays on defense and 11 (42%) on special teams.



OFFENSE

- #72 **TERRON ARMSTEAD**, OT, Miami (10th season, **ARKANSAS-PINE BLUFF**) - Started at left offensive tackle in 30-0 win over the New York Jets. The Dolphins rushed for 77 yards and two TDs and passed for 228 yards and one TD while giving up three sacks. Armstead was in for 53 (87%) of the offensive snaps.



SPECIAL TEAMS

- #14 **COBIE DURANT**, DB, LA Rams (2nd season, **SOUTH CAROLINA STATE**) - Durant blocked an extra-point kick to preserve a 28-20 fourth-quarter lead. It was his only stat while playing 21 (35%) of the defensive snaps and 20 (74%) of the special teams' snaps.