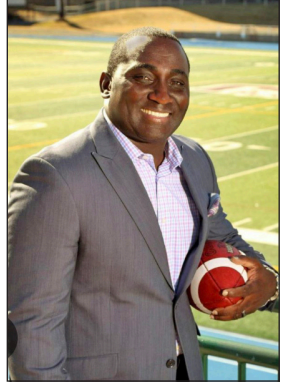


BLACK COLLEGE SPORTS



Florida A&M Sports Photo

BIGSHOES TO FILL: New head coach James Colzie III set to lead Florida A&M after Rattlers were best HBCU team in 2023

THE CHALLENGE BEGINS

CHALLENGE IN ATL; PRESEASON FOOTBALL RANKINGS; GOOD EARLY RESULTS FROM NFL

UNDER THE BANNER

WHAT'S GOING ON IN AND AROUND BLACK COLLEGE SPORTS

ONLY TWO RANKED TO OPEN SEASON:

SWAC champion **Florida A&M** (25th) and CIAA champion **Virginia Union** (20th) are the only black college teams to crack the preseason Top 25 in the American Football Coaches Association (AFCA) FCS and NCAA Div. II polls. FAMU was 12-1 a year ago and won the SWAC title with an 8-0 record. Virginia Union finished 10-2 and won the CIAA crown with a 7-1 mark.

North Carolina Central (53), **Howard** (20) and **North Carolina A&T** (6) received votes in the FCS poll. **Benedict** (64), **Virginia State** (54), **Albany State** (15) and **Fort Valley State** (1) received votes in the Div. II poll.

2024 AMERICAN FOOTBALL COACHES ASSOCIATION (AFCA) PRESEASON FCS TOP 25

RANK	SCHOOL (1st PL. VOTES)	2023	2024	SEASON OPENER RANK	COACH
1	S. Dakota St. (25)	15-0	649	1	Aug. 31 at Oklahoma St. Jimmy Rogers
2	North Dakota St.	11-4	614	3	Aug. 29 at Colorado Tim Polasek
3	Montana	13-2	576	2	Aug. 31 vs. Missouri St. Bobby Hauck
4	Montana St.	8-4	518	8	Aug. 24 at New Mexico Brent Vigen
5	South Dakota	10-3	512	4t	Aug. 29 vs. Northern St. Bob Nielson
6	Villanova	10-3	502	9	Aug. 29 vs. No. 23 Y'stown St. Mark Ferrante
7	Idaho	9-4	473	4t	Aug. 31 at Oregon Jason Eck
8	Chattanooga	8-5	403	17	Aug. 31 at Tennessee Rusty Wright
9	Furman	10-3	392	6	Aug. 31 at Ole Miss Clay Hendrix
10	Sacramento St.	8-5	382	15	Aug. 29 at San Jose St. Andy Thompson
11	Southern Illinois	8-5	370	13	Aug. 31 at BYU Nick Hill
12	Richmond	9-4	353	22	Aug. 31 at Virginia Russ Huesman
13	Central Arkansas	7-4	339	NR	Aug. 31 at Arkansas St. Nathan Brown
14	UALbany	11-4	275	7	Aug. 31 vs. LIU Greg Gattuso
15	UIW	9-2	259	14	Aug. 31 vs. N. Colorado Clint Killough
16	William & Mary	6-5	196	NR	Aug. 29 vs. VMI Mike London
17	UC Davis	7-4	164	NR	Aug. 31 at California Tim Plough
18	Lafayette	9-3	157	19	Aug. 29 at Buffalo John Troxell
19	Western Carolina	7-4	144	NR	Aug. 29 at NC State Kerwin Bell
20	Illinois St.	6-5	143	NR	Aug. 31 at Iowa Brock Spack
21	Tarleton	8-3	137	NR	Aug. 24 vs. McNeese Todd Whitten
22	North Dakota	7-5	131	16	Aug. 31 at Iowa St. Bubba Schweigert
23	Youngstown St.	8-5	97	21	Aug. 29 at No. 6 Villanova Doug Phillips
24	Nicholls	6-5	91	NR	Aug. 31 at Louisiana Tech Tim Rebowe
25	Florida A&M (1)	12-1	71	10	Aug. 24 vs. Norfolk State James Colzie III

2024 AMERICAN FOOTBALL COACHES ASSOCIATION (AFCA) PRESEASON NCAA DIV. II TOP 25

1	Harding (25)	15-0	672	1	Sept. 5 vs. S. Nazarene Paul Simmons
2	C. Missouri	1-2	620	6	Sept. 7 vs. NE State Josh Lamberson
3	Ferris St. (1)	8-3	590	9	Aug. 31 at No. 6 Pburg St. Tony Annese
4	Grand Valley St. (1)	11-2	566	3	Sept. 5 vs. Central State Scott Wooster
5	Col. Sch. of Mines	14-1	564	2	Sept. 5 vs. W. Texas A&M Pete Sterbick
6	Pittsburg St.	11-2	540	5	Aug. 31 vs. No. 3 Ferris St. Tom Anthony
7	Valdosta State	12-2	516	8	Aug. 31 vs. Albany St. Tremaine Jackson
8	C. Washington	9-4	418	17	Sept. 7 at San Diego Chris Fisk
9	Lenoir-Rhyne	13-2	416	4	Sept. 7 vs. Bowie State Doug Socha
10	Kutztown	12-3	413	7	Sept. 5 vs. Assumption Jim Clements
11	Slippery Rock	12-2	384	10	Sept. 7 vs. New Haven Shawn Lutz
12	West Florida	8-4	330	23	Sept. 5 vs. McKendree Kaleb Nobles
13	Minnesota St.	9-3	232	21	Aug. 29 at No. 22 NW Mo. Todd Hoffner
14	Augustana	11-2	231	13	Sept. 5 at Mary (N.D.) Jerry Olszewski
15	W. Colorado	10-2	230	15	Sept. 7 vs. MW St. Jas Bains
16	Indianapolis	9-2	216	22	Sept. 7 at Hillsdale Chris Keevers
17	Minn.-Duluth	9-2	214	25	Aug. 29 at N. Michigan Curt Wiese
18	Delta State	10-2	212	11	Aug. 29 at Mars Hill Todd Cooley
19	Ouachita Baptist	9-2	209	NR	Sept. 5 vs. SW Okla. St. Todd Knight
20	Virginia Union	10-2	183	20	Aug. 31 at Kentucky St. Alvin Parker
21	Tex.-Perm. Basin	10-2	169	18	Aug. 31 vs. W. N. Mexico Kris McCullough
22	NW Missouri St.	7-4	167	NR	Aug. 29 vs. No. 13 Minn. St. Rich Wright
23	Charleston	7-2	102	19	Aug. 31 at Livingstone Quinn Sanders
24	Angelo State	7-3	89	NR	Aug. 29 at Fort Hays St. Jeff Girsch
25	Bemidji State	9-3	70	16	Aug. 29 vs. Mich. Tech Brent Bolte



atlantafalcons.com Photo

YOUNG MAN, RUN FREE! Atlanta wide receiver **CHRIS BLAIR** (#19, **ALCORN STATE**) gets free after one of his four receptions Saturday in the Falcons' 13-12 loss to Baltimore. Blair had catches of 32, 27, 21 and 11 yards to lead Atlanta with 91 receiving yards (22.8 yards per catch) in his bid to make the Falcons roster. He had two catches for 45 yards but surrendered a fumble after a reception in the first preseason game vs. Miami

Challenges on both sides in opener

LUT WILLIAMS
BCSP Editor

All eyes will be on Atlanta this Saturday as the 2024 black college football season kicks off with the **Cricket MEAC/SWAC Challenge**.

The Week Zero game, to be held at Center Parc Stadium in the ATL (7:30 p.m. on ABC), will pit **Norfolk State** of the MEAC vs. defending SWAC and **Celebration Bowl** champion **Florida A&M**.

The NSU Spartans, in their fourth-year under head coach **Dawson Odums**, are coming off a 3-8 mark in 2023, 1-4 in the MEAC.

The FAMU Rattlers finished 12-1 under head coach **Willie Simmons** last season, 8-0 in the SWAC including a 35-14 win over SWAC West champion **Prairie View A&M** in the conference's title game.

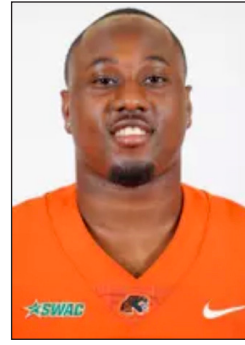
Simmons' troops went on to defeat MEAC champion **Howard** 30-26 in a tight Celebration Bowl match up at Atlanta's Mercedes-Benz Stadium to wrap up the season.

The MEAC leads the series 11-6 over the SWAC. **Jackson State** of the SWAC beat the MEAC's **South Carolina State** Bulldogs 37-7 in last year's game.

The 2024 Match Up

Both the Spartans and the Rattlers will be missing key players heading into Saturday's showdown.

Norfolk State will be without senior quarterback **Otto Kuhns** who was voted first team all-MEAC in the preseason by the league's coaches and sports information directors. Last week Odums confirmed that Kuhns would miss the first four games of the 2024 season because of an unspecified NCAA ruling. Odums said the ruling is due to academics.



Florida A&M Sports Photo

NEW TRIGGERMEN: Florida A&M's Daniel Richardson (l.) and Norfolk State's Jalen Daniels (r.) will both be leading their teams for the first time in Saturday's MEAC/SWAC Challenge in Atlanta.



Norfolk State Sports Photo

Kuhns, who has started 18 games over the past two seasons, threw for 1,244 yards with 12 touchdowns and seven interceptions in 2023.

On Sunday, Odums named Garden City Community College transfer **Jalen Daniels** Norfolk State's starting quarterback for Saturday's game. Daniels (6-5, 202) threw for nine touchdowns and over 1200 yards in 8 games with Garden City last season.

The missing piece for the Rattlers is Simmons who left after last season's successes looking for a more high profile position. He joined the staff of new Duke coach Manny Diaz as the Blue Devils' running backs coach.

Along with taking over from Simmons, new FAMU head coach **James Colzie III** also has the challenge of replacing quarterback **Jeremy Moussa**, last year's SWAC Offensive Player of the year. Moussa led the league with 2,893 passing yards for 22 touchdowns and 10 interceptions.

GAMES THIS WEEK

SATURDAY, AUGUST 24

Delaware State @ Hawaii in Honolulu, Oahu - Spectrum 10:30p
CLASSICS / TV GAMES
MEAC / SWAC Challenge
Norfolk State vs. Florida A&M in Atlanta, GA - ABC 7:30p

On Monday, Colzie named **Daniel Richardson** as his Game 1 starter. Richardson (5-10, 205) is a grad transfer from Miami, Florida. He edged out **Junior Muratovic** for the role in what Colzie admitted was a tight and tense battle through fall camp. Richardson started his career at Central Michigan where he started 23 of 32 games. At Florida Atlantic last year, he threw for 2,001 yards and 13 TDs with ten interceptions.

Headed to Hawaii?

The only other game on the Week Zero schedule has **Delaware State** of the MEAC travelling all the way out to Honolulu Hawaii to meet the Hawaii Rainbows Saturday (10:30 p.m. ET). The Hornets were 0-10, 0-5 in the MEAC in 2023. Hawaii finished 5-8 overall, 3-5 in the Mountain West Conference.

Steven J. Gaither of **HBCU Gameday** reported Tuesday that the Hornets and second-year head coach **Lee Hull** missed their 10-and-a-half hour flight Tuesday to Honolulu. CBS Sports reported later Tuesday that Delaware State rebooked its travel and is "still scheduled to arrive on time in Hawaii tomorrow (Wednesday)."

Delaware State is the first HBCU team to make the trip to play Hawaii since **Grambling State** did so during the days of legendary GSU head coach **Eddie Robinson**. Robinson's troops defeated Hawaii 34-23 on October 2, 1976. GSU went 3-0 vs. Hawaii between 1972 and 1976, winning 20-6 in 1975 and 46-7 in 1972.

Black college NFL players off to great starts, again

BCSP NFL PLAYERS OF THE WEEK

For preseason games of August 15 - 18, 2024



newyorkjets.com Photo

STAR OF THE WEEK!! New York rookie free agent defensive back/kick returner **BRANDON CODRINGTON** (#43, **NC CENTRAL**) settles under a punt that he returned 31 yards in the Jets' 15-12 win over Carolina Saturday. Codrington also returned another punt for 15 yards and a kickoff for 63 yards.

LUT WILLIAMS
BCSP Editor

One year after undrafted black college rookie free agents made a splash during preseason games to earn spots on NFL active or practice squad rosters, the same is happening in the 2024 preseason.

So far through two weeks of preseason play, the names of 2024 undrafted rookie free agents **Ian Wheeler** of **Howard**, **Jarveon Howard** of **Alcorn State** and **Brandon Codrington** of **North Carolina Central** have shown up prominently in NFL headlines.

Wheeler, signed by the Chicago Bears, made a splash two weeks ago in his debut by rushing for 43 yards in five carries (8.6 yards per carry) and rushing for touchdowns of 7 and 8 yards vs. Buffalo. He didn't get much opportunity this week as he had just two carries for 4 yards and hauled in two passes for 14 yards vs. Cincinnati.

Howard, the former SWAC rushing leader signed by Green Bay after this year's draft, was productive in the first preseason game as he ran for 44 yards in eight carries (5.5 ypc.) vs. Cleveland. He did not play in the Packers' game Saturday vs. Denver.

The rookie star this week was Codrington, the 5-9, 185-pound former NCCU defensive back and kick returner. Signed as a free agent by the New York Jets, Codrington showed he could be a weapon in the kicking game. He had a 63-yard kickoff return to start the second half and also had 46 yards on punt returns of 31 and 15 yards to make his case for a roster spot.

The 63-yard kickoff return is tied for the second best so far in the preseason. He is averaging 19.6 yards on three punt returns to currently place second in the NFL in that category.

"[He] definitely seized his opportunities," Jets coach Robert Saleh said in a **New York Post** story Sunday. "I think he was, for both teams, the most productive. He set up a couple of scoring drives. That's what he's here for. That's why we brought him in, his punt return and kick return ability. I thought he did a really nice job tonight."

"I'm trying to make the most of my opportunity," Codrington said in the story. "Making sure every time I step on the field, I'm giving my all, no regrets. If I mess up, I make sure I'm flying around."

Rookie free agents are not the only former black college players looking to earn spots.

Second-year pros **Chris Blair** out of **Alcorn State**, **Xavier Smith** of **Florida A&M** and **Isiah Land** also of FAMU, all undrafted free agents, are making strong bids to move from practice squads to 53-man active rosters.

Blair, who spent his first season on Green Bay's practice squad and last year in the same status with Atlanta, hauled in a team-best four catches for 91 yards in the Falcons game Saturday vs. Baltimore. Blair hauled in two catches for 45 yards (22.5 yards per catch) in the first preseason game vs. Miami. His 22.6 yards per catch average is fourth best in the preseason.

"We all know that this league, it can be pretty hard to get into, but I know that this is a job interview not just for the Falcons but for 31 other teams," Blair said in a postgame interview. "So I just want to put good things on tape."

Smith, the former MEAC receiving leader, is looking to make the Los Angeles Rams 53-man roster after spending all of last year on their practice squad.

The 5-9, 176-pounder is showing his abilities as a pass catcher and

OFFENSE



- #19 **CHRIS BLAIR**, WR, Atlanta (1st season, **ALCORN STATE**) - In 13-12 loss to Baltimore, Blair (6-2, 195) had four receptions in five targets for 91 yards (22.8 yards per catch) with a long catch of 32 yards. Blair had a 21-yard reception in the first quarter, a 32-yarder and an 11-yarder in the second quarter. He played 28 snaps on offense (41%) and four on special teams (18%).

DEFENSE



- #53 **ISAIHAH LAND**, OLB, Indianapolis (2nd season, **FLORIDA A&M**) - In 21-13 win over Arizona, Land (6-4, 225) had three tackles, all solos, with a sack for -12 yards among two hits on the quarterback and two tackles for loss. Land played 28 defensive snaps (53%) and two on special teams (8%).

SPECIAL TEAMS



- #19 **XAVIER SMITH**, WR/KR, LA Rams (1st season, **FLORIDA A&M**) - Starting at wide receiver in 13-9 win over the LA Chargers, Smith (5-9, 176) had one carry for 9 yards, caught five passes in eight targets for 45 yards (9.0 yards per catch) with a long reception of 22 yards and returned two punts for 50 yards (25.0 yards per return) with a long return of 34 yards. Smith played 59 offensive snaps (94%) and seven on special teams (33%).

ROOKIE



- #43 **BRANDON CODRINGTON**, CB/KR, NY Jets (Rookie, **NORTH CAROLINA CENTRAL**) - Codrington (5-9, 185) had an eye-popping day on special teams as he returned two punts for 46 yards with a long return of 31 yards, fair caught one punt, had one kickoff return for 63 yards and had an assisted tackle on defense in the Jets' 15-12 win over Carolina. He was in for 12 plays on defense (23%) and five on special teams (21%).

kick returner. He caught five passes for 45 yards Saturday vs. the LA Chargers including a tough 22-yarder after he collided with a defender. He also had 34- and 16-yard punt returns.

"The coaches are putting me in position to make plays and I'm just trying to do what I can to make the most of my opportunities," Smith said after the battle with the crosstown Chargers.

"Just knowing my role honestly, and knowing that'll be my way on to the 53 (man roster)," Smith said of his kick return duties. "So, just trying to do everything I can, get extra work in with the punters and get extra work with the kickers and then take advantage once I get on the field."

Land, the 2021 **Buck Buchanan Award** winner while at FAMU, was originally signed as a free agent and cut by Dallas in 2023 before he was picked up by Indianapolis. He spent most of 2023 on the Colts' practice squad but got in for seven games and posted one sack.

Against Arizona Saturday, Land showed the explosiveness of former Indy pass rusher extraordinaire **Robert Mathis** out of **Alabama A&M** who spent all of his 14-year NFL career with the Colts and posted 123 career sacks. Land, who posted 19 sacks during that award-winning season, burst around the left side of the Cardinals' line to sack quarterback Clayton Tune for a 12-yard loss.

The Colts unveiled their first depth chart this week and Land is listed as the third edge rusher on one side of the defense.

It will be interesting to see how these players among the 44 former black college players currently in NFL camps fare as teams move towards finalizing their 53-man active roster and 17-player practice squads on August 27. In 2023, a total of 31 black college players made active roster or were named to practice squads out of 43 that were on preseason rosters.