

# BLACK COLLEGE SPORTS PAGE



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## THE KINGS ARE CROWNED

### JACKSON STATE PREVAILS IN CELEBRATION BOWL, JOINS VIRGINIA UNION AS 2024 TOP TEAMS

**BASKING IN VICTORY:** Jackson State head coach T. C. Taylor hoists the Celebration Bowl championship trophy after his team's 28-7 win over SC State.

#### 2024 FINAL BCSP DIV. I FCS TOP FIVE

- JACKSON STATE** (12-2) - Head coach T. C. Taylor's SWAC champion Tigers are the 2024 BCSP Div. I national champions after defeating MEAC champion South Carolina State 28-7 Saturday in the season-ending *Cricket Celebration Bowl* in Atlanta. JSU ran the table in the SWAC (9-0) and had its only losses to FBS member Louisiana-Monroe (30-14) to open the season and a 41-20 designated non-conference game loss to Grambling State (41-20). After that loss, the Tigers ran off 10 straight wins. Senior RB Irv Mulligan was the SWAC's only 1,000-yard rusher and offensive player of the year. Eleven JSU players were named all-MEAC.
- South Carolina State** (9-3) - The Bulldogs retooled under first-year head coach Chennis Berry, who came from two-time SIAC champion Benedict and brought several stars from that team to Orangeburg. They ran the table in the MEAC (5-0) outscoring conference foes by a 47-19 margin only losing to Florida A&M (22-18) to open the season and to FBS member Georgia Southern (42-14). MEAC Offensive POY QB Eric Phoenix and Offensive Lineman of the Year Nick Taiste led 12 Bulldogs on the all-MEAC teams.
- Tennessee State** (9-4) - Eddie George's Tigers won their last three games including knocking off nationally-ranked SE Missouri in the final regular season game to earn a four-way tie for the OVC/Big South title. TSU was granted a berth in the FCS playoffs where it fell 41-27 at Montana in the first round. George was named Coach of the Year with LB Sanders Ellis winning Freshman of the Year. TSU also lost at N. Dakota State (52-3), Tennessee Tech (24-14) and at home to UT-Martin (28-21).
- North Carolina Central** (8-3) - Trei Oliver's Eagles finished behind SC State in the MEAC only losing to the Bulldogs, 24-21. Other losses were at home to Elon (41-19) and on the road at UNC (45-10). Junior RB J'Mari Taylor ran for 1,126 yards and 15 TDs to lead the MEAC.
- Southern** (8-5) - The Jaguars, under first-year head coach Terrence Graves, fought their way to the SWAC West title with a 7-1 mark, only losing to Florida A&M (24-6). SU also lost to Jackson State (33-15) in the regular season and also had losses to McNeese State (21-7), Nicholls (51-7) and in the SWAC Championship Game to Jackson State (41-13).



TAYLOR: With the Celebration Bowl trophy.

#### 2024 FINAL BCSP DIV. II/NAIA TOP FIVE

- VIRGINIA UNION** (10-4) - The Panthers of seventh-year head coach Dr. Alvin Parker Jr., lost early in the season to Hampton (33-21) and Johnson C. Smith (21-16) and at season's end to Virginia State (35-28) before vanquishing VSU a week later in the CIAA title game (17-13) to win their second straight league title. They went on to win their first games in NCAA Div. II playoff history after ten tries with road wins at Wingate (34-31, in OT) and Lenoir-Rhyne (44-12) before falling in the Super Region II final to D2 top-ranked Valdosta State (49-14). Career rushing leader Jada Byers topped off his career with bests of 2,061 rushing yards and 27 TDs to lead all black college players in rushing, scoring and all-purpose yards.
- Miles** (10-3) - In his third season, head coach Sam Shade led the Golden Bears to the SIAC title with an unblemished 8-0 record defeating Clark Atlanta for the second time this season in the league championship game (53-25). They went on to get a first Div. II playoff win beating Carson-Newman 14-13 in a first round Super Region II game before losing to top-ranked Valdosta State 33-17 in the second round. Miles opened the season with losses at West Alabama (16-15) and at Alabama State (24-3) before winning ten straight. Freshman defensive back Lashon Young led Div. II with eight interceptions and was named SIAC Defensive POY. Shade was SIAC coach of the year.
- Virginia State** (7-4) - Dr. Henry Frazier III's Trojans won the CIAA regular season title with a 35-28 win at season's end over Virginia Union but lost in the league's championship game to VUU, 17-13. VSU also lost at Norfolk State (28-23), at home to Winston-Salem State (15-14) and at J. C. Smith (21-17). Trojans had the top defensive rookie (LB Marquis Edmond) and O-lineman (Bruno Onwuzor).
- Clark Atlanta** (7-3-1) - Teddy Keaton brought in some of his former players from Allen who helped get the Panthers to the SIAC title game (a 53-25 loss to Miles) after the team finished 0-10 in 2023. CAU also lost in the regular season to Miles (49-28) and to Savannah State (35-28). All-SIAC QB and POY David Wright III was the catalyst as he threw for 3,271 yards and 31 TDs.
- J. C. Smith** (8-2) - Won eight straight to start the season under CIAA COY Maurice Flowers, beating VSU and VUU, before losing final two games to Fayetteville State (27-0) and Livingstone (15-10).



PARKER: CIAA title and two D2 playoff wins.

# Jackson State dominant in Celebration Bowl

## LUT WILLIAMS

BCSP Editor

ATLANTA, GA – Jackson State second-year head coach T. C. Taylor accomplished something Saturday that celebrated former JSU head coach Deion “Coach Prime” Sanders never did, i.e., win a Celebration Bowl.

Taylor's SWAC champion JSU Tigers (12-2) shutdown and stifled MEAC champion South Carolina State (9-3) in a dominant 28-7 win here Saturday at *Celebration Bowl IX* before a crowd of 36,823. Sanders, now the head coach at Colorado, failed in two attempts leading JSU into this season-ending game including a 31-10 loss to SC State in the 2021 game.

"The thing going into this game is we got tired of hearing about them," Taylor said in the postgame press conference regarding SC State and the physical brand of ball played in the MEAC. "If you look at it today, they were the more fitness team. They tried to throw the ball and we ran the football."

JSU ran for 152 grind-it-out yards on 51 carries and got two short 2-yard rushing touchdowns from senior star running back Irv Mulligan (25 carries, 71 yards) in the second and fourth quarters.

The Tigers' passing offense was just as effective. Junior quarterback Jacobian Morgan was an efficient 15 of 21 thru the air for 233 yards with two scoring passes to star wideout Joanes Fortilien (6 catches, 43 yards).

The Tiger defense meanwhile limited SC State to 30 rushing yards on 19 carries (1.6 yards per carry) and held prolific SCSU passer Eric Phoenix to 13 completions in 31 attempts for 143 yards with one interception. Phoenix, in fact, led Bulldog rushers with just 17 yards on eight carries.

SCSU was 2 of 13 on third-down conversions while JSU converted 9 of 16. JSU won the time of possession battle 37 minutes to 23 minutes. JSU outgained SC State 385 yards to 178.

"I told the team before the game that we're going to win this thing in the trenches," Taylor said. "The O-line, the D-line, we had to win this game in the trenches and show everybody we're the best in the country. That's what they went out there and did."

The win gives Jackson the Div. I black college national championship and gives the SWAC its second straight win in the season-ending matchup of black college conference champions. The MEAC's lead in the bowl game is



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**MVPs:** Jackson State defensive lineman Jeremiah Williams (l.) and quarterback Jacobian Morgan (r.) proudly display the defensive and offensive MVP trophies after the Tigers' 28-7 thrashing of South Carolina State at Celebration Bowl IX.

now cut to 6-3.

"First and foremost, we didn't get it done," SC State first-year head coach Chennis Berry said. "We didn't play the way we're capable of playing. We played very uncharacteristically today."

JSU had a lot to do with that.

The first stamp of JSU's domination came on its second possession after stopping SCSU early and forcing two punts. The Tigers went on a Celebration Bowl-record 19-play drive that covered 78 yards, and cashed in on a 4-yard fade pass from QB Morgan to Fortilien in the left corner of the end zone. The drive took 9 minutes and 39 seconds – also a Celebration Bowl record – and carried into the second quarter giving JSU a 7-0 lead with 11:26 left in the period.

JSU forced a punt and stopped the Bulldogs on fourth down to get the ball back at their own 34 with just over six minutes left in the half. On first down from there, Morgan hit wideout Isaiah Spencer behind the Bulldogs' secondary for a 65-yard reception before he was tackled by Jared Washington at the SCSU 1. On the next play, Mulligan went over for the first of his two scores.

After two more stops of SCSU, JSU went into the break with the 14-0 lead. The Bulldogs made just one first down in the half, were held to 10 rushing yards on six carries and 17 passing yards. JSU had outgained SCSU 153 yards to 27 yards thru two quarters.

Morgan was picked off by SCSU defensive back Diego Addison on the second play of the

third quarter setting up the Bulldogs at the JSU 33. Ryan Stubblefield replaced Phoenix hoping to spark the SCSU offense. Instead, the back-up fumbled on first down and was sacked by LB Ashton Taylor on 3rd-and-2 from the JSU 25 forcing a punt.

In the final drive of the period that ended two snaps into the fourth quarter, JSU took possession at its own 36 and drove 64 yards in ten plays to score on Mulligan's short TD run and a 21-0 lead at the 14:48 mark.

SC State finally got on the scoreboard in the ensuing possession. Phoenix returned and hit sophomore wideout Nigel Johnson on a 64-yard run and catch down to the JSU 18. The gain was two more yards than the 62 yards the Bulldogs had mustered thru three quarters. After completing an 8-yard pass to Caden High on 4th-and-7 at the JSU 15, the Bulldogs scored two plays later when Phoenix went over on a 3-yard keeper to cut the lead to 21-7 with 11:13 to play.

JSU came right back to run off 11 plays – eight on runs – that covered 56 yards and took 5:36 off the clock before placekicker Gerardo Baeza was wide right on a 35-yard field goal.

Three plays into the following SC State possession, Phoenix was picked off by JSU LB Shemar Hawkins who returned the interception to the Bulldogs' 14. On first down from there, Morgan lofted another fade pass into the left endzone that Fortilien hauled in for his second TD and the 28-7 Tigers' lead.

SC State drove 43 yards in 10 plays to the JSU 8 on its final possession before it was stopped on downs with 1:34 to play.

Morgan was named the game's offensive MVP. Six-two, 285-pound redshirt senior defensive lineman Jeremiah Williams was a disruptive force in the interior and was the defensive MVP. Williams had three solo tackles, two for losses of 7 yards, and one of three sacks of Phoenix for -6 yards in the fourth quarter. Hawkins led the JSU defense with six stops, all solos and had the interception. Taylor had two solo stops including a sack.

"I was locked in the whole game," Williams said. "My coach told me from the get-go, 'own your gap.' I owned my gap all game."

SC State was led by all-MEAC linebacker Aaron Smith who had 17 total tackles, 12 solos. Washington had 10 stops while Addison had nine tackles and the interception. Sophomore lineman Josh Barker had 7 tackles, three for losses, and a strip sack of Morgan.



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**SWAC HALL OF FAMERS:** (L. to r.) Former Alcorn State QB and head coach Fred McNair, former 17-year Southern head coach Pete Richardson and veteran black college play-by-play man Charlie Neal were inducted into the SWAC Hall of Fame Saturday in Atlanta along with Arkansas-Pine Bluff track legend Earl Goldman and Grambling pitching legend Hillary Matthew Bossier.

## UNDER THE BANNER

WHAT'S GOING ON IN AND AROUND BLACK COLLEGE SPORTS

### BURGESS WINS AENEAS WILLIAMS AWARD:

Alabama State senior defensive back James Burgess has been named the winner of the 2024 *Aeneas Williams Award* given to the top defensive back in black college football.

Burgess, a 6-3, 185-pound native of Center Point, Alabama received the honor on behalf of the Oklahoma Sports Hall of Fame and presenting sponsor the Chickasaw Nation. The award is given based on performance on the field, athletic ability and character.

Burgess is the third recipient of the Aeneas Williams Award, established in 2022, and the first recipient from Alabama State and the SWAC. He posted an incredible senior season for the Hornets, ultimately being named as a 2024 BOXTOROW First Team All-American and 2024 First Team All-SWAC defensive back.

Burgess posted 53 tackles, 34 solos, with 4.0 tackles for loss, four interceptions and ten passes defended. He tied for first in interceptions in the SWAC and third in pass break-ups. Burgess was targeted 37 times with only nine making catches in man coverage.

Burgess will represent Alabama State as a 2025 selection to the Allstate *HBCU Legacy Bowl* and was named as a watch list player for the 2024 *Deacon Jones Trophy Black College Football Player of the Year*.

The Oklahoma Sports Hall of Fame and the Chickasaw Nation will honor Burgess as the 3rd Annual Aeneas Williams Award Winner at the 39th Anniversary of the Paycom Jim Thorpe Award Banquet in Oklahoma City on Feb. 4, 2025.

Also this weekend, former Jackson State defensive back/wide receiver Travis Hunter was named the 2024 recipient of the Heisman Trophy, given to the top player in college football. Hunter, a two-way star, started his career at JSU under head coach Deion Sanders before moving with Sanders two years ago to Colorado.

## THE STAT CORNER

WHO ARE THE BEST PERFORMERS IN BLACK COLLEGE SPORTS

### CELEBRATION BOWL HISTORY

CELEBRATION BOWL IX - 2024  
Jackson State 28, South Carolina State 7  
MEAC 6, SWAC 3

CELEBRATION BOWL VIII - 2023  
Florida A&M 30, Howard 26  
Mercedes-Benz Stadium – Atlanta, GA  
MEAC 6, SWAC 2

CELEBRATION BOWL VII - 2022  
North Carolina Central 41, Jackson State 34  
Mercedes-Benz Stadium – Atlanta, GA  
MEAC 6, SWAC 1

CELEBRATION BOWL VI - 2021  
South Carolina State 31, Jackson State 10  
Mercedes-Benz Stadium – Atlanta, GA  
MEAC 5, SWAC 1

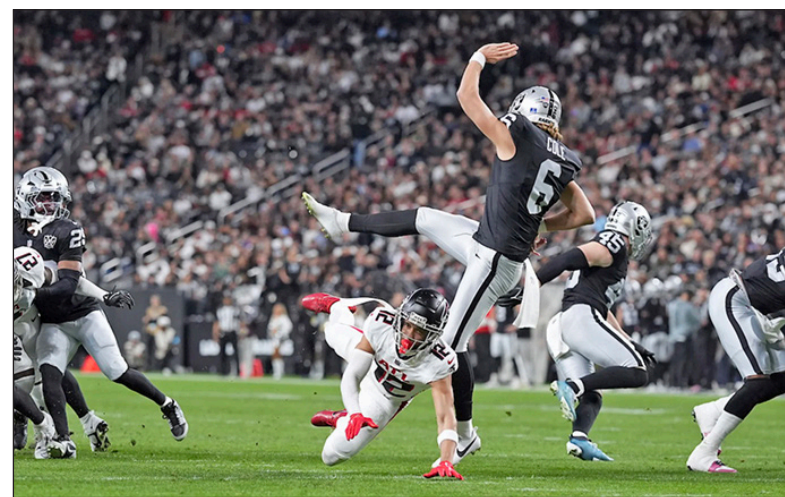
CELEBRATION BOWL V - 2019  
North Carolina A&T 64, Alcorn State 44  
Mercedes-Benz Stadium – Atlanta, GA  
MEAC 4, SWAC 1

CELEBRATION BOWL IV - 2018  
North Carolina A&T 24, Alcorn State 22  
Mercedes-Benz Stadium – Atlanta, GA  
MEAC 3, SWAC 1

CELEBRATION BOWL III - 2017  
North Carolina A&T 21, Grambling State 14  
Mercedes-Benz Stadium – Atlanta, GA  
MEAC 2, SWAC 1

CELEBRATION BOWL II - 2016  
Grambling State 10, North Carolina Central 9  
Georgia Dome – Atlanta, GA  
SWAC 1, MEAC 1

CELEBRATION BOWL I - 2015  
North Carolina A&T 41, Alcorn State 34  
Georgia Dome – Atlanta, GA  
MEAC 1, SWAC 0



**BOO YOW!!** Atlanta special teams' ace KHADAREL HODGE (#12, PRAIRIE VIEW A&M) blocks a punt by Las Vegas punter A. J. Cole (#6) in the third quarter of the Falcons' 15-9 win Monday night over the Raiders. The block led to an Atlanta field goal. (falcons.com photo)



**ACROBATIC PICK!!** Kansas City safety BRYAN COOK (#6, HOWARD / Cincinnati) goes high to pick off Cleveland QB Jameis Winson in the end zone during the Chiefs' 21-7 win over the Browns Sunday. (chiefs.com photo)

## BCSP NFL PLAYERS OF THE WEEK

For NFL games of December 12 - 16, 2024

**DEFENSE**  
- #6 BRYAN COOK, S, Kansas City (3rd season, HOWARD / CINCINNATI) - In Kansas City's 21-7 win over Carolina, Cook started at strong safety and finished with three total tackles, all solos, with an interception, one tackle for loss and one pass defended. Cook played 39 defensive snaps (63%) and 16 on special teams (62%).

- #2 JOSHUA WILLIAMS, DB, Kansas City (3rd season, FAYETTEVILLE STATE) - In Kansas City's 21-7 win over Carolina, Williams started at cornerback and tied for the team lead with five total tackles, three solos, and was credited with defending one pass. Williams played 44 defensive snaps (71%) and six on special teams (23%).

- #53 CLAUDIN CHERELUS, LB, Carolina (2nd season, ALCORN STATE) - In Carolina's 30-14 loss in to Dallas, Cherelus started at inside linebacker and was second on the team with nine total tackles, five solos. He played 53 defensive snaps (73%) and nine on special teams (36%).

**OFFENSE**  
#71 TYTUS HOWARD, OL, Houston (6th season, ALABAMA STATE) - In Houston's 20-12 win over Miami, Howard started at right offensive tackle as the Texans rushed for 77 yards on 20 carries and passed for 131 yards and two touchdowns while the Texans' line gave up four sacks (-27 yards). Howard was in on all 50 offensive plays (100%) and four on special teams (16%).

**SPECIAL TEAMS**  
- #12 KHADAREL HODGE, WR, Atlanta (6th season, PRAIRIE VIEW A&M) - In Atlanta's 15-9 win over Las Vegas, Hodge blocked a third-quarter Raiders' punt that led to a Falcons' field goal. Hodge was in for five offensive snaps (9%) and eight on special teams (32%).