

BLACK COLLEGE SPORTS PAGE



Morgan State Sports photo

STRAP UP!

HE'S BACK!!: Morgan State linebacker Erick Hunter back to terrorize MEAC after missing most of 2024 season.

MEAC PREDICTIONS ARE IN; NEW HOOPS COACH AT TENN STATE; NEW GRID COACH AT EDWARD WATERS

SC State tops MEAC forecast

South Carolina State, who ran thru the 2024 conference season undefeated, was picked to come out on top this season in voting revealed at Tuesday's Mid Eastern Athletic Conference (MEAC) Football Media Day at M&T Bank Stadium, the home of the NFL's Baltimore Ravens.

While head coach **Chennis Berry's** SCSU Bulldogs were picked to finish on top of the team race, **Morgan State** grabbed the top individual honors.

MSU senior linebacker **Erick Hunter** was picked as the preseason defensive player of the year and redshirt sophomore running back **Jason Collins Jr.** was selected as the league's top offensive player.

Hunter played sparingly in only two games last season but led the MEAC with 75 tackles in 2023. He is expected to resume his dominant play in 2025. Collins (5-9, 185) led the Bears

with 654 rushing yards and eight TDs averaging 5.6 yards per carry as he earned the league's rookie of the year award.

Perhaps the most MEAC buzz this season has been around new coaches **Michael Vick** at **Norfolk State** and **DeSean Jackson** at **Delaware State**. The former NFL standouts are taking over programs that have struggled to gain traction and get victories in conference play. All eyes and the national media will be watching the duo to see if they engineer a similar turnaround that NFL Hall of Famer **Deion Sanders** pulled off at **Jackson State** of the SWAC.

Trei Oliver's Eagles of **North Carolina Central** were picked to finish behind SC State followed by Morgan State, **Norfolk State**, **Howard** and **Delaware State**.

Eight of Oliver's players were named to the preseason first team, six on offense including redshirt senior quarterback **Walker Harris** (see

THE STAT CORNER).

Morgan State placed six players on the first team defense and special teams. Bears' head coach **Damon Wilson** placed one player each on the defensive line (sophomore **Dashawn Fields**) at linebacker (Hunter) and in the secondary (senior **Jadon Carter**). The Bears nearly swept the first team special teamers with junior punter **Shane Messenger**, redshirt sophomore place-kicker **Sahr Gbundema** and redshirtsophomore kick returner **Maliq Leatherbury**.

MEAC PREDICTED ORDER OF FINISH

1. South Carolina State (5) 63
2. North Carolina Central (4) 61
3. Morgan State 39
4. Norfolk State (1) 36
5. Howard (1) 33
6. Delaware State (1) 20

THE STAT CORNER

WHO ARE THE BEST PERFORMERS IN BLACK COLLEGE SPORTS

2025 PRESEASON ALL-MEAC FOOTBALL SELECTIONS

OFFENSIVE PLAYER OF THE YEAR
Jason Collins Jr., R-So., RB, Morgan State
DEFENSIVE PLAYER OF THE YEAR
Erick Hunter, Sr., LB, Morgan State

FIRST TEAM OFFENSE
QB Walker Harris, R-Sr., NCCU
RB Kevon King, Sr., NSU
RB Eden James, Sr., HOW
WR Kam'Ryn Thomas, Sr., NSU
WR NyGhee Lolley, R-Sr., DSU
TE Luke Bracey, Sr., NCCU
C Noah McKinney, Sr., NCCU
OL Trevon Humphrey, R-Jr., NCCU
OL Tim Artis Jr., R-Jr., HOW
OL Vincent Byrd Jr., Sr., NSU
OL AC McMoore, Jr., NCCU

FIRST TEAM DEFENSE
DL Noah Miles, Sr., HOW
DL Ishaun Abdul-Ali, Jr., HOW
DL Dashawn Fields, So., MSU
DL Marquise Brunson, R-Jr., DSU
LB Max U'Ren, R-Sr., NCCU
LB Erick Hunter, R-Sr., MSU
LB Daylan Long, R-Sr., NSU
DB Malcolm Reed, Sr., NCCU
DB Jarod Washington, Sr., SCSU
DB Jadon Carter, Sr., MSU
DB Jelani Vassell, R-Sr., NCCU

FIRST TEAM SPECIAL TEAMS
P Shane Messenger, Jr., MSU
PK Sahr Gbundema, R-So., MSU
RS Jaylen White *, R-Sr., NSU
RS Maliq Leatherbury *, R-So., MSU

SECOND TEAM OFFENSE
QB Ja'Shawn Scroggins, R-Jr., HOW
RB Jason Collins Jr., R-So., MSU
RB Marquis Gillis R-Sr., DSU
WR Maliq Leatherbury, R-So., MSU
WR Chance Peterson, R-So., NCCU
TE Edward Core, Gr., DSU
C Daniel Casillas, Sr., MSU
OL Kahari Finley, R-Jr., MSU
OL Treyvon Branch, Sr., MSU
OL Isaiah Cook, R-Sr., DSU
OL Roger Smith, Sr., SCSU

SECOND TEAM DEFENSE
DL Anthony Johnson, So., DSU
DL Keshawn Lynch, Sr., NSU
DL Josh Barker, Jr., SCSU
DL Christian Smith, R-Sr., NCCU
LB Terique Miles, Gr., NSU
LB Arturo Mattocks, Sr., MSU
LB Brian Bates, Jr., DSU
DB Kahleef Jimmison, Gr., NSU
DB Jayden Smith, Gr., NSU

SECOND TEAM SPECIAL TEAMS
P Noah Tracey, Jr., NSU
PK Kaleb Robison, So., NCCU
RS Anthony Reagan Jr., So., HOW

2025 PRESEASON OVC/BIG SOUTH SELECTIONS, PLAYERS TO WATCH

Despite earning a share of the OVC/Big South title a year ago under then head coach **Eddie George**, **Tennessee State** under new head coach **Reggie Barlow** was picked to finish eighth in a vote of the OVC-Big South Football Association head coaches. The low forecast for TSU may have something to do with the Tigers losing a whopping 46 players to the transfer portal after George's departure.



Barlow

Tennessee Tech picked up five of the nine first-place votes and 57 points to claim the top spot. That was one point ahead of UT Martin, who received two first-place votes and 56 points. The UT Skyhawks have won or shared four-straight league football crowns (2021, 2022, 2023, 2024). Southeast Missouri, who also shared the Association title last year, picked up the other two first-place votes and 53 points and was tabbed third. Lindenwood rounded out the top four with 39 votes, while Western Illinois (30), Eastern Illinois (24), Gardner-Webb (24), Tennessee State (23) and Charleston Southern (18) concluded the nine-team poll.

The Association's head coaches also voted Lindenwood running back Steve Hall as the Preseason Offensive Player of the Year while UT cornerback JaMichael McGoy, Jr. was tabbed as the Preseason Defensive Player of the Year.

TSU redshirt sophomores **Sammy Taylor** (LB), **Camani Cobbs** (DC) and **Mark Shenouda** (P) were tabbed as Players to Watch on Defense and Special Teams. Taylor returns after a strong sophomore campaign, with 15 solo tackles in the 2024 season. Known for his coverage instincts and physical play, Cobbs is expected to be a cornerstone of the Tigers' pass defense. Shenouda punted for 1,608 yards, eight of which were inside the 20 in the 2024 season.

On the offensive side, **Delanie "Juice" Majors**, a junior wide receiver, earned a spot on the Preseason Wide Receiver Watch List. In his first season, Majors tallied 15 receptions for 149 yards and a touchdown. Joining him is junior tight end **Jason Hoath Jr.**, recognized for his consistency in blocking and receiving. Hoath notched 86 yards on nine receptions in 2024. Graduate offensive lineman **Anthony Smith** rounds out the offensive selections.

Toriano Morgan out to Tennessee State, Brian Jenkins in as head coach at Edward Waters

Four-year head coach **Toriano Morgan** has left **Edward Waters** for **Tennessee State** and longtime black college mentor **Brian Jenkins** has been installed as the Tigers' interim head coach.

Morgan, who compiled an 18-24 record in four years leading EWU and had previously agreed to a three-year contract extension with the school in December 2023, resigned last Wednesday (7/16) to join head coach **Reggie Barlow** at TSU.

Morgan, a TSU graduate, had led EWU during the football program's transition from the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) to NCAA Division II status.

He will be the co-offensive coordinator and running backs coach for Barlow at TSU. A South Florida native, Morgan had previously worked as offensive coordinator at **Virginia State** when Barlow led the Trojans from 2016 to 2021.

The other co-offensive coordinator is **Shannon Harris**, also a TSU alum and former quarterback for the Tigers, who replaced Barlow as head coach of the UFL's DC Defenders this season and led that team to the league championship.

Also on Barlow's star-studded TSU staff are Tampa Bay Buccaneers' Super Bowl XXXVII MVP **Dexter Jackson** as safeties coach and former NFL head coach and longtime defensive guru **Gregg Williams** as defensive coordinator.

Jenkins, who has worked alongside Morgan since 2021 and has nearly 30 years of coaching experience, is back in Florida as a head coach for the second time in his career.

Jenkins, 54, served as head coach at **Bethune-Cookman** from 2010-14, where he compiled a 46-14 record and won the **Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference's** coach of the year award in 2010, 2012 and 2013. His Wildcats teams won or tied for first in the MEAC four times and appeared three times in the Football Championship Subdivision (FCS) playoffs.

He subsequently moved to **Alabama State** in December 2014 where he coached until he was let go in October 2017 with a 9-17 record. Jenkins also has assistant coaching stints at Eastern Illinois (1995-99), Bowling Green (2000), the Frankfurt Galaxy of NFL Europe (2001), Louisiana-Lafayette (2002-08), Rutgers (2009), **Alabama A&M** (2018) and **North Carolina Central** (2019).

Nolan Smith to lead Tenn. State men's hoops

NASHVILLE — **Tennessee State** named **Nolan Smith** as its new head men's basketball coach Friday, bringing in a national champion, former NBA player, and one of the most respected young coaches in college basketball.

"It's an honor and a privilege to be named head coach at TSU," Smith said in a statement from the university.

"First and foremost, I'm ready to give my heart and energy to our players every single day as we prepare to win and proudly represent the university and the state. I'm excited to immerse myself in the TSU and Nashville community and contribute far beyond the court. I'm built for this challenge — and TSU is built to win. So let's win! Go Tigers!"

"Nolan Smith is a championship-caliber leader with elite playing experience, high basketball IQ, and a proven track record of developing NBA talent," said Director of Athletics **Dr. Mikki Allen**.

The press conference to introduce Smith as head coach was held Monday in the Tiger Den inside Hank Hall on the campus of Tennessee State University.

Smith as a Coach

Smith joins TSU following the 2024-25 season as an assistant coach at the University of Memphis under Penny Hardaway. At Memphis, he played a key role in player development and recruiting, helping guide a young roster through one of the toughest non-conference schedules in the country

and a competitive American Athletic Conference slate.

Before Memphis, Smith served two seasons as an assistant coach at the University of Louisville (2022-24), where he was instrumental in roster development and known for his mentorship of guards. He joined Louisville after six seasons on the coaching staff at his alma mater, Duke University.

"If anyone is deserving of this position, it's Nolan," said Memphis head men's basketball coach Penny Hardaway on Smith's hire. "He is prepared and ready for the job. Nolan's time at Memphis was short, but he made a huge impact on our program. I'm very confident he will do the same at TSU."

Smith spent his entire playing career at Duke under Hall of Fame coach Mike Krzyzewski, widely regarded as one of the greatest coaches in college basketball history. That experience helped shape Smith's foundation as a tactician, motivator, and leader.

Roaming the Cameron Indoor sidelines, Smith began as a special assistant before being promoted to director of basketball operations and player development. In 2021, he was elevated to assistant coach. During his tenure, he helped guide the Blue Devils to multiple NCAA Tournament appearances, including a Final Four run in 2022 and several ACC championships. Smith worked closely with NBA-bound stars such as Zion Williamson, Jayson Tatum, RJ Barrett, and Paolo Banchemo. In total, 25 players he coached at



Givens



Reed



Terrell

Eight from black college ranks make preseason STATS Perform FCS Preseason All-America Team

Four players from the **Southwestern Athletic Conference** (SWAC) and four from the **Mid Eastern Athletic Conference** (MEAC) were named last week to the STATS Perform FCS Preseason All-America Team.

Named to the first team were **Southern** senior defensive tackle **Clayton Givens**, the preseason SWAC defensive player of the year, **North Carolina Central** senior defensive back **Malcolm Reed** and dangerous **Jackson State** kick returner, sophomore **Travis Terrell Jr.** Terrell was a preseason 2025 first team all-SWAC selection at the same position.

Givens (6-2, 230) led the SWAC and was second in the FCS in tackles for loss totalling 27.5 or 2.12 per game among 73 stops in the 2024 season. He also registered 12 sacks to finish second in the SWAC and sixth in the FCS.

Reed (6-3, 180) was second on NCCU with 60 tackles in 11 games in 2024 with 34 solo stops en route to earning first team all-MEAC honors. He also had a fumble return for a touchdown and two interceptions.

As a freshman, Terrell (5-8, 165) led the SWAC in both kick returns (30.6 ypr.) and punt returns (16.7 ypg.) and finished fifth in the FCS in Combined Kick Returns. He was third in the FCS in punt returns and fourth in kickoff returns.

The lone second team selection was **Morgan State** senior linebacker **Erick Hunter**, who sat out most of the 2024 season with an injury. The 6-4, 210 pounder was a first team all-MEAC selection prior to the 2024 season after leading the MEAC with 75 total tackles (7.5 pg.) in 2023.

On the third team are **Florida A&M** redshirt senior offensive lineman **Ashton Grable**, **Jackson State** redshirt senior defensive lineman **Jeremiah Williams** (6-3, 285) and **Howard** senior defensive lineman **Noah Miles**. Morgan State sophomore **Maliq Leatherbury** (5-9, 160) was named the third team punt returner. He led the MEAC with 17.9 yards per punt return, second best in the FCS.

Duke went on to the NBA.

"I'm so happy for Nolan and his beautiful family," said Krzyzewski. "Nolan was an All-American and a national champion at Duke. He was a joy to coach, and our fans loved him — they called him 'The People's Champ.' He was also an exceptional assistant coach. Now, he's ready to be an exceptional head coach at Tennessee State. I'm incredibly proud of him."

Smith as a player

As a player, Smith was one of the most decorated guards in Duke history.

From 2007 to 2011, he helped lead the Blue Devils to the 2010 NCAA national championship. He was named the South Regional Most Outstanding Player and earned All-Final Four honors during that run. As a senior in 2011, Smith averaged 20.6 points per game, led the ACC in scoring, and was named ACC Player of the Year, ACC Tournament MVP, and a consensus First-Team All-American. He finished his collegiate career with 1,911 points, ranking 17th all-time in Duke history.

Smith was selected with the 21st overall pick in the 2011 NBA Draft by the Portland Trail Blazers. He played two seasons in the NBA before continuing his professional career in the NBA G League and overseas, including stops in Croatia and Turkey.

Smith in the Community

Off the court, Smith is known for his activism and community



Tennessee State Sports photo

SMITH: At Monday's introductory press conference at TSU.

engagement. He serves on the board of the Durham-based non-profit "The Brotherhood," which focuses on mentorship, empowerment, and education for young men of color. He's also been a national advocate for mental health awareness, player rights, and racial equity in college athletics.

Smith is the son of the late Derek Smith, a former NBA player and assistant coach, and has long carried on his father's legacy both on and off the court.

Tennessee State is coming off a 17-16 season in 2024-25, including a 12-8 mark in Ohio Valley Conference play in its seventh year under former head coach **Brian "Penny" Collins**. Collins stepped down to take a job with the NBA's Memphis Grizzlies. TSU ranked among the conference leaders in rebounding margin and was led by guards **Aaron Nkrumah** and **Travis Harper II**, and forward **Carlous Williams**.