



Keenan Yusuf Palmer photo

FOOTBALL SEASON FINALES

SC STATE TAKES CELEBRATION BOWL TITLE, TOP FINAL BCSP RANKING; ALBANY STATE TAKES D2 CROWN, LOSING GRAY

REDEMPTION: SC State head coach Chennis Berry raises Celebration Bowl championship trophy after his team's epic come-from-behind win Saturday.

SCORES

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 13
CELEBRATION BOWL X

South Carolina State 40, Prairie View A&M 38, 4 OTs



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ALL WINNERS: (L. to r.) Celebration Bowl winning coaches T. C. Taylor (Jackson State, Celebration Bowl IX, 2024), Willie Simmons (Florida A&M, Celebration Bowl VIII, 2023) and Sam Washington (NC A&T, Celebration Bowl IV, 2018 and Celebration Bowl V, 2019) pose with their red jackets given for leading their teams to wins in the big game. Trei Oliver (North Carolina Central, Celebration Bowl VII, 2022), Oliver "Buddy" Pough (South Carolina State, Celebration Bowl VI, 2021) and Rob Broadway (North Carolina A&T, Celebration Bowl I, 2015 and Celebration Bowl III, 2017) were also on hand at Saturday's game donning their red jackets. The only CB-winning head coach absent was Broderick Fobbs (Grambling State, Celebration Bowl II, 2016). South Carolina State head coach Chennis Berry will now get his red jacket after his team's 40-38 come-from-behind, 4-overtime win over Prairie View A&M in Celebration Bowl X in Atlanta.

UNDER THE BANNER

WHAT'S GOING ON IN AND AROUND BLACK COLLEGE SPORTS

QUINN GRAY LEAVING ALBANY STATE:

Albany State announced Monday that third-year head football coach **Quinn Gray** will be departing the program to pursue another leadership opportunity. Longtime Assistant Coach **Anthony Kelly** will assume the role of interim head Football coach while the University conducts a national search.

Coach Gray's accomplishments mark a historic chapter for ASU Football. In three seasons, he led the Golden Rams to a 24-11 record, delivered a program-best 12-win season in 2025, and guided ASU to its first-ever NCAA Division II Quarterfinals appearance. His tenure included two SIAC Championship appearances, culminating in the 2025 title, and ushered in sustained competitive excellence along with a resurgence of alumni and community engagement.

Speculation is rampant that Gray will be named the new head coach at his alma mater, **Florida A&M**, who recently announced the dismissal of head coach **James Colzie II** after he posted a 12-12 mark over two seasons.

Gray was a record-setting quarterback at FAMU from 1999 to 2002 before an eight-year NFL career.

HAMPTON NAMES MALONE ITS NEW MAN:

HAMPTON, Va. (Dec. 12, 2025) **Van Malone** was named the 23rd head football coach in **Hampton University** history, when he was announced Friday by Director of Athletics **Anthony D. Henderson Sr.**

Malone comes to Hampton after spending the last seven seasons as assistant head coach, pass game coordinator and defensive backs coach at Kansas State. During his tenure, the Wildcats, posted a 53-34 (.609) record and earned five bowl invitations: the Liberty Bowl (2019), the Texas Bowl (2021), the Sugar Bowl (2022), the Pop-Tarts Bowl (2023), and the Rate Bowl (2024).

"Hampton University is a place of purpose, pride and possibility. My staff and families are beyond excited to begin our journey together," said Malone. "With the Hampton Nation, we will build a program rooted in leadership, accountability and service --- a family committed to excellence on-and-off the field. Our mission is simple: develop men, elevate our community and compete for championships one relationship at a time."

Malone has built an impressive resume as a player and coach on both the college and professional levels. A defensive back, he played at Texas from 1990-93 and was a 1990 freshman All-American. He was a second-round (57th overall) draft pick by the Detroit Lions and played for the Lions (1994-97), then signed with the Arizona Cardinals before retiring due to injury.

He spent five years as a high school coach before coaching collegiately at North Dakota State, Western Michigan, North Texas State, Texas A&M Tulsa and Mississippi State.

Down 21-0, SC State surges to Celebration Bowl win

LUT WILLIAMS
BCSP Editor

ATLANTA, GA – Many of the 26,763 fans at Saturday's *Celebration Bowl X* at Atlanta's Mercedes-Benz Stadium likely thought the game was all but over when SWAC champion **Prairie View A&M** dominated the first half and went into the break with a 21-0 lead over MEAC champion **South Carolina State**.

But, boy were they (we) wrong!

A Prairie View turnover in its first second-half possession deep in its own territory was just the opening **Chennis Berry's** South Carolina State squad needed. The 5-yard scoring run by running back **Tyler Smith** on the next play constituted the first of 40 second-half points that propelled the Bulldogs (10-3) to a stunning 40-38 victory that they needed four overtimes to pull out.

"You gotta believe," said an amped-up Berry in his postgame comments after his Bulldogs pulled off the improbable win. "I didn't chew anybody out at halftime. I just told them, if they didn't believe, then don't leave this locker room."

South Carolina State stormed out of the locker room and put together the largest comeback in the first multi-overtime game in Celebration Bowl history to earn the 2025 FCS black college national championship.

HOW IT UNFOLDED

The Prairie View turnover, on a botched wide receiver reverse that gave SC State the ball at the Panthers' 5-yard line, opened the door for the Bulldogs. The play of back-up grad senior quarterback **Ryan Stubblefield** (15-29-1, 234 yards, 2 TDs, 1 rushing TD) blew the door off.

He entered the game on the last SC State possession of the first half after starter **William Atkins IV** went out with an injury to his throwing arm after passing for just 45 yards. Stubblefield hit on 2 of 6 passes before the final of five first-half Bulldog punts.

But after his team got on the scoreboard early in the second half, he caught fire. Stubblefield needed just two plays to get his squad to paydirt again. Starting at his own 48 after a Prairie View punt, he connected with **Nigel Johnson** on a 42-yard hook up deep down the right sideline to the Prairie View 10. On the next play, wideout **Jordan Smith** ran it in from there and with 8:34 to play in the third quarter, it was 21-14 and we had a game.

Prairie View, obviously rattled after cruising to the big lead, had another three-and-out, augmented by a delay of game penalty. The Panthers' punt gave SC State the ball on Prairie View's side of the field at the 49. Stubblefield hit Johnson for 14 yards before a pass interference penalty gained the Bulldogs 30 yards to the PV 19. On the next play, Stubblefield hit Smith on a short pass in the left flat and he ran untouched to the end zone. With 5:05 left in the period, we had a new game with the teams knotted at 21.

But it was far from over. In fact, this is where the real back-and-forth began. The teams traded touchdowns over the final 20 minutes.

PV got a 13-yard hookup on QB **Cameron Peters** to **Andre Dennis** to complete a six-play, 75-yard drive at the 2:38 mark of the third period. Stubblefield then engineered a 12-play, 78-yard drive capped by his 1-yard scoring plunge with 10:44 left in the final period to tie the score at 28.

Two plays after the kickoff, Peters (24-35-0, 412 yards, 4 TDs) hit

WR **Cameron Bonner** on a 78-yard catch and run TD down the right sideline for a 35-28 Panthers' lead with 9:53 left. In the ensuing 13-play, 62-yard drive that knotted the score at 35 and sent the game to overtime, Stubblefield hit Smith (9 catches, 152 yards, 2 TDs) for 19 yards on 3rd-and-10 from the SCSU 38 and later hit Smith on a 23-yard game-saving pass over the middle on 4th-and-16 from the PV 37. The duo capped the drive with a 10-yard scoring pass with 1:54 to play.

Both teams got a final possession before entering the overtime periods.

In the first OT from the 25-yard line, the teams traded field goals. Prairie View's **Diego Alfaro** was good first from 29 yards out before SC State's **Nico Cavanillos Altı** tied in on a clutch 40-yarder.

In the second OT from the 25, SCSU got the ball first but Stubblefield was picked off at the goal line. Alfaro was then wide right on a potential game-winning 31-yard field goal sending the game to a third extra period that by rule began at the 3-yard line with just one play for each team to score.

Peters' pass failed in Prairie View's possession as did Stubblefield on the Bulldogs' chance. It then triggering the fourth extra period from the 3.

In the SC State possession, Stubblefield rolled right and hit Tyler Smith who stretched the ball at the right pylon that the official ruled a touchdown. It triggered a lengthy review before the call was upheld. In Prairie View's turn, Peters was pressured and tried to run forward before he was tackled and went down in the backfield.

OUTCOMES

• For his second-half heroics, Stubblefield was named the game's offensive MVP, an award that could have easily gone to his compadre Jordan Smith after his clutch catches and three-touchdown second-half performance.



Stubblefield

"At halftime, I didn't think plays but playmakers," Berry said postgame. "I said 'we have to get the ball to our best playmaker (Smith) and that's what we did.'"

• SC State defensive back **Brenyen Scott**, who led the Bulldogs with nine stops, seven solos, earned the game's defensive MVP honors.



Smith

• Cameron Peters, Prairie View's grad senior QB, certainly did his part. His 412 passing yards broke the Celebration Bowl passing yardage record of 364 yards set by **North Carolina A&T** quarterback **Kyil Carter** during his six-touchdown performance against **Alcorn State** in 2019.

• Prairie View outgained S. C. State 319 to 80 yards in the first half and only allowed the Bulldogs past midfield once. At that point it looked eerily like last year's 14-0 Jackson State halftime lead en route to a 28-7 beatdown of Berry's Bulldogs. For the game, PV outgained SC State 491 to 357 yards.

• Peters accounted for all 21 first-half Panther points, throwing for touchdowns of 16 yards (to **Ethan John**) and 14 yards (to **Iyzaiah Rockwell**) and scoring on a 17-yard QB draw. Dennis finished with seven catches for 131 yards.

• Neither Prairie View (55 yards, 30 carries) or S. C. State (41 carries, 78 yards) rushed for 100 yards.

• The win by the MEAC champion breaks a two-year win streak for the SWAC champs and gives the MEAC a 7-3 edge in the series.

2025 FINAL BCSP DIV. I FCS TOP FIVE

1) **SOUTH CAROLINA STATE** (10-3) - The Bulldogs earned their second Celebration Bowl title (after their 2021 title under Buddy Pough) and the black college BCSP FCS national crown with their 40-38, 4-overtime victory over SWAC champion Prairie View A&M Saturday. Second-year head coach Chennis Berry's Bulldogs ran thru the MEAC unscathed (5-0) for their second straight conference crown and Celebration Bowl berth. Two of their three losses were to FBS opponents, 38-10 to South Carolina and 63-14 to South Florida. Their other loss was a close 31-24 decision on the road at Charleston Southern. Grad senior QB William Atkins IV took over as the starter in mid season and led the Bulldogs to five straight MEAC wins before senior Ryan Stubblefield led the bowl-game win.

2) **PRAIRIE VIEW A&M** (10-4) - In head coach Tremaine Jackson's first season, the Panthers won the SWAC West with a 7-1 mark and defeated East winner Jackson State 23-21 to earn their first SWAC title since 2009 (under Henry Frazier) and their first-ever Celebration Bowl appearance. They lost Saturday to S. C. State, 40-38 in four overtimes. Their only loss during an 8-1 SWAC campaign was at home to Alabama State, 31-28. Other losses were to UT-Rio Grand Valley (27-21) and Rice (38-17). Resilient QB play from Cameron Peters and a stingy defense spurred the Panthers' run.

3) **ALABAMA STATE** (9-2) - The Hornets under Eddie Robinson Jr. tied Jackson State for the SWAC East title at 7-1 but fell to the Tigers in head-to-head competition, 38-34. Their only other blemish was a hard-fought season-opening loss at UAB 52-42. Junior QB Andrew Body played in only eight games but his over 1,700 passing yards, 70.6 completion percentage, 20 passing TDs with 1 interception, 518 rushing yards and four TDs were enough to earn the SWAC offensive player of the year award.

4) **JACKSON STATE** (9-3) - Third-year head coach T. C. Taylor led the Tigers to their second straight SWAC East crown at 7-1 but fell to West champ Prairie View A&M, 23-21 in the conference title game. JSU also lost at home in Las Vegas to Grambling State (26-24) and at Southern Miss (38-20). Grad senior QB Jacobian Morgan was the standout but the Tigers persevered thru his injuries

5) **DELAWARE STATE** (8-4) - In head coach DeSean Jackson's first season, the former NFL standout led the Hornets to the brink of an MEAC title, falling at home to SC State 28-17 in what was in effect the MEAC title game. It was the only MEAC loss for DSU who also suffered close losses to Delaware (35-17), Sacred Heart (35-31) and Monmouth (49-38). The league's best rushing attack led by the duo of Marquis Gillis and James Jones accounted for over 2,000 rushing yards

2025 FINAL BCSP NCAA DIV. II / NAIA TOP FIVE

1) **ALBANY STATE** (12-2) - Third-year head coach Quinn Gray led the Golden Rams to their first SIAC title in his tenure knocking off Benedict 22-16 in the league's championship game to complete an 8-0 run thru the conference. The Rams, as the top seed in the NCAA Div. Super Region II, got two playoff wins over Valdosta State (35-30) and Benedict (14-12), their third win of the season over Benedict, to advance to the regional final. There they fell to Newberry, 31-24. The only other loss was in the regular season at Florida A&M of the SWAC (33-25). Senior QB Isaiah Knowles, the SIAC offensive player of the year, and Div. II's top defense (258.5 ypg., 1st and 14.4 ppg., 3rd) led their championship march.

2) **JOHNSON C. SMITH** (10-2) - Head coach Maurice Flowers led his alma mater to its first CIAA title since 1969 as they avenged their only regular season loss (28-10 at Virginia Union) by knocking off two-time defending champion VUU in the league's title game, 45-21. The Golden Bulls, seeded second in Div. II's Super Region I, lost in the first round on its home field to Frostburg State, 21-7. Senior QB Kelvin Durham and freshman running back Bobby Smith, both all-CIAA first team picks, led the Bulls.

3) **VIRGINIA UNION** (9-3) - Dr. Alvin Parker's Panthers could not make it three CIAA titles in a row as they fell to J. C. Smith in the league title game, 45-21. They then bowed out of the Div. II Region I playoffs first round losing at home as a 3rd-seed to California (PA) 27-24. The Panthers also lost an early season match up at Edward Waters, 41-38. Senior running back Curtis Allen broke Jada Byers' school rushing record and led all of Div. II in rushing (2,466 yards, 200.5 ypg.), touchdowns (30), all-purpose yards (205.8 ypg.) and scoring (180 points, 15.0 ppg.).

4) **BENEDICT** (10-3) - Ron Dickerson's Tigers of Benedict defeated all comers except Albany State, who handed his squad all three of its losses - 31-3 in the regular season, 22-16 in the SIAC title game and 14-12 in the Div. II playoffs second round. Dickerson's troops got closer each time. The Tigers had a miraculous throw-back kickoff return TD on the final play of the game to knock off Wingate 25-24 in a first round D2 playoff game. Sophomore RB Tiant Wyche ran for 1,051 yards and 12 TDs to lead the Tigers.

5) **KENTUCKY STATE** (9-3) Kentucky State, under third-year head coach Felton Huggins, was perhaps the surprise black college team of the season. The Thoroughbreds only had back-to-back losses to eventual SIAC champion Albany State (49-21) and SWAC member Grambling State (37-31) in the regular season. It was good enough to earn an NCAA Div. II playoff berth where they fell in the first round to eventual regional champ Newberry, 45-24. Freshman RB Chad Elzy (789 rushing yards, 13 TDs) was a standout performer.

BCSP NFL PLAYERS OF THE WEEK

For NFL games of December 11 -15, 2025

OFFENSE

- **#22 JACORY CROSEY-MERRITT**, RB, Washington (Rookie, **ALABAMA STATE/Arizona**) - In Washington's 29-28 win over the New York Giants Sunday, JCM came off the bench to lead the Commanders with 96 yards in 18 carries (5.3 yards per carry) with a long run of 16 yards that he scored on early in the second quarter. He fumbled once but Washington did not lose possession. He was not targeted in the passing game. He was in for 32 (52%) of the offensive snaps.

OFFENSE & SPECIAL TEAMS

- **#33 BHAYSHUL TUTEN**, RB, Jacksonville (Rookie, **NORTH CAROLINA A&T/Virginia Tech**) - In the Jaguars' 48-20 win over the New York Jets Sunday, Tuten had one carry for 7 yards and one reception in his only target for a 16-yard second-quarter touchdown. He also had three kickoff returns for 93 yards (31.0 yards per return) with a long return of 43 yards. He got in for 11 snaps on offense (18%) and five on special teams (17%).

DEFENSE

- **#6 BRYAN COOK**, S, Kansas City (3rd season, **HOWARD / Cincinnati**) - In the Chiefs' 16-13 loss to the Los Angeles Chargers Sunday, Cook started at safety and finished with



jaguars.com photo

CLEARED FOR LANDING!!

Jacksonville rookie RB/KR **BHAYSHUL TUTEN** (#33, **NC A&T / Virginia Tech**) completes the catch and looks to land on his 17-yard scoring reception Sunday against the New York Jets. Tuten was untouched and rolled into the end zone in the Jaguars' 48-20 win Sunday. He also had 93 return yards.

seven total tackles, five solos with one tackle for loss. He also had one solo tackle on special teams. He was in for all 66 defensive snaps (100%) and four on special teams (17%).