

**BLACK COLLEGE
SPORTS**™



NC A&T Athletics Photo

FANTASTIC FINISHES, STARTS

HOWARD'S WHEELER UFL BOWL MVP; NC A&T, HOWARD STANDOUT AT D1 TRACK; FOOTBALL MEDIA DAYS LOOM

BEST FINISH: NCAA&T's 400 meter hurdler Isaiah Taylor's third-place finish at the NCAA Div. I Track & Field championships was the best among the HBCU participants and led the Aggies to a tie for 12th.

UNDER THE BANNER

WHAT'S GOING ON IN AND AROUND BLACK COLLEGE SPORTS



THE PIVOT TO HOST MEAC MEDIA DAY:

NORFOLK, Va. -- The **Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference** (MEAC) has announced that its 2026 Football Media Day will return to M&T Bank Stadium, home of the National Football League's (NFL) Baltimore Ravens, on Tuesday, July 21.

This year's event will feature *The Pivot*, the acclaimed sports podcast hosted by former NFL standouts Ryan Clark, Channing Crowder and Fred Taylor, bringing one of the nation's most influential sports media platforms to the conference's marquee preseason event.

Returning to M&T Bank Stadium for the second consecutive year, the MEAC will showcase its premier football programs on one of the sport's biggest stages. The event will spotlight the conference's student-athletes and head coaches, while providing a preview of the upcoming season. It also reflects the MEAC's continued partnership with the NFL, a relationship that has created valuable opportunities and increased visibility for the conference and its member institutions.

"It is a tremendous honor to return to M&T Bank Stadium, home of the Baltimore Ravens once again this year, and to be joined by The Pivot as part of this year's Media Day," said MEAC Commissioner **Sonja Stills**. "I extend my heartfelt thanks to Sashi Brown for granting us this opportunity to showcase the MEAC on such a remarkable stage, and to The Pivot for their partnership and involvement in this year's event. This partnership amplifies the longstanding relationship between the NFL and our HBCU conferences, and I look forward to its continued growth for years to come."

"We are honored to host the MEAC Football Media Day at M&T Bank Stadium for the second consecutive year," said Ravens President Sashi Brown. "A cornerstone of Black collegiate athletics, the MEAC's eight HBCU programs represent their communities with outstanding pride, excellence and purpose — both on the field and in the classroom."

"MEAC Football Media Day provides an opportunity to celebrate the student-athletes, coaches, and institutions that continue to shape the game of football while preparing young people for success in life," said Troy Vincent, Sr. Executive Vice President of NFL Football Operations. "As we look ahead to another season, we celebrate the power of football to bring people together, create opportunity, and inspire the next generation."

Head coaches and select student-athletes from each MEAC football program will take center stage, providing media with exclusive access to the voices, storylines and season outlooks that will define the 2026 MEAC football season.

Howard's Wheeler MVP of UFL Bowl



Wheeler

WASHINGTON, DC — Former **Howard** running back **Ian Wheeler**, whose 51-yard TD gallop was the go-ahead touchdown in the Louisville Kings 29-20 win over the St. Louis Battlehawks in the UFL semifinals, had a 44-yard go-ahead scoring run as the Kings defeated the DC Defenders 27-20 in Saturday's championship game here before a sellout crowd at Audi Field.

Wheeler (5-10, 206) was named United Bowl MVP after rushing for 81 yards on 10 carries (8.1 yards per carry) and scoring that go-ahead touchdown.

"My offensive line did a good job," Wheeler said in describing both scores.

Versus St. Louis, he bounced an off-tackle play to the right outside and then used his 4.39 40 speed to outrun the cornerback to paydirt.

The score vs. the Defenders was on an outside zone run left where he cut back and ran untouched into the end zone.

"You're not catching 33," the commentator said of that score.

The championship marked a historic finish for the Kings (7-4), a first-year expansion franchise. After a rough start to their inaugural season, the Kings completed a remarkable turnaround to win the UFL title in their debut year. The title win came versus the Defenders, last year's UFL champion.

"We started the year kind of slow but we made some personnel decisions that led to a pretty solid season," Wheeler, 24, a Houston native, said in a phone interview Tuesday. "I'd give us an eight out of ten (on the season) overall.

"This was by first go-round in the UFL," he said. "It was quite an adjustment from the NFL. But they are doing a good job of getting players and allowing them to showcase their talent."

The Defenders featured two former black college players on its roster, cornerback **Willie Drew** out of **Virginia State** and former **Lincoln (Pa.)** cornerback **Kai Gray**.

In the regular season, Wheeler carried 68 times for 386 yards (5.4 yards per carry) and scored six touchdowns in nine games. He also had six receptions for 36 yards. In two playoff games, he totalled 170 rushing yards on 17 carries (10.0 ypc.) with the two scores.

In his Howard career (2020-23) as a versatile running back and kick returner, Wheeler rushed for 1,154 yards and 14 TDs averaging a healthy 6.5 yards per carry. He also had 23 receptions for 234 yards. His three kickoff return TDs is a school record. He had 2,476 all-purpose yards in his career.

His best season was in 2021 when he rushed for 460 yards and 8 TDs and also had 265 kickoff return yards with one score.

Off the field, Wheeler majored in chemistry at Howard, finished with a 3.57 cumulative GPA and was accepted into Howard's med school. His intention was to go to medical school if the NFL didn't come calling.

He went undrafted in 2024 but was signed to a free agent contract by the Chicago Bears. Before tearing his ACL in the final preseason game of his rookie year, Wheeler made national headlines as a featured player on HBO's *Hard Knocks* after a massive NFL debut against the Buffalo Bills. He scored two TDs in a 33-6 preseason blowout.

He spent the 2024-25 season on the Bears' IR recovering from his injury. He returned to the Bears in 2025 and rushed for 100 yards averaging 3.8 yards per carry in two games but was cut.

"I wasn't consistent enough in my head," is what he says of his stints with the Bears. His plan now is to "keep the (NFL) dream alive, stay in shape and wait for the next opportunity."



Howard Sports Photo



Louisville Kings Photo

IAN WHEELER: At Howard (l.) and with the Louisville Kings (r.).

His agents, Jason and Justin Ward out of South Carolina, are reportedly fielding offers. They reached out to him after his time at Howard and have stood by him as he has embarked on his professional journey. After his Howard career, he performed in the *HBCU Combine* and at the *HBCU Legacy Bowl* in New Orleans, opportunities that have "absolutely" helped, he said.

"Any time you get to be in front of (pro) scouts, and they get the opportunity to see how you perform, how you move, is great. Any exposure is good exposure."

He says his main focus now is football.

"I realized that I never gave football my full attention," he said, always trying to make sure he would have something to fall back on if football didn't work.

"I still want to pursue medicine once football is done." He plans are to pursue psychiatry and open a clinic in his native Houston.

"I want to help and educate under-served and under-resourced communities like I came from, to learn more about themselves and put themselves in better positions."

He has proven he has the skills and the intellect to accomplish both his goals.

BCSP Notes

SWAC announces new basketball tournaments format beginning in 2027

BIRMINGHAM, Ala.- The **Southwestern Athletic Conference** has announced the adoption of new basketball tournament formats that will debut beginning with the 2027 SWAC Men's and Women's Basketball Tournaments.

The SWAC Men's and Women's Basketball working group consisting of league head coaches and administrators recommended the new format that will now feature the leagues' top ten teams at the conclusion of regular season play.

Under the revised formats, the top two seeds in each tournament bracket will receive byes directly into the semifinal round. Seeds No. 3 and No. 4 will advance directly to the quarterfinal round, while seeds No. 5 and No. 6 will receive byes into the second round.

The tournaments will begin with first-round contests featuring the No. 8 seed versus the No. 9 seed and the No. 7 seed versus the No. 10 seed. Winners of those contests will advance to face the No. 5 and No. 6 seeds in the second round.

Quarterfinal matchups will feature the No. 4 seed against the winner from the No. 5 side of the bracket and the No. 3 seed against the winner from the No. 6 side of the bracket.

The semifinal round will then see the No. 1 seed face the winner of the No. 4 side of the bracket, while the No. 2 seed will meet the winner of the No. 3 side of the bracket.

The SWAC Men's and Women's Basketball working group will continue to assess the overall viability, growth opportunities and long-

term sustainability of basketball across the conference while evaluating additional enhancements to the championship experience. Additional information will be announced at a later date.

Touring HBCU All-Star games featuring softball and baseball talent underway

The *Minority Baseball Prospects HBCU All-Star Games Tour* showcasing the premier talent from across the nation's HBCU baseball and softball programs kicked off last week in Charlotte and Kannapolis, NC. The Minority Baseball Prospects organization is based in Atlanta with Founder CEO **Alexander Wyche** and **Reginald Hollins**, the former head baseball coach at **Tuskegee**, as the president.

Now in its sixth year for baseball and fourth year for softball, the tour continued with baseball in the Atlanta area on Sunday, June 14 at Hermance Stadium at Oglethorpe University in Brookhaven, Ga. The game was called because of rain after just two innings. The final baseball game is set for Detroit, Michigan at Corner Ballpark in the Corktown neighborhood of the city on Saturday, June 20.

The events have featured MLB scout exposure for the 17 players on each softball team and 21 on each baseball team. Also included are youth clinics, Home Run Derbies, Fastest Man and Woman Challenges, alumni bands, vendors, music, food, and a true HBCU homecoming atmosphere.

"I think it's extremely well organized," said **Charles Ward**, who called the games in the Charlotte area. "It's a great opportunity for the student-athletes to showcase their skills before the scouts."

BCSP Spring Notes

North Carolina A&T, Howard make marks at NCAA Div. I Outdoor Track & Field Championships

The **North Carolina A&T** track program, led by head coach **Allen Johnson**, once again proved that is the best in the black college ranks at the NCAA Div. I Track & Field Championships in Eugene, Oregon last week.

The Aggie men scored points in four final events Friday to come away with a tie for 12th with Alabama with 21 points. Finishers in the top eight in each event earn points on a descending basis (10-8-6-5-4-3-2-1) and get first team all-American status.

The highest scorer for the Aggies was junior **Isaiah Taylor** who earned six points for his third-place finish in 49.03 seconds in the 400 meter hurdles final. His twin brother, junior **Xzavier Taylor** finished seventh in the event in 49.98 to garner an additional two points. The Taylors, out of Decatur, Ga., are the sons of Angelo Taylor, the two-time former Olympic gold medalist in the 400 hurdles.

Aggies also finished fourth in two events garnering five points in each.

Senior hurdler **Jason Holmes** teamed with junior **Lassale Hewlett**, senior **Jalen Booth-Mitchell**, and junior **Nakhi Benjamin** to post a time of 38.67 seconds in the 4x100 meter relay, finishing behind Tennessee (37.98), LSU (38.06) and Ohio State (38.44).

In his individual event, the 110-meter high hurdles, Holmes clocked a time of 13.16 seconds to finish fourth in the field behind repeat champion Ja'Kobe Tharp (12.90) of Auburn who set a world record of 12.75 seconds in Wednesday's semifinals, Kendrick Smallwood of Texas and Braxton Brann of Ohio State. Holmes broke his personal record for the second time in three days, and his school record for the second time in three days. Friday marked the fourth time in Holmes' career he has broken A&T's 110 record.

Holmes also broke the Coastal Athletic Association (CAA) record for the third time in his career. He will leave the university with six of the seven best times in the 110 hurdles. His fourth-place finish is the highest finish nationally in the 110 hurdles in program history, exceeding **Rasheem Brown's** eighth-place finish in 2023.

The Taylor twins capped the day by joining **Elijah Thomas** and **Dyiamond Walker** on the 4x400 meter relay team as they timed 3:00.98 to finish sixth and garner three points. Georgia won the event in 2:57.93 followed by LSU (2:57.93) and Arkansas (2:58.87).



NC A&T Athletics Photo

AGGIE ALL-AMERICANS: North Carolina A&T athletes that finished in the top eight in their respective events earning all-American honors at the NCAA Div. I Track & Field Championships in Eugene, Oregon are (SITTING l. to r.) Lasalle Hewitt (4x100m relay), Dyiamond Walker (4x400m relay) and Elijah Thomas (4x400m relay). (STANDING l. to r.) Xzavier Taylor (400m Hurdles, 4x400m relay), Nakhi Benjamin (4x400m relay), Jalen Booth-Mitchell (4x100m relay), Isaiah Taylor (400m hurdles, 4x400m relay), Michael Brittingham (4x400m relay, alternate), and Jason Holmes (110m hurdles, 4x100m relay)

Arkansas won the men's team title with 58 points with Georgia second with 49 points. Tennessee, led by former A&T head coach **Duane Ross**, was third with 46 points. No other black college program scored in the men's competition.

In the women's results, Howard sophomores **Yahari Lyons** and **Cenaya Billups** had the best finishes.

Lyons finished fifth in the 200 meters in 22.31 seconds to score four points for the Lady Bison. Billups finished sixth in the 400 meters in 55.42 to earn three points. The other women's points were scored by **Southern** junior **Tashina Alase** who finished eighth in the 100 meter hurdles final in 13.18 seconds to score a single point for the Lady Jaguars.

NC A&T senior **Spirit Morgan** cleared 1.79 meters in the high jump but could not advance. Twelve others cleared higher heights. A&T senior **Olivia Dowd** finished 18th in the triple jump with a leap of 12.80 meters (42.0 feet).

The seven points for Howard, under head coach **David Oliver**, landed the Lady Bison in a tie for 32nd. Southern's one point tied the Lady Jaguars for 64th.

THE STAT CORNER

WHO ARE THE BEST PERFORMERS IN BLACK COLLEGE SPORTS

2026 PRESEASON FOOTBALL MEDIA DAYS

CIAA

Wednesday, July 15, Durham, NC
Hilton Durham - 9 a.m.

SWAC

Wednesday, July 15, Birmingham, AL
Sheraton Birmingham Hotel - 10 a.m.

MEAC

Tuesday, July 21, Baltimore, MD
MT Bank Stadium - 10 a.m.

SIAC

Wednesday, July 22, Macon, GA
Tubman Afridan-American Museum - 10 a.m.