

BLACK COLLEGE SPORTS PAGE™



South Carolina State Sports Photo

ANCHOR: Linebacker Jordan Franklin anchors the SC State defense and is a key reason voters believe the Bulldogs will three-peat in the MEAC.

PREDICTIONS AND PREDILECTIONS

WHO YOU LIKE IN 2026? THE EXPERTS HAVE SPOKEN; TENNESSEE STATE PICKED LAST IN OVC

THE STAT CORNER

WHO ARE THE BEST PERFORMERS IN BLACK COLLEGE SPORTS

2026 PRESEASON ALL-CIAA FOOTBALL SELECTIONS

*Asterisk denotes a returning 2025 All-CIAA First Team selection.

OFFENSE

QB - Rahsaan Matthews Jr., Virginia State
RB - Micah Robinson, Bowie State
RB - Bobby Smith, Johnson C. Smith*
WR - Brandon Wiley, Bluefield State*
WR - Brian Lane, Johnson C. Smith*
WR - Marcus Fleming, Fayetteville State
TE - Joe Griffin, Elizabeth City State
OL - Jamari Mason, Johnson C. Smith*
OL - Robert Early, Johnson C. Smith
OL - Malachi Jones, Fayetteville State
OL - Toriono Combs, Elizabeth City State*
OL - Marcus Andrews, Johnson C. Smith

DEFENSE

DL - Dalan Johnson, Bowie State
DL - Joseph Woodard, Fayetteville State
DL - Christopher Gordon, Fayetteville State
DL - Sir'Sean Ingram, Elizabeth City State
DL - Deshawn Willoughby, Bowie State
LB - Jaevon Branch, Elizabeth City State
LB - Vincent Hill, Johnson C. Smith*
LB - Jatavien Taylor, Fayetteville State
DB - Amari Best, Fayetteville State
DB - Jymere Melendez, Virginia Union
DB - Terrell Ford, Fayetteville State
DB - Tynan Tucker, Johnson C. Smith

SPECIAL TEAMS

PK - Jason Zapata, Livingstone
P - Abdoulazim Bayor, Fayetteville State
KR - Shamar Sutton, Elizabeth City State
PR - Zyaire Tart, Virginia Union*

2026 PRESEASON ALL-MEAC FOOTBALL SELECTIONS

PRESEASON OFFENSIVE PLAYER OF THE YEAR

Chance Peterson, R-So., WR, North Carolina Central

PRESEASON DEFENSIVE PLAYER OF THE YEAR

Jordan Franklin, R-Jr., LB, South Carolina State

FIRST TEAM (OFFENSE)

QB - Josh Jones (North Carolina Central)
RB - Eden James (Howard)
RB - Tyler Smith (South Carolina State)
WR - Chance Peterson (North Carolina Central)
WR - Darius Thompson (South Carolina State)
TE - Alex Simmons (Morgan State)
C - James Reddick II (South Carolina State)
OL - Moses Umoren (South Carolina State)
OL - AC McMoore (North Carolina Central)
OL - Ryan Nolan (Norfolk State)
OL - Diu Dau (Delaware State)

FIRST TEAM (DEFENSE)

DL - Joshua Barker (South Carolina State)
DL - Ka'Von Chisolm (South Carolina State)
DL - Jordan Dollard (South Carolina State)
DL - Jaylen Williams (Norfolk State)
LB - Jordan Franklin (South Carolina State)
LB - Isaiah Lawson (North Carolina Central)
LB - Arturo Mattocks (Morgan State)
DB - Kedrick Green (Howard)
DB - Wayne Favors (Delaware State)
DB - Sharmari Reed (South Carolina State)
DB - Aki Harvey (Morgan State)
P - Liam Allen IV (Howard)
K - Matt Conord (Howard)
RS - Mehki Wall (North Carolina Central)

SECOND TEAM (OFFENSE)

QB - Ja'Shawn Scroggins (Howard)
RB - Josh Shaw (South Carolina State)
RB - Keith Jenkins Jr. (Morgan State)
WR - Justin Perry (Morgan State)
WR - Nate Stewart (Delaware State)
TE - Rodney Lesane (North Carolina Central)
C - Holly Saint-Melus (North Carolina Central)**
C - Jack Smoot (Norfolk State)**
OL - Kiande Marsh (South Carolina State)
OL - Tyler Leinberger (Norfolk State)
OL - Taron Williams (North Carolina Central)
OL - Victor Goree (North Carolina Central)

SECOND TEAM (DEFENSE)

DL - Quoy Rainey (Delaware State)
DL - Miguel Rijo (Norfolk State)
DL - Justin Dutton (Morgan State)
DL - Kristopher Boyd (Morgan State)
LB - Kaleb Broadbent (Norfolk State)
LB - Roderick Kelly (South Carolina State)
LB - Quentin Johnson (Delaware State)
DB - Kwanter Harry (South Carolina State)
DB - Nasir Bashir (Norfolk State)
DB - Jakarri Martin (North Carolina Central)
DB - Stephon Hall (Norfolk State)
P - Shane Messenger (Morgan State)
K - Jake Walker (Norfolk State)
RS - Malique Leatherbury (Morgan State)

**Indicates Tie

BCSP Football Notes

Virginia Union picked over J. C. Smith in preseason CIAA football voting

DURHAM, N.C. (July 15, 2026) – The teams that met for the 2025 **Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association** (CIAA®) football championship – **Johnson C. Smith** and **Virginia Union** – are picked to finish on top again in 2026 in voting released at last week's CIAA Football Media Day.

Despite losing to JCSU in last year's championship game and having just one player selected to the preseason all-CIAA team, **Dr. Alvin Parker's** VUU squad was picked ahead of Head Coach **Maurice Flower's** Golden Bulls in preseason voting of the league's head coaches and sports information directors. VUU beat JCSU 28-7 in last year's regular season but fell to the Golden Bulls 45-21 in the league's title game. **Fayetteville State** and **Virginia State** were the third and fourth choices.

The 2025 title for JCSU ended a 55-year championship drought and came after VUU completed a perfect 7-0 conference regular season, its first perfect mark in league play under Parker, and entered the championship game seeking a third consecutive CIAA title. JCSU and FSU each finished 6-1 in conference play, highlighting one of the most competitive regular season races in recent conference history.

"The excitement surrounding CIAA football continues to grow, and we are thrilled to officially begin another season," said CIAA Commissioner **Jacqie McWilliams Parker**. "Last year's championship reminded us how competitive this conference has become, and we expect that momentum to continue this fall."

While those four were at the top of the conference a year ago, **Elizabeth City State**, who finished in a tie for fourth at 4-3 with VSU, was picked seventh in the preseason voting behind **Winston-Salem State** and **Livingstone**. That prediction didn't sit well with second-year ECSU head man **Adrian Jones**, whose team had four-point, down-to-the-wire losses a year ago to eventual champion JCSU and VSU and finished with three straight wins.

"I think that we got, on paper, the best football team in the conference," Jones said during last week's press conference. "Mark what I say, we're one of the better football teams in the CIAA."

New head coaches will debut this season at **Bowie State (Dawson Odums)** and **Winston-Salem State (Tory Woodbury)**

New Consolation Game

In addition to announcing the preseason poll and preseason all-conference team (see STAT CORNER), the CIAA unveiled an expanded championship weekend that will bring four of the conference's top football programs to Durham County Memorial Stadium.

The weekend begins Friday, Nov. 13, with a newly added contest featuring the teams finishing third and fourth in the final regular-season standings. It amounts to an 11th regular season game that brings those teams in line with the rest of NCAA Div. II conferences and provides an enhanced opportunity for a conference team to earn a playoff berth.

"We were catalysts for it," Parker said of the head coaches backing of the 3 vs. 4 game. "It was something that we wrote up to get passed. It started with the Coaches Association, so hats off for all the coaches in the league for making sure that we did what we had to do to get that passed. I think everybody wanted to kind of match the other league's that are playing 11 games. We just happened to be one of the league's that has a championship game.

"But we thought it was beneficial to the top four teams to create a better resume and get them ready for postseason play."

"Expanding championship weekend allows us to celebrate even more of our student-athletes while creating an enhanced experience for our fans, member institutions and partners," Commissioner Parker said. The culmination of the weekend is the 56th CIAA Football Championship on Saturday, Nov. 14, featuring the conference's top two teams.

Durham will host CIAA Football Championship Weekend for the second consecutive year as part of the conference's partnership with the Durham Sports Commission.

Favorite VUU has just one player selected preseason all-CIAA

After losing 2025 Offensive Player of the Year and *Harlan Hill Trophy* winner, running back **Curtis Allen** of Virginia Union, to graduation and Defensive Player of the Year, defensive end **Kenyon Garner** of Livingstone, to the transfer portal, it will be interesting to see who will be the standout players in 2026.

Suprisingly, VUU was picked to finish first but had just one player selected to the preseason all-conference team, last year's all-CIAA kick returner **Zyaire Tart**.

J. C. Smith led all schools with six selections, followed by Fayetteville State with five and Elizabeth City State with four. **Bowie State** placed three student-athletes on the preseason squad, while **Bluefield State**, **Livingstone**, Virginia State and VUU each earned one selection.

2026 CIAA FOOTBALL PREDICTED ORDER OF FINISH with last year's record

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1) Virginia Union (7-1, 9-3) | 2) Johnson C. Smith (7-1, 10-2) |
| 3) Fayetteville State (6-1, 6-4) | 4) Virginia State (4-3, 6-4) |
| 5) Winston-Salem State (4-3, 4-6) | 6) Livingstone (3-4, 5-5) |
| 7) Elizabeth City State (4-3, 4-6) | 8) Bowie State (2-5, 3-7) |
| 9) Bluefield State (2-5, 3-7) | 10) Shaw (2-5, 2-8) |
| 11) Lincoln (Pa.) (0-7, 0-10) | |

SWAC FOOTBALL PICKS:

Prairie View A&M to repeat in West, Alabama State to unseat Jackson State in East

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. – The **Southwestern Athletic Conference** announced its 2026 SWAC Football Predicted Order of Finish last Wednesday morning at SWAC Football Media Day as voted on by the league's head coaches and sports information directors.

Alabama State was selected as the preseason favorite to win the SWAC Eastern Division after totaling 131 points and receiving 16 of the 24 first-place votes. **Jackson State** was picked to finish second with 122 points and seven first-place votes, setting the stage for what is expected to be another highly competitive race in the East.

Those projected East Division leaders also have the preseason Offensive and Defensive Players of the Year in Alabama State quarterback **Andrew Body** and Jackson State defensive back **Kam Sallis**. The BCSP listed the preseason SWAC all-conference teams last week.

Body (6-0, 205) was leading the conference in rushing (88.5 ypg.), passing (202.8 ypg.) and total offense (352.5 ypg.) thru eight games before being lost for the season with an injury. Despite his season being cut short, he led the SWAC with 24 TD passes.

Sallis (6-1, 222) totalled 53 tackles, 27 solo stops, two interceptions, two pass break-ups and two forced fumbles for JSU.

The battle for the remaining positions in the



PARKER: His VUU squad picked to return to the top in 2026.

division was equally close as **Bethune-Cookman** narrowly claimed third place with 71 points, edging **Florida A&M** by just one point. The Rattlers finished fourth with 70 points, while **Alabama A&M** garnered 66 points and the division's remaining first-place vote. **Mississippi Valley State** rounded out the East with 29 points.

Defending league champion **Prairie View A&M** was tabbed as the preseason favorite in the SWAC Western Division, collecting 130 points and 19 of the 24 first-place votes. **Grambling State** was selected second with 93 points and two first-place votes, while **Alcorn State** finished a close third with 90 points and one first-place vote.

Texas Southern was picked fourth with 79 points and received one first-place vote, followed by **Southern** in fifth with 65 points and one first-place vote. **Arkansas-Pine Bluff** completed the Western Division voting with 32 points.

The 2026 SWAC football season is scheduled to begin on Thursday, August 27, with teams opening their pursuit of division championships and a berth in the 2026 SWAC Football Championship Game.

South Carolina State pegged for three-peat in the MEAC

BALTIMORE – The **Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference** (MEAC) announced its 2026 preseason football honors on Monday ahead of Tuesday's Football Media Day here highlighting the conference's preseason predicted order of finish and preseason all-conference selections (see STAT CORNER).

Defending MEAC champion **South Carolina State** has been selected as the preseason favorite. The Bulldogs earned 49 points and five first-place votes in the poll conducted by the league's head coaches and sports information directors.

North Carolina Central was projected to finish second with 42 points and one first-place vote, followed closely by **Delaware State**, which received 40 points and two first-place votes. **Morgan State** was picked fourth, followed by **Norfolk State**, which garnered one first-place vote, and **Howard**.

North Carolina Central wide receiver **Chance Peterson** was voted the 2026 MEAC preseason offensive player of the year, while South Carolina State linebacker **Jordan Franklin** earned 2026 MEAC Preseason defensive player of the year honors.

Peterson, a product of Wake Forest, N.C., ranked fourth in the MEAC in receiving yards (720) and fifth in receptions (48) and yards per game (60.0) last season en route to garnering second team all-MEAC honors.

Franklin, a native of Waynesboro, Ga., paced the Bulldogs with 62 total tackles, including 42 solo stops and 20 assisted tackles a season ago. He also led the team with 12.0 tackles for loss totaling 52 yards while adding 2.0 sacks for 26 yards. The 2025 first team all-MEAC selection tied for the team lead with two interceptions, recorded four pass breakups, forced one fumble and recovered one fumble a season ago.

South Carolina State led all programs with nine student-athletes named to the Preseason all-MEAC first team across offense and defense. North Carolina Central and Howard followed with four first-team selections each, while Morgan State earned three selections. Norfolk State and Delaware State rounded out the list with two first-team honorees apiece.

The 2026 MEAC football season officially kicks off on Saturday, Aug. 29, with the annual **MEAC/SWAC Challenge** at Center Parc Stadium in Atlanta. The matchup between Howard and **Alabama A&M** will air live on ABC at 7:30 p.m. ET.

For more information on MEAC Football Media Day, visit www.MEACSports.com or follow the MEAC on social media @MEACSports.

PRESEASON PREDICTED ORDER OF FINISH

- | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1) South Carolina State 49 (5) | 2) North Carolina Central 42 (1) |
| 3) Delaware State 40 (2) | 4) Morgan State 25 |
| 5) Norfolk State 18 (1) | 6) Howard 15 |

Barlow's Tennessee State Tigers picked last in re-formed OVC

Tennessee State received just nine votes to finish at the bottom of the preseason football poll of the Ohio Valley Conference's head coaches.

UT-Martin, who has won or shared four of the past five OVC championships, was the top pick getting six of the eight first-place votes and topping the poll with 47 points.

Reggie Barlow is entering his second year leading the TSU Tigers who finished 2-10 a year ago and winless at 0-8 in the final year of the OVC's three-year partnership with the Big South Conference. The nine-member league will once again compete under the OVC name and logo beginning with the 2026 season.

Senior quarterback **Daylin Lee**, who transferred to TSU from **Winston-Salem State**, is listed as an OVC Offensive Player to Watch. Lee threw for over 2,000 yards with 23 TDs and just seven interceptions for the Rams last season.

Running back **Zack Simmons-Brown**, wideout **Cam Bullock**, tight end **Aaron Duncan**, lineman **Breon Brown**, all-purpose back **Anthony Taylor** and placekicker **Britton Watts** were also on that offensive list.

Simmons-Brown ran for 456 yards and two TDs for TSU as a freshman. Bullock (6-4, 190) played at Murray State last season where he had 10 receptions for 140 yards and two scores.

On defense, sophomore defensive lineman **Bryce Gray** earned recognition after recording 25 tackles, including four tackles for loss and three sacks in 10 games last season. Junior linebacker **Sammy Taylor** returns after leading the Tigers with 51 tackles in 2025. He added two tackles for loss, one sack, two quarterback hurries, one forced fumble and one fumble recovery. Junior defensive back **Sincere Safeullah** was also named a Player to Watch after finishing with 17 tackles, an interception returned 31 yards, three pass breakups and two fumble recoveries.

THE CHALLENGE IS ON!

ESPN game analyst Jay Walker (c.) separates Alabama A&M head coach Sam Shade (l.) and new Howard head coach Ted White (r.) at last Thursday's press conference at Center Parc Stadium in Atlanta. Their teams will meet on Saturday, Aug. 29 at 7:30 p.m. at the stadium in the Cricket SWAC/MEAC Challenge Kick-off presented by Toyota. Walker and Tiffany Green will handle duties in the broadcast booth in the game to be carried live on ABC.



Photo by Willie Tucker