



ONES TO WATCH

28 GAMES KICK OFF 2026 FOOTBALL; NEW AD AT TEXAS SOUTHERN; PRESEASON RANKINGS



Alabama State Sports Photo

ALL EYES ON ME: Alabama State quarterback Andrew Body begins final season in Birmingham vs. Southern.

PRESEASON NATIONALLY RANKED TEAMS:

Only one black college FCS team – **South Carolina State** – and three black college NCAA Div. II squads – **Virginia Union**, **Johnson C. Smith** and **Albany State** – are ranked in recently released preseason national football polls.

Each of the four reached postseason play in 2025 and are expected to be strong contenders for repeat performances in 2026.

South Carolina State, under head coach **Chennis Berry**, has won the last two **Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference** championships, finishing 5-0 in the six-member football playing conference in both 2024 and 2025. The Bulldogs, who won the postseason 2026 *Celebration Bowl* over **SWAC** champion **Prairie View A&M** are again the MEAC favorites in 2026.

The Bulldogs are ranked 24th in the American Football Coaches Association (AFCA) preseason Top 25 poll and 25th in the Stats Perform Preseason Top 25. Defending champion Montana State is the overwhelming favorite to repeat.

2026 PRESEASON AFCA FCS TOP 25					2026 PRESEASON STATS PERFORM FCS TOP 25				
		2025 REC	2025 RNK				2025 REC		
1	Montana State (57)	14-2	1	1	Montana St. (25)	14-2			
2	Montana	13-2	3	2	Montana	13-2			
3	South Dakota State	9-5	3	3	South Dakota St. (1)	9-5			
4	Illinois State	12-5	2	4	Illinois St.	12-5			
5	Tarleton State	12-2	6	5	Tarleton St.	12-2			
6	UC Davis	9-4	8	6	UC Davis	9-4			
7	Rhode Island	11-3	11	7	Villanova	12-3			
8	Villanova	12-3	T4	8	Rhode Island	11-3			
9	Youngstown State	8-5	18	9	Youngstown St.	8-5			
10	North Dakota	8-6	14	10	North Dakota	8-6			
11	Lehigh	12-1	10	11	Lehigh	12-1			
12	South Dakota	10-5	9	12	South Dakota	10-5			
13	Stephen F. Austin	11-3	7	13	Stephen F. Austin	11-3			
14	Tennessee Tech	11-2	16	14	ACU	9-5			
15	Abilene Christian	9-5	12	15	Tennessee Tech	11-2			
16	Southern Illinois	7-5	25	16	Southern Illinois	7-5			
17	Austin Peay	7-5	NR	17	Mercer	9-3			
18	Yale	9-3	15	18	Austin Peay	7-5			
19	SE Louisiana	9-4	9	19	Yale	9-3			
20	Lamar	8-5	24	20	SE Louisiana	9-4			
21	Mercer	11-3	17	21	Lamar	8-5			
22	Monmouth	9-3	22	22	UT Martin	6-6			
23	UT Martin	6-6	NR	23	Monmouth (N.J.)	9-3			
24	South Carolina State	10-3	21	24	Northern Arizona	7-5			
25	Northern Arizona	7-5	NR	25	South Carolina State	10-3			

2025 **CIAA** runners-up **Virginia Union** is the only black college NCAA Div. II team to appear in both the AFCA and the D2football.com preseason football polls.

Dr. Alvin Parker Jr.'s Panthers are 14th in the AFCA Div. II Coaches Poll and 16th in the D2football.com poll.

VUU fell to **Johnson C. Smith** 45-21 in the 2025 CIAA title game after taking the titles in 2023 and 2024. The Panthers won two games in the 2024 Div. II playoffs to reach the quarterfinals before falling to eventual national runners-up Valdosta State. Last season VUU bowed out in the first round of the Div. II Atlantic Regional to California (Pa.), 27-24.

2025 **SIAC** champion Albany State is 21st in the AFCA poll ahead of J. C. Smith at 23rd.

Under head coach **Quinn Gray** last season, Albany State went 8-0 to take the title in the SIAC and then got playoff wins over Valdosta State (35-30) and **Benedict** (14-12) before falling to Newberry (31-24) in the national quarterfinals. Gray left after the season to take over at his alma mater, **Florida A&M**. Former **Saint Augustine's** head coach and assistant at **Fayetteville State** and J. C. Smith, **David Bowser**, is the new head coach at Albany State.

The Golden Bulls, under head coach **Maurice Flowers**, won their first CIAA title since 1969 with the championship game win over VUU. The Bulls fell to Frostburg State, 21-7 in a first round D2 playoff game. Ferris State is the two-defending D2 champ.

2026 PRESEASON AFCA NCAA DIV. II TOP 25	2026 PRESEASON D2football.com TOP 25
1. Ferris State (Mich.) (31)	1. Ferris State
2. Harding (Ark.)	2. Harding
3. Kutztown (Pa.)	3. Minnesota State
4. Pittsburg State (Kan.)	4. Kutztown
5. Minnesota State	5. Pittsburg State
6. Colorado State-Pueblo	6. Northwest Missouri State
7. Central Washington	7. Indianapolis
8. Northwest Missouri State	8. Grand Valley State
9. Grand Valley State	9. Central Washington
9. Ulndy	10. CSU Pueblo
11. Western Colorado	11. Western Colorado
12. Minnesota-Duluth	12. Ashland
13. Ashland (Ore.)	13. Augustana
14. Virginia Union	14. Western Oregon
15. Newberry (Ga.)	15. Valdosta State
16. Findlay (Ohio)	16. Virginia Union
17. Frostburg State (Md.)	17. Frostburg State
18. UT-Permian Basin	18. UT Permian Basin
19. Wingate (NC)	19. Findlay
20. Augustana (SD)	20. Minnesota Duluth
21. Albany State (Ga.)	21. Chadron State
22. Western Oregon	22. Wingate
23. Johnson C. Smith (NC)	23. Northeastern State
24. Ouachita Baptist (Ark.)	24. Newberry
25. Indiana (Pa.)	25. Slippery Rock

What happened to Week Zero?

LUT WILLIAMS

BCSP Editor

The 2026 black football season will have a Week Zero game played this weekend. It just arrives a week later than usual and coincides with 27 other games.

The 2026 Week Zero game – usually staged a week before a full schedule of games – is Saturday's **SWAC/MEAC Challenge** in Atlanta's Center Parc Stadium at 7:30 p.m. on ABC. It pits the MEAC's **Howard Bison** vs. the SWAC's **Alabama A&M Bulldogs**.

While that game has plenty of intrigue with second-year A&M head coach **Sam Shade** facing off against new Howard head coach and former quarterback **Ted White**, there's plenty more on the menu.

There is another SWAC vs. MEAC game in Houston where **North Carolina Central** of the MEAC visits the SWAC's **Texas Southern**. The game will be streamed on *HBCUGo.tv* at 6 p.m. CST.

Nine other games are interconference battles between black conference teams – four SWAC vs. **SIAC** tussles, three with SIAC teams meeting **CIAA** foes, one CIAA vs. MEAC match-up and one matching SIAC and MEAC teams.

FOUR SWAC VS. SIAC GAMES

The **Albany State** vs. **Florida A&M** match in Tallahassee, Fla. (Sat., 7 p.m. on *SWAC TV*) pits two new coaches against each other.

New Florida A&M head coach **Quinn Gray** has returned to his alma mater after guiding Albany State for three years including winning the SIAC title and two Div. II playoff games a year ago. The former record-setting FAMU QB was 24-11 at ASU including a 20-4 record in league play.

He faced his alma mater in Tallahassee a year ago and his ASU team threw a 33-25 scare into the Rattlers in a game many thought his Golden Rams should have won.

David Bowser has taken over from Gray at ASU and comes in with great credentials. Though he struggled to a 4-26 record in three seasons at declining **Saint Augustine's** in his first head coaching stint, he had two decades as an assistant at **Fayetteville State** when the Broncos won three CIAA titles and was with **Johnson C. Smith** last season when the Golden Bulls took the CIAA crown.

Two other SWAC vs. SIAC battles at 6 p.m. Saturday (on *SWAC TV*) will also feature debuts for new coaches, both in the SIAC.

New head man **Brad Sherrod** at **Morehouse** will take his Maroon Tigers out to Little Rock, Arkansas to take on **Arkansas-Pine Bluff** while former **Bethune-Cookman** head coach **Terry Sims**, now at **Clark Atlanta**, will lead the Panthers on the road at **Grambling State**.

Miles is on the road at **Alcorn State** in another SIAC vs. SWAC 6 p.m. game on *SWACTV*.

THREE CIAA VS. SIAC GAMES

Two NCAA Div. 2 playoff teams matchup Saturday (5 p.m., *SIAC Network*) when 2025 CIAA champion J. C. Smith visits 2025 SIAC



AUSPICIOUS DEBUTS: Head coaches (top row, l. to r.) Ted White at Howard, Quinn Gray at Florida A&M, David Bowser at Albany State, Terry Sims at Clark Atlanta, (bottom row, l. ro r.) Brad Sherrod at Morehouse, Tory Woodbury at Winston-Salem State, Thomas Howard at Savannah State, Van Malone at Hampton and (below in story) Marshall Faulk at Southern make their debuts this week. Gray and Bowser's new teams meet in Tallahassee Saturday (7 p.m. on *SWAC TV*).

runners-up **Benedict** in Columbia, S.C. **Fort Valley State** of the SIAC plays at the CIAA's **Elizabeth City State** in a 1 p.m. match up carried on the *CIAA Network* while **Allen** of the SIAC visits the CIAA's **Livingstone** at 6 p.m.

Kentucky State at **Central State** is the lone SIAC game on the schedule (3 p.m.). SIAC preseason favorite **Edward Waters** is hosting **Florida Memorial** (6 p.m., *SIAC Network*).

MEAC INTERCONFERENCE GAMES

The lone CIAA vs. MEAC game has **Winson-Salem State** and former quarterback and new head coach **Tory Woodbury** debuting at **Norfolk State** in its second year under former NFL star QB **Michael Vick** (6 p.m., ESPN+). Woodbury was an assistant to Vick at NSU last season.

Another new coach – **Thomas Howard** – will be one the sidelines for **Savannah State** when the SIAC member opens at two-time defending MEAC champion **South Carolina State** (6 p.m.). Howard is a former defensive coordinator at SC State.

MEAC member **Morgan State** is at former conference member **North Carolina A&T** Saturday (6 p.m., *FloCollege*).

THE DEBUTS CONTINUE

The coaching debut that perhaps will be watched the most could be Pro Football Hall of Fame running back **Marshall Faulk's** premiere Saturday as head coach at **Southern**. His Jaguars are taking on SWAC East Division favorite **Alabama State** at the first *Birmingham Football Classic* at historic Legion Field in Birmingham, Al. (2 p.m., *ESPNU*).

The early season SWAC match-up also marks the return to the field of ASU quarterback **Andrew Body**, last year's conference offensive player of the year and the most talked-about player in 2026 black college football.

The 6-1, 205-pound Corpus Christi, Texas native led the SWAC in rushing (518 yards, 4 TDs) and passing (1,770 yards, 20 TDs, 1 int.) before he went out after eight games a year ago with a shoulder injury. His return is much

GAMES THIS WEEK

THURSDAY, AUGUST 27

Mississippi Valley State vs. Nicholls in Thibodaux, LA - *ESPN+* 6p
Stony Brook vs. Delaware State in Dover, DE - *MEAC Network* 6p
Barton vs. Virginia State in Ettrick, VA - *CIAA Network* 6p
Bluefield State vs. Tusculum in Greeneville, TN - *SAC Stream* 6p

FRIDAY, AUGUST 28

Virginia Union vs. Lenoir-Rhyne in Hickory, NC - *FloCollege* 6p

SATURDAY, AUGUST 29

Chowan vs. W. Va. State in Institute, WV - *MEC Network* 12p
Fort Valley State vs. Elizabeth City State in Eliz. City, NC - *CIAA Network* 1p
Southern vs. Alabama State in Birmingham, AL - *ESPNU* 2p
Johnson C. Smith vs. Benedict in Columbia, SC - *SIAC Network* 5p
Kentucky State vs. Central State in Wforce, OH - *SIAC Network* 3p
Allen vs. Livingstone in Salisbury, NC - *CIAA Network* 6p
Central Methodist vs. Lincoln (MO) in J'son City, MO - *GLVCN* 6p
Clark Atlanta vs. Grambling State in Grambling, LA - *SWAC TV* 6p
Florida Memorial vs. Edward Waters in J'ville, FL - *SIAC Network* 6p
Miles vs. Alcorn State in Lorman, MS - *SWAC TV* 6p
Morehouse vs. Arkansas-Pine Bluff in Little Rock, AR - *SWAC TV* 6p
N. C. Central vs. Texas Southern in Houston, TX - *HBCU GO* 6p
Morgan State vs. N. C. A&T in Greensboro, NC - *FloCollege* 6p
Savannah State vs. South Carolina State in O'burg, SC - *ESPN+* 6p
Shaw vs. Fayetteville State in F'ville, NC - *Broncos Network* 6p
Virginia-Lynchburg vs. Hampton in Hampton, VA - *FloCollege* 6p
Winston-Salem State vs. Norfolk State in Norfolk, VA - *ESPN+* 6p
Lane vs. Bethel (TN) in McKenzie, TN 7p
Albany State vs. Florida A&M in Tallahassee, FL - *SWACTV* 7p
Howard vs. Alabama A&M in Atlanta, GA - *ABC* 7:30p
Jackson State vs. Tennessee State in Nashville, TN - *ESPN+* 7:30p
Prairie View A&M vs. Tarleton State in Stephenville, TX - *ESPN2* 8p

SUNDAY, AUGUST 30

Tuskegee vs. West Alabama in Montgomery, AL 7p

anticipated.

One other debut has **Hampton** and new head coach **Van Malone** opening at home vs. **Virginia-Lynchburg** (6 p.m., *FloCollege*).

FAVORITES DEBUT

Defending SWAC West champion **Prairie View A&M** is picked to repeat in that division and has a tough opening date Saturday (8 p.m., *ESPN2*) in Stephenville, Texas at FCS preseason No. 5 Tarleton State. The game is for the Texas A&M University's inaugural *Chancellor's Cup*.

Virginia Union, picked by CIAA coaches as the favorite in that conference, opens Friday (6 p.m., *FloCollege*) on the road at Lenoir-Rhyne. The teams last met in the second round of the 2024 Div. II playoffs at L-R with VUU coming away with a dominant 44-12 victory.

Jackson State, the defending SWAC East division champ but second preseason pick in the East behind Alabama State, renews its rivalry after a three-year hiatus with **Tennessee State** Saturday (7:30 p.m., *ESPN+*) at the *John Merritt Classic* in Nashville, Tn. The teams met for 23 straight years from 1998 to 2022 at the *Southern Heritage Classic* at the Liberty Bowl in Memphis, Tn.

STARTS AND FINISH

Four 6 p.m. Thursday night games will kick off the season. **Mississippi Valley State** is on the road at Nichols (*ESPN+*), **Delaware State** hosts Stony Brook (*MEAC Network*), **Virginia State** hosts Barton (*CIAA Network*) and **Bluefield State** plays at Tusculum. The opening week wraps up Sunday (7 p.m., *ESPN2*) with **Tuskegee** hosting West Alabama in the 6th annual *Red Tails Classic* honoring the Tuskegee Airmen who fought in World War II.

BCSP Notes

Ashley Robinson leaves Jackson State to become new AD at Texas Southern

Texas Southern University announced last Wednesday the hiring of two-time National Athletics Director of the Year **Ashley Robinson** as the new vice president and athletics director.

Robinson is one of the most accomplished and decorated athletics administrators in the country. He comes to Texas Southern after six transformative years at **Jackson State University**, where his leadership guided the University into a national HBCU powerhouse both on the field and in the classroom.

"When we began this search, my goal was simple: to identify an exceptional leader who has the leadership and acumen to take the University athletics to the next level of sustained excellence," said TSU President **J.W. Crawford III**. "I am confident Mr. Ashley Robinson has the capability to do so. I look forward to working with him to not only elevate our program on the national stage, but also achieve measurable outcomes for our student-athletes and memorable experiences for our fans."

Robinson is a two-time National Athletics Director of the Year, earning the honor from the Black Student-Athlete Summit in 2023 and from the National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics (NACDA), sponsored by Cushman & Wakefield, in 2022. During his time at Jackson State, the athletics department captured 19 championships and won the *C.D. Henry Award* for the SWAC's best all-around men's sports program in 2022-23.

Robinson's tenure was marked by national exposure for the program, including a 60 Minutes feature, a live *Good Morning America* broadcast from campus, and a landmark appearance of ESPN's College GameDay

BCSP PRESEASON NCAA DIV. II / NAIA TOP FIVE	BCSP PRESEASON FCS TOP FIVE
1) Johnnson C. Smith	1) South Carolina State
2) Virginia Union	2) Alabama State
3) Fayetteville State	3) Jackson State
4) Edward Waters	4) North Carolina Central
5) Kentucky State	5) Prairie View A&M

from Jackson State's home stadium — only the fourth time the show has originated from an HBCU football game.

That national exposure came on the heels of Robinson luring Pro Football Hall of Famer **Deion "Coach Prime" Sanders** to become JSU's head coach. Sanders led the Tigers to back-to-back undefeated **Southwestern Athletic Conference** (SWAC) football championships in 2021 and 2022, the first since 2007 and only the second and third titles for JSU since 1996.

Under Robinson's leadership, Jackson State student-athletes posted a 3.101 GPA in the fall of 2022, and the department graduated nearly 70 student-athletes that year. Robinson previously led JSU to the SWAC's Academic Success Award in 2019-20.

Robinson's path to Texas Southern includes a successful run as Director of Athletics at **Prairie View A&M University** (2013-2019), where he was later promoted to Vice President and Director of Athletics. At PVAMU, he oversaw six conference championships, the construction of a new football stadium and athletics administration complex, a track and field complex, and a soccer field, along with baseball and softball upgrades. In the 2018 NCAA Academic Progress Rate report, all 18 PVAMU athletics teams exceeded the NCAA-mandated benchmark, with seven posting perfect scores.

"I want to thank President Crawford and the Board of Regents for the opportunity to lead the athletics department at Texas Southern," Robinson said. "It's great to be back in Texas. I do not take this opportunity lightly and can't wait to get to work. I am focused on our student-athletes, I wouldn't be here if not for them and our shared goal for them to have a memorable experience competing as a Tiger at the highest level and then watch them walk across the stage with a degree from this elite institution."

A native of Jackson, Mississippi, Robinson was a four-year letterman and standout point guard at **Mississippi Valley State**, where he remains the school's single-season and career assists record-holder. He was named MVSU Athlete of the Year in 2002 and was inducted into the MVSU Athletics Hall of Fame in 2011. Robinson holds a bachelor's degree from MVSU and a master's degree from the United States Sports Academy.

He began his career in college athletics administration at **Delaware State University** before returning to his alma mater, MVSU, and later JSU, in a series of compliance roles. He went on to serve as the SWAC's Assistant Commissioner for Compliance, Assistant Vice President of Athletics Compliance and Academic Advising at Prairie View A&M, and Director of Athletics at Mississippi Valley State before beginning his tenure at Prairie View A&M as athletics director in 2013.

He was the first African American to serve as president of the NCAA's Football Championship Subdivision (FCS) Athletics Directors Association. He is a member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc.