FOOTBALL UPDATE

It still looks like a race between Howard and FAMU

It's still very early in conference play, but the MEAC's mystery team, North Carolina A & T, was at the top of the standings going into their sixth game.

The Aggies (2-3, 2-0) earned the top spot with wins over South Carolina State and Morgan State. A & T's victory over the Bulldogs was impressive as they controlled the game at the line of scrimmage and triumphed 17-6.

QB Hilton Winstead enjoyed his best game of the year for A & T. He accounted for 200 yards in total offense and scored one touchdown.

However, things should begin to balance out as some key match-ups take place this month. Florida A & M had to forfeit their victory over Delaware State because of using an ineligible player (see Roscoe Nance's Notes & Quotes on page 5), so the standings had to be altered.

As expected, the Howard University Bison (3-1, 1-1) looked very strong and in good position to successfully defend their '87 conference title. But they ran into a ditch when South Carolina State (2-2, 1-1) came away with a 21-13 upset win.

Prior to that game, State was totally out of synch. Furman blasted them 38-0. They were awful against A & T.

The Bulldogs set the tone for the game by shutting down Howard's high powered offensive machine. Going into the contest, the Bison averaged 514 yards in total offense per game. They netted 262 against the Dogs. Fred Killings, the Bison's leading rusher (185 yards a game at that time), was limited to 64 yards.

Tyrone Gilmore put in a solid day's work as the Dogs quarterback. His team had 461 yards total offense and used a good blend of runs and passes to keep the Howard defense off-stride. Gilmore completed 15 of 20 passes for 195 yards and one touchdown. Running back James Darby handled the brunt of the rushing chores, gaining 118 yards.

South Carolina State secured the win with 48 seconds left in the game on a swing pass from Lance Salters to Zachary Whitley that resulted in a 48-yard TD.

Before facing the Bulldogs, the Bison had stampeded through all their opposition. They blitzed Grambling 35-20 in the Whitney Young Classic by scoring 26 points in the second half.

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Lee DeBose threw just four passes in the second half, but those tosses produced 111 yards and two scores. Killings ran for two touchdowns, including a 79-yard effort, and Derrick Faison caught a 55-yard TD bomb from DeBose.

The Bison remained as the top offensive unit in the league. They averaged 34 points and 451 total offensive yards per contest.

Bethune-Cookman could very well have the most exciting pass and catch combination in the conference with quarterback Anthony Thomas and wide-out Stevie Thomas.

The Wildcats (2-3, 2-1) ride the friendly skies with this pair. Thomas had thrown for 1,300 yards and 11 TDs. He was averaging 18.6 completions per game. Receiver Thomas is tops in the MEAC with 29 catches for 599 yards and two scores. The wide-out gets his yards in bunches. He averages 20.7 yards per catch. Stevie has had four games where he has had 100 or more receiving yards.

QB Thomas plays with verve and courage. In B-CC's 10-9 win over Del State, Thomas was scheduled to sit the game out due to an injured knee. But he wanted to play and convinced the Wildcats' coaching staff that he could handle it. He showed that he could, throwing a seven-yard TD pass to Lebron Sumpter that won the game late in the fourth quarter.

Rattlers kick returner Howard Huckaby got the fans buzzing when he slipped and zipped past JSU for a 74-yard score on a punt return. He returned three punts for 98 yards and was named the (Circle City) Classic's offensive MVP.

The week before vs. Grambling in the Gateway Classic played in Jacksonville, Fla., Thomas put his team in position, throwing a TD pass to Sumpter with just four seconds left in the game. B-CC was down 17-16 and went for the two points conversion but failed, and Grambling won.

In other B-CC notes, placekicker Manny Manolas set a new conference career record for field goals. The two he kicked in the Morgan State game (Wildcats won 13-6) gave him a career total of 35. The record-setting kick was a 41-yard boot. The previous MEAC record of 34, was held by Howard University's Howard Ward (1977-1980).

Florida A & M (1-2-1, 0-1) should be the team to provide Howard with their stiffest challenge. The Rattlers remaining schedule should also be a factor. The rest of their MEAC games will be played in the state of Florida. Conversely, all FAMU games played last month were on the road.

The Rattlers let a big one get away from them when they tied Jackson State 10-10 in the Circle City Classic. That game was played in Indianapolis' Hoosier Dome with more than 47,000 people in the stands.

James Vertuno booted a 21-yard field goal midway through the last quarter to give A & M a 10-7 cushion. But the Rattlers turned the ball over deep in their own territory with roughly four minutes left in the game and the Tigers kicked a field goal to force the stalemate.

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Things haven't panned out too well for Delaware State so far this season. Until they were awarded the forfeit win in their game with Florida A & M, the Hornets (1-2-1, 1-3) hadn't won a game. They were blown out by Eastern Kentucky, dominated by Towson State, and lost to Bethune-Cookman in the waning moments of that contest.

Reggie Barnes, however, is turning in some solid performances. His rushing average is nearly five yards a carry and he's ranked among the league leaders in total offense.

Defensively, the Hornets' Marvin Bright, a defensive back, is the guy with the big sting. Bright leads all MEAC tacklers (45) and averages 11.3 per ball game.

Morgan State is hoping they can get something going before this season is over. The Bears (0-5, 0-2) are in the rebuilding stage and are taking their lumps.

MSU has the league's least effective defense against the rush (allowing 262.8 yards a game). All one has to do is look at the individual defensive stats to determine that. Five Bears (William Foye, Nathaniel Parham, Allen Polston, Ed Gough, and Rodney Gould) are ranked among the conference's top 10 tacklers.

-BCSR Staff

CIAA football action

From Page 8

scored five TDs. The Trojans are very adept at the running game. They had already reached a total of 1,023 team rushing yards by the first weekend in October and the team rushing average is 5.1 yards per carry. VSU also leads the conference in rushing -- 321.6 yards per contest.

Hampton, on the other hand, has more balance. The Pirates were second in passing offense (183 yards/game) and third in rushing (244.4 yards/game).

Virginia Tech transfer Tim Dudley has been an impact player for Hampton. The running back has scored seven TDs (second ranked in scoring in the CIAA) and rushed for 443 yards. He has proven to be an adequate replacement for the departed Carl Painter, who was conference offensive player of the year in 1985.

Norfolk State (3-2, 1-1) and Virginia Union (3-2, 1-2) could play the role of spoiler for both of the division front runners. Union was ecstatic about what they did to Central and felt they could do the same against Virginia State in the Gold Bowl on Oct. 29. The following weekend, the Spartans get their shot at the Trojans in the regular season finale.

-Steve Zimmerman

ON THE MOVE

Baxter is a steamroller with break-away speed

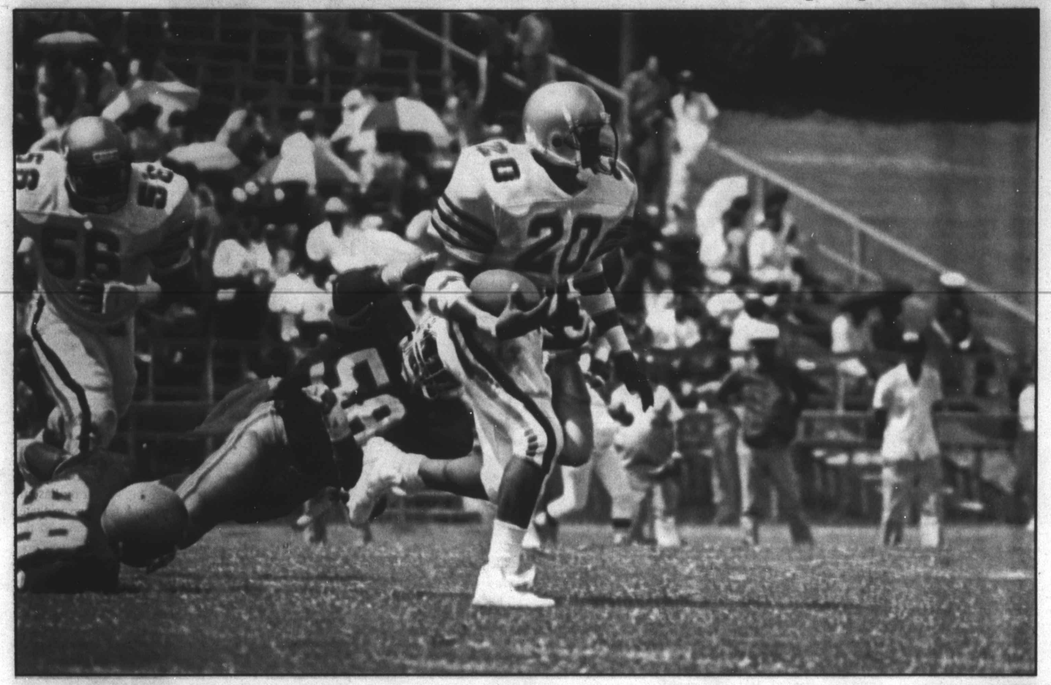

Photo by J.D. Schwalm

Baxter's skills allow him to bull his way over defenders to get tough yards. But his 4.5 speed also enables him to outrun tacklers and turn short runs into game-breaking touchdowns.

Alabama State tailback Brad Baxter's season has gone exactly the way he expected it would.

It's been tough.

Baxter rushed for almost 3,000 yards during his sophomore and junior seasons while operating behind a talented and experienced offensive line. This season, Baxter has one veteran lineman to run behind and the yards have been hard to come by. The 6-2, 225-pounder gained just 48 yards in the Hornets first two games.

But Baxter isn't worried. "If the Lord is willing and the creek doesn't rise, I'll get my yards," he said.

And the burly runner usually accomplishes what he says he will.

"This is not a surprise," he said. "I was looking forward to this. I knew it would happen with only one veteran offensive lineman and the rest being freshmen. They're catching on slowly. But there are no excuses. It's just a waiting process. It's a little bit frustrating. But I'm not going to worry about it. My time will come."

Baxter showed signs that things are coming together when the Hornets defeated Texas Southern 20-6. He rushed for 126 yards, including a 71-yard touchdown run. That's the kind of performance he anticipates more of for the remainder of the year.

"I wanted to break the school rushing record," he said. "It's never too late, but it's time to go for it now. It's a big goal for me because teams are playing the run first and the pass second. But I promised myself that I would do my best."

At the very least, Baxter expects to gain 1,000 yards. And why shouldn't he? The only time he hasn't was during his freshman year in 1985.

But that wasn't his fault.

The Hornets coaching staff was in disarray. Coach Jim Parker had been suspended for violating NCAA rules and Ron Mitchell was in charge of the team. Mitchell was very unfamiliar with the team and put Baxter at fullback and limited his playing time to the special teams.

Baxter carried the ball only twice that year.

The lack of playing time was hard for Baxter to take. He had come to Alabama State because he felt he would get to play immediately. He had committed to Auburn, but changed his mind when the Tigers changed from the wishbone to the I formation to accommodate Bo Jackson. Auburn's plan at that juncture was to redshirt Baxter.

"Several things ran through my mind," Baxter said. "Transferring was one of them. But I knew that it wouldn't solve anything."

When Parker returned, Baxter won the starting tailback position and ran wild.

"People thought I came out of nowhere," he said. "I was here all the time."

The big guy has the combination of speed and size that is rare for backs playing below the Division I-A level. A track man, Baxter ran a 6.56 in the 55-meter dash indoors last season and consistently runs a 4.5 in the 40.

"I'm a versatile runner," he said. "I used to be a power runner. But I learned that it doesn't do anything but cause you to get broken up. Now, if I can outrun you, I will. I can do a little of both -- run over you or finesse you.

"Most times defenders think that with my size, I'm going to try to run over them. That's not the case. It used to be a bad problem, trying to run over people when I could have side-stepped them and gone all the way. I learned quick."

What opened Baxter's eyes to the need for a change -- besides the school of hard knocks -- was studying film. He's seen times where he could have turned six-yard gains into 90-yard touchdowns on several occasions.

If *only* he had avoided the tacklers.

That's typical of his attitude. He's always looking for ways to improve.

"I'm never satisfied with my performance," he said. "When you start getting satisfied, you get relaxed. I'll never be like that."

-Roscoe Nance