



Blocked kicks lift Hampton over Grambling State in black college showdown

HBCSPA

BIRMINGHAM, AL – It may have come a year later than most preferred, but the 13th ranked Pirates of Hampton University showed that they're still the team to beat in black college football after defeating No. 23 Grambling State, 27-26 in overtime in the Ford MEAC-SWAC Challenge. The teams shared the SBN Black College National Championship in 2005, but Derius Swinton's blocked extra point and solid play from some Hampton reserves helped the Pirates win their season opener and their fifth consecutive game over the Tigers.

After forcing Grambling to go three plays-and-out on its first possession, the Pirates struck on the first play of the ensuing drive. Quarterback Princeton Shepherd found Marquay McDaniel wide open for a 55-yard touchdown after the Tiger defense was drawn in by a flea-flicker. Alonzo Coleman took the handoff from Shepherd and headed into the middle of the line before pitching it back to the senior signal caller who tossed his 32nd career touchdown pass, giving the Pirates a 7-0 lead with 10:47 to go in the first quarter.

Grambling matched Hampton on its next possession, putting together an 11-play, 78-yard drive. Quarterback Brandon Landers moved the ball around, hitting Henry Tolbert for 33 yards and LaKeldric Bridges for 16 more before tossing an 11-yard touchdown strike into the hands of Clyde Edwards to tie the game.

Two series later the Pirates took over at the Grambling 47-yard line after a short punt by Tim Manuel. Coleman rushed twice for 22 yards and Van Morgan added four more before Andrew Paterini kicked a 47-yard field goal for a 10-7 Hampton lead.

Hampton allowed the Tigers to cross midfield just once in their next four possessions, with one ending after a spectacular interception by senior cornerback Calvin Bannister. The Pirates moved deep into Grambling territory on two occasions, but came away empty both times. The first Hampton drive stalled at the GSU 22-yard line and Paterini's 39-yard field goal attempt hit the right upright and was no good. Another attempt from 40 yards was blocked by Melvin Matthews, keeping the score 10-7 at halftime.

In the first half the Pirates gained 91 yards on the ground to Grambling's none, had 211 total yards to Grambling's 114 and forced the Tigers into 3-and-out three times. Shepherd completed 8-of-11 pass attempts for 120 yards and a score and Coleman ran 12 times for 78 yards, but neither would return after the break after suffering from severe leg cramps.

Grambling State coach Melvin Spears and the Tigers emerged from the locker room determined to improve upon their first half offensive struggles. Ab Kuuan and Landry Carter accounted for consecutive first downs on the ground and a pass interference call on Hampton's George Knox added another, giving Grambling the ball at the HU 25-yard line. On second-and-long Landers found Tolbert in the end zone for a 29-yard touchdown. Tolbert beat Preston on a post across the middle to cap a 12-play, 81-yard drive that took just over five minutes.

The Pirates went 3-and-out on their first possession of the second half and quickly faced a 20-10 deficit when Bridges blew past Hampton's Reginald Knox for a 51-yard score on a pass from Landers. During the extra-point attempt Kendall Langford broke through the line for what would be the first of three crucial blocked kicks for Hampton.

West Virginia transfer TJ Mitchell entered the game at QB and HU reserve running backs, Van Morgan and Kevin Beverly, filled in admirably for Coleman. Mitchell found his former high school teammate Jeremy Gilchrist for a 9-yard gain and Morgan rushed for 33 of his game-high 82 yards during a 53-yard scoring drive that ended with a 37-yard field goal by Paterini, making the score Grambling State 20, Hampton 13 with under three minutes to play in the third period.

An action packed fourth quarter began when the Tigers took over at the HU 4-yard line following a fumbled punt return by Gilchrist. Travarous Bain nearly intercepted a Landers' pass in the end zone and Durant stuffed Kuuan for a 6-yard loss. Grambling settled for a 32-yard field goal attempt by Manuel, but Ray Lewis came up with another block to keep the score at 20-13.

The Tigers held the lead and the ball with 3:40 to play and it appeared that GSU was total control. However, the Hampton defense limited Grambling to just one yard on the first two plays from scrimmage and on third down Alden Blizzard sacked Landers and forced a fumble that was recovered by Vernon Bryant at the Tigers' 13-yard line.

Two plays into the ensuing drive, Mitchell rolled to his right and found Onrea Jones at the pylon for a 9-yard touchdown with 1:10 remaining and the extra point knotted the game at 20 apiece.

Grambling had one more chance as it received the ball at its own 29-yard line and promptly drove down the field. Landers completed passes to Tolbert, Tim Abney and Edwards to put the Tigers inside the Hampton 30-yard line, but Manuel's 44-yard field goal attempt as time expired sailed wide left to send the game into overtime.

Hampton had the first possession of overtime and after gaining one first down Mitchell found Beverly out of the Pirate backfield for a 10-yard score and a 27-20 lead. The Tigers took their turn next and, faced with a critical 3rd -and-7, Landers connected with Tolbert for a gain of 10 yards to keep the Grambling drive alive. Landers then found Abney in the end zone from 12-yards out and the Tigers were just an extra point away from another overtime. But once again, the Pirates' field goal block team came through as Swinton exploded through the line and took the ball of the foot of Manuel to seal the victory for the Pirates.