

High Flying Pirates set to host Richmond

In state opponents prepare for playoff battle

By Kerry Flagg

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The Hampton Pirates closed the regular season last weekend with a 44-6 victory over Savannah State to finish undefeated in the MEAC and 11-0 overall. Their reward; the number three seed in the Division I-AA playoffs and a first round home game against the Richmond Spiders (8-3).

Hampton hasn't hosted a playoff game since 1993, when they were in Division II. The Spiders struggled early in the season but a mid-season quarterback change and a season-ending 41-7 defeat of William & Mary has them hitting on all cylinders for their visit the Tidewater area this Saturday. They come in as one of the hottest teams in the country having won seven games in a row.

However, the Pirates will no doubt be ready, having taken on and beaten all challengers throughout the season. And the experience many of the players gained in last year's playoffs—a 42-35 road loss to William & Mary in the first round—should help ease any of the Pirates' postseason anxiety.

"These guys have had the experience of what it's like to be in the playoffs," said Hampton head coach Joe Taylor. "The core personnel of this team will hopefully add some advantage to this team."

The number one advantage for Hampton all season has been the two-headed rushing attack of senior Alonzo Coleman and junior Ardell Daniels. For the second consecutive season each has rushed for more than 1,000 yards. Entering last week's contest against Savannah State Daniels needed 110 yards to top the century mark. He wasted no time, gaining 133 yards in the first quarter as the Pirates amassed 548 yards from scrimmage in the game, including 415 on the ground.



Hampton head coach Joe Taylor and the Pirates will host a playoff game for the second time in school history.

Coleman's rushing total (191 carries for 1,309 yards, 6.9 average) makes him the ninth-best running back in DI-AA and Daniels (185 carries for 1,015, 5.5 average) is 30th. Coleman has also scored the second-most points (114) in Division I-AA. The two are joined in the backfield by another duo at quarterback. Starter Princeton Shepherd has completed more than 55% of his passes (70 of 126) for 1,018 yards, eight touchdowns and five interceptions. At 6'5" he is more of a pocket passer and his height allows him to see over Hampton's massive offensive line to pick defenses apart. Kent State transfer Antwan Smith is also a capable passer (39-82 for 522 yards, three touchdowns and an interception) but is also adept at using his feet. When he decides to tuck the ball and run with it he gains nearly 2.5 yards per carry.

Regardless which quarterback is under center the Pirates have plenty of pass-receiving targets, as five players have caught more than ten passes this season. The leader of the group is senior

Marquay McDaniel who has a team-best 39 catches for 611 yards and six touchdowns. Onrea Jones has 21 catches for 439 yards (20.9 yard average) and a touchdown and even Daniels has chipped in with 92 yards through the air on 14 catches. When the Pirates need to keep a drive alive they look to 6'4" 220 pound junior Dereck Faulkner (10 catches, 163 yards and a TD) and 6'5" tight end Ernie Lomax (10 catches, 124 yards and a TD).

As an offense the Pirates gain an average of 400 yards per game (eighth-best in the nation) and score 33.3 points per game. And while Coach Taylor prefers to wear down opposing defenses with ball-control, time consuming drives, the Pirates offense can also gain yards in chunks, as evidenced by their 47 plays of more than 20 yards.

Defensively, the Pirates are led by preseason All-American and Buchanan list finalist (given to the top defensive player in DI-AA) middle linebacker Justin Durant. The senior from Florence, SC leads the team in tackles with 110, 14.5 of them for loss, including five sacks. He also has an interception, two pass breakups and two fumble recoveries. Other defensive stalwarts include 6'6" 276 pound sophomore defensive end Kendall Langford (second in tackles with 63, 4.5 sacks and two blocked kicks); Kensley Dougan (56 tackles and two fumble recoveries) and defensive back Kyle Whitehurst (54 tackles, three interceptions for 106 yards and a TD).

The Pirates' defense will face a Richmond offense that has vastly improved since they made the switch to Stacy Tutt at quarterback. The Spiders opened the season with three losses in their first four games, including a 37-13 defeat at the hands of Division I-A Vanderbilt. However, since moving Tutt from wide receiver to signal caller, his natural position, the Spiders have not lost a game—five of those final seven victories were by ten points or more. In just seven games Tutt has completed 143 of 248 passes for 1,959 yards, 14 touchdowns and seven interceptions. Those numbers make Tutt the 23rd-best quarterback in the division. The 6'2" 235 pound athlete is also the team's most potent rusher, with 665 yards and 10 TDs. However, the Pirates have faced athletic quarterbacks throughout the season.

"We have had four opportunities to face running quarterbacks (against Gardner-Webb, South Carolina State, Bethune-Cookman and FAMU). Its no question he is the key to that football team," said Taylor. "Since he's been at quarterback they haven't lost, so certainly he is the key. We can't let him have a field day."

Other offensive weapons for the Spiders include running backs Tim Hightower, the team's second-leading rusher with 614 yards and seven touchdowns on 112 carries, and David Freeman (99 carries, 445 yards and three TDs). When Tutt looks to throw, his main targets are: Arman Shields (51 catches, 724 yards and four TDs); Matt Hale (40 catches, 565 yards and three TDs); and Hightower (19 catches, 161 yards). First team all-Atlantic 10 kick returner David Freeman has 506 return yards on the season, good for a 28.1 yard average.

Richmond's defense is led by Atlantic 10 first-teamers, defensive lineman Sherman Logan (43 tackles, 8.5 sacks) and linebacker Adam Goloboski (101 tackles, 2.5 sacks and an interception). Other key defenders are Lance Gray (78 tackles, three sacks, two interceptions and a fumble recovery) and Brian Burnette (67 tackles, two sacks and an interception).

Said coach Taylor: "...when you have experience and that is something you can't pay for, my hope is that the missed tackle last year (against William & Mary) won't be a missed tackle this year. Normally games like these come down to special teams, the hidden yardage, and the field position."

Note: Hampton's Alonzo Coleman was named the MEAC's offensive player of the year on Thursday, while Justin Durant earned defensive player of the year honors. Senior offensive lineman Gerrell Golightly, place kicker Andrew Paterini, defensive end Langford and defensive back Travarous Bain were also selected to the first team.