

The Battle for the Number One Spot

by Kerry Flagg
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If last week's game between Albany State and Clark Atlanta was to keep pace with league-leading Tuskegee, then the match up between the Golden Rams and Golden Tigers on Saturday is the battle to BE the leader. Albany State overcame modest offensive numbers by scoring 21 unanswered points en route to a 34-20 homecoming victory over CAU. Tuskegee, meanwhile, scored touchdowns offensively, defensively and on special teams during a 42-27 defeat of Morehouse, the Golden Tigers' 22nd consecutive victory dating to the 2006 season.

Albany State (5-1, 4-1 SIAC) can take sole possession of first place (by virtue of tiebreaker) in the conference with a victory at Tuskegee, but they'll have to be more consistent on offense than they were last week. Against CAU, the Golden Rams were out gained 203 yards to 178. Quarterback Kissan Flakes completed 12-of-14 passes for just 65 yards and two touchdowns while rushing for another 32 yards. For the season Flakes has completed 65% of his passes, tops in the SIAC, but for just 564 yards, five touchdowns and three interceptions. Just two Golden Rams have more than 100 yards receiving, junior Ronnie Childs (11-147-1) and junior tight end Larry Johnson (9-161-1), however four other players have at least one touchdown reception. Flakes also serves as the team's leading rusher with 210 yards and five touchdowns on 53 carries. Four other Golden Rams have rushed for at least 100 yards on the season.

While ASU's offense struggled against Clark Atlanta their defense and special teams excelled, allowing just 61 yards on the ground. Lineman Develle Miller recovered a fumble for a touchdown and the unit forced three interceptions. In addition, junior RB Demetri Johnson returned a kickoff 85 yards for a score. Statistically, the Golden Rams lead the league in points (14 ppg) and yards allowed (203.2).

Tuskegee, meanwhile, tops the league in points scored (34.8 ppg) and total yards (490.3) so in this battle of immovable objects something will have to give. The Golden Tigers' offense is led by the conference's leading passer, senior Jacary Atkinson (78-151-1,468, 11 TDs, 8 ints). Against Morehouse, Atkinson passed for 239 yards and ran for another 69. His favorite receiving targets are sophomore Antoine Mitchell (20-445-2), junior Jonathan Lessa (16-357-3) and senior Jason English (16-309-4), all of whom rank among the ten best pass-catchers in the league. Like Albany State, the Tigers' QB is the team's rushing leader. However, with 488 yards and seven touchdowns on 71 carries (6.9 ypg) Atkinson is the SIAC's second-leading rusher. Junior Tony Forney (66-382-3) ranks fourth. Still, it would seem the QB is the key to both teams' success, and no doubt the opposing defenses will focus on (at least) slowing them down.

Speaking of defense, Tuskegee ranks second to ASU in points allowed (14.7 ppg) and third in total defense (262.2 ypg). Senior end Jarvis DeVaughn has recorded seven sacks, forced three fumbles and recovered two. Senior linebacker Clifton Sanders, just 5-9 and 196 pounds, leads the team with 39 tackles.