

SIAC Teams Battle to Keep Pace with Leader

By Kerry Flagg
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As the 2008 season reaches the midway point, Clark Atlanta will travel to Albany State in a game pitting two teams trying to keep pace with league-leading Tuskegee. The Panthers (4-2, 3-1) are coming off a heartbreaking 17-14 homecoming loss to Savannah State, a game that would've gone to overtime had kicker Henry Brayton's 35-yard field goal not sailed wide left as time expired. The Golden Rams, meanwhile, will have to block out their own homecoming festivities, as they'll look to build on last week's 35-14 victory over Stillman. The winner will remain within striking distance of Tuskegee who sits atop the SIAC undefeated but face once-beaten Morehouse on Saturday.

Against Savannah State, CAU raced to an early 11-0 lead, but were outscored 17-3 over the game's final 31 minutes. Still, they certainly did some positive things, especially on offense where they racked up 448 yards. Sophomore RB Winston Thompson ran for 145 yards and senior QB Cedric Johnson threw for 175 yards and ran for another 99, including diving one-yard for a score. For the season Thompson has run for more than 100 yards in five of six contests and leads the conference in rushing (by far) with 819 yards and three touchdowns on 135 carries (6.1 ypc). His closest competitor, Tuskegee QB Jacary Atkinson, is exactly 400 yards behind. Johnson ranks fourth in passing (63-136, 6 TDs, 5 ints.) and has completed at least one pass to 12 different receivers. His favorite targets include senior Antwan Bell (11-229-2 TDs), and 6-5 sophomores Morti Lightburn (9-144-2) and Coshnue Bingham (3-66). Overall the Panthers boast the second most prolific offense in the conference (404.7 ypg) and are also the third-highest scoring offense (27.2 ppg).

Albany State counters with the SIAC's best defense, a unit that allows just 203 total yards and just under 13 points per contest. Leaders include junior LBs Frederick Green (22 tackles) and Jericho Brown (3.5 sacks), senior DL Jermyah Graves (2 forced fumbles) and sophomore LB Quinton Nelson (2 forced fumbles).

During last weekend's win over Stillman, ASU took an early 14-0 lead en route to amassing 451 yards from scrimmage (241 rushing, 210 passing). Junior QB Kissan Flakes completed 7-12 passes for 115 yards, a TD and two interceptions; he also ran for 60 yards and two more scores. As if he weren't effective enough on his own, he shares time under center with 6-5, 240 pound junior A.J. McKenna, who finished 10-15 for 117 yards and a touchdown. For the season Flakes is the SIAC's ninth-rated QB (44-72 499 yds., 3 TDs, 3 ints.) and McKenna ranks tenth (26-42, 325 yds., 4 TDs). Both gentlemen complete more than 61% of their passes. Their favorite receiving targets include junior Ronnie Childs (110147-1), junior TE Larry Johnson (8-158-1), senior RB Brian Porter (8-80-1) and junior RB Demetri Johnson (12-54). Flakes leads the team in rushing with 178 yards and 5 touchdowns on 39 carries. Porter (38-139) and junior Gary Neavins (24-205-2) are also key in the running game.

Clark Atlanta's defense, one of the best in the conference against the run, is led by senior LB Milton Norris (38 tackles, 1.5 sacks), senior linemen Reginald Thomas (33 tackles, sack) and Marcus Winston (23 tackles, 4.5 sacks) and senior DB Devon Shorte who leads the league with 4 interceptions.