



## **This Year's Florida Classic a Battle for More Than Bragging Rights**

*Playoffs, Conference finish also on the line*

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While South Carolina State has already locked up the MEAC regular season title, second place and a possible at-large playoff berth are still up for grabs. Bethune-Cookman (8-2, 5-2 MEAC) currently sits behind SCSU and a victory over Florida A&M (8-3, 4-3) will give them sole possession of the slot to end the season. The Rattlers, meanwhile, can force a tie with the Wildcats with a victory and if Delaware State defeats Howard, the Hornets, Rattlers and Wildcats would all finish tied for second. Oh yeah, and if that weren't enough this meeting will also mark the 29<sup>th</sup> Anniversary for the Florida Classic.

Bethune enters the game after escaping with a two-point victory over Howard a week ago. The best rushing offense in the MEAC is led by sophomore Brian Sumlar, fourth in the conference with 744 yards and 10 TDs on 143 carries (5.2 yard average). Other leading rushers include senior QB McKinson Souverain (99-544-7 TDs) and senior A-back Corey Council (33-196-2). In the Wildcats' "Wyatt-bone" offense Souverain is most effective on the run, but is also a capable passer (27-61-412, 2 TDs, 2 ints.) when he needs to be. His favorite targets are senior Phillip Kirkland (22-374-1) and Joe Singleton (19-250-2).

The top-ranked scoring defense in the conference (15.2 points allowed) is led by senior safety Travis Roland, fifth in the MEAC with 78 tackles and first in sacks (8), junior LBs Brendan Odom (64 tackles, 3 sacks) and Kendrick Odom (55 tackles, 1.5 sacks) and another set of brothers, Antonio and Antwane Cox, at DB (4 combined ints.).

Florida A&M played themselves into position by blowing out Hampton last Saturday, a day when ESPN's College Gameday crew was on campus. The Rattlers lead the league in scoring (33.1 ppg), so their offense vs. Bethune's defense is the match up to watch. The quarterback tandem of junior Curtis Pulley (87-158- 1,257 yards, 15 TDs, 4 ints.) and sophomore Eddie Battle (83-132-963 yards, 4 TDs, 4 ints.) form the most potent passing tandem in the league; they rank sixth and seventh respectively. Regardless which QB is under center, their favorite targets include sophomores Kevin Elliott (54-779-7), Isaac West (32-575-3) and Adrian Smith (32-445-6). Pulley is also the Rattlers leading rusher (105-714-5) and when you throw RB Philip Sylvester (142-624-6) in the mix they are also very capable of running the football.

Leading the charge defensively for the Rattlers are freshman LB Alvis Graham (62 tackles, 6 sacks), senior DB Jason Beach (60 tackles, 5.5 sacks), freshman DB Greg Harvey (50 tackles) and sophomore DBs Qier Hall and Curtis Holcomb (league-leading 5 ints. apiece).

As for the playoff race, the Rattlers have a strong case with a win over Bethune. They have a solid win over nationally-ranked Tennessee State and their three losses, all to MEAC opponents (Delaware State, South Carolina State, and Morgan State), were by a total of 17 points. The case could also be made for the Wildcats with a win over FAMU. The Wildcats' two losses are two Delaware State, the 2007 MEAC Champions, and South Carolina State.