

Test of Wills when SWAC Foes Meet; Something Has to Give

by Kerry Flagg
HBCSports Press Association

This weekend Southern travels to Houston's Reliant Stadium to face Prairie View in a pivotal SWAC Western division game. The Jaguars (4-3, 3-0 in SWAC) are tied with Grambling atop the division, while the Panthers (6-1, 3-1) can take sole possession of second place with a win. Southern is looking to bounce back from a heartbreaking 52-49 loss to Florida A&M during which the lead changed hands seven times and the teams combined to gain nearly 1,000 yards from scrimmage. Prairie View, meanwhile, hopes to build off a 15-0 victory over Arkansas Pine Bluff, a game in which the defense allowed their opponent less than 100 yards.

The Jaguars enter the contest having won four of their last five games, including four straight prior to last week's loss. Following his performance against FAMU-25-of-42, 407 yards, three touchdowns and one interception-junior quarterback Bryant Lee leads the SWAC in completions and attempts (152-240), yards (1,939) and touchdowns (16) with just three interceptions. And after rushing 16 times for 64 yards and three more scores, Lee is also the conference's third-leading rusher (370 yards, 6 TDs). As if Lee weren't a potent enough offensive weapon by himself, junior receiver Juamorris Stewart has been his favorite target, leading the SWAC in receptions (6.3) and receiving yards (97.3) per game. Others who have reaped the benefits of Lee's live arm are senior Del Roberts (30-398-3), junior Clevan White (23-262-1), Curry Allen (15-125-1), senior RB Kendrick Smith (15-125-2) and Corderious Gregory (13-217-2). And while Lee is the Jags' most effective rusher, he is by no means alone in the backfield. Smith, a 220-pounder, has rushed 96 times for 421 yards and two touchdowns while sophomore Silas Gibbs (33-225-1) and junior Brian Threat (24-100-2), both also more than 210 pounds, have chipped in.

Southern leads the SWAC in points scored (32.6), passing (283.7) and total yards (442) per game. Their Panthers, meanwhile, boast the league's best defense in every category including points (13.1) and yards (187.7) allowed per game. Key defenders for PVA&M include senior LBs Zach East (42 tackles, 3 sacks) and Gary Hicks (34 tackles, 3 sacks), junior end Quinton Spears (5 sacks) and junior DBs Anthony Beck (3 ints., TD) and Jason Fobbs (2 ints., TD).

When the Panthers have the ball, they boast their share of talented skill players, led by junior RB Donald Babers. The 5-8, 170-pounder has utilized his elusiveness en route to a league-leading 701 yards and eight touchdowns on 147 carries (4.8 ypc). His nearest competitor, Southern's Smith, needs nearly 300 yards to catch him. Other backs slated to see time include 225-pound sophomore Michael Jason (32-138-2) and Russell Ball (20-80-2). Quarterback Mark Spivey, a 6-5 senior, has completed 59% of his passes for 1,199 yards, nine touchdowns and eight interceptions. He ranks third in pass efficiency and fifth in yards per game. The dual threat has also gained 166 yards and three scores on the ground, numbers that rank him second on the team. When looking to pass, some of Spivey's key targets are sophomore Shaun Stephens (17-216-4), Gabe Osaze-Ediae (16-291-2), Babers (15-129) and junior Joe Townsend (12-262-2).

Much like the Jaguars, PVA&M ranks near the top of the SWAC in most offensive categories, including points scored (2nd-31.7), rushing offense (1st-173) and total offense (2nd-343.6). They'll face a defense that ranks at or below the middle-of-the-pack in most categories and allows the most passing yards in the conference (267 per game). Still there are talented individuals on the unit, including senior LB John Malveaux (47 tackles), senior DBs Joe Manning (37 tackles) and Glenn Bell (41 tackles, sack) and senior end Vincent Lands (38 tackles, 2.5 sacks).