

## **Tuskegee vs. Benedict clash in opening game of college football season**

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For most of the 2008 football season, the Golden Tigers of Tuskegee were on a collision course for a second straight undefeated campaign and a Black College Football National Championship.

While Willie Slater's group did win their third straight SIAC crown (10-1, 9-0 SIAC), the perfect season and national crown hopes came crashing down following a controversial 17-13 loss at Alabama State in the Turkey Day Classic.

On Saturday night in Columbia, S.C. (6 p.m. ET), TU will open their 2009 season against conference foe Benedict College.

Despite the loss of several standouts -- including SIAC Offensive Player of the Year QB Jacary Atkinson -- the Golden Tigers will still be a team to be reckoned with.

Picked to finish second in the SIAC Coaches Preseason Poll, Slater has double digit members on this year's preseason all conference team for the second straight year.

This year's team features 12 players including five on the first team, four of which are either defensive or secondary players.

This also includes offensive lineman Michael Stevens, a selection to the 2009 BoxToRow.com/BASN Preseason HBCU All-America Team.

As for Benedict, the Tigers pulled off one of the bigger upsets of the HBCU season last year when they defeated Albany State 13-10 in September. The win gave the Tigers a 3-2 record at the time.

However, Stan Connor's squad could only muster up two more wins in their last six games and tumbled to a 5-6 mark (4-5 SIAC).

The Tigers are looking to replace All-SIAC offensive linemen, Stanly Wright and offensive tackle, Cliff Ellison, on the right side their offensive line.

Defensively, the linebacker core is expected to continue to shine on the field for the Tigers. Returning is senior linebacker and All-SIAC first teamer James Graham (75 total tackles, 3.5 sacks, three quarterback hurries, and a fumble recovery).

Another contributor is All-SIAC second team LB Michael Thompson who last season mustered 87 total tackles, a sack, two pass break-ups, three quarterback hurries, three forced fumbles and two fumble recoveries.

Tuskegee is 12-0 all-time against Benedict College.