

Hampton's loss means MEAC race is very much open
SCSU/DSU game could decide who remains in first place

By Kerry Flagg
HBCSports Press Association

As we enter the final weekend in October, college football games are increasing in importance and conference standings are beginning to take shape. Though, in the MEAC they are taking on one very few people could've predicted. Following an undefeated streak that lasted nearly two years to the day, Hampton fell to South Carolina State 13-6 in Orangeburg, SC last weekend. The Bulldogs' reward? They get to travel to Dover for a night game against Delaware State, the last team to defeat the Pirates back in October 2004. Even with the loss the Pirates are still atop the MEAC standings with a 5-1 conference record, but the Hornets (5-2, 4-1 in the MEAC) and Bulldogs (4-3, 3-1) are right there with them. With just four weeks remaining in the regular season this is the time of year when the teams with real postseason aspirations separate themselves from the rest of the pack. This game between South Carolina State and Delaware State should give fans a good idea as to who, if anyone, is ready to dethrone Hampton, the three-time conference champions.

To listen to both coaches during their weekly teleconference it is obvious Buddy Pough of SC State and DSU's Al Lavan have immense respect for each other as coaches and for their programs. Both recognize the challenges presented by their opponents, and know they will have their work cut out for them in order to emerge victorious. But for the Bulldogs' Pough, the concerns run deeper than what may happen on the field.

"We are concerned about what the weather might be up there at night," said Pough regarding the prospects of traveling north and playing under the lights in late October. This is the first season the Hornets are playing night games at home.

Regardless of his concerns, however, Pough's squad will definitely enter the game with a lot of momentum after holding the MEAC's highest-scoring offense to just six points and 201 total yards last weekend. Hampton entered the contest averaging nearly 160 rushing yards per game, but against the Bulldogs was held to just 50.

"The team I saw on tape against Hampton is an outstanding football team. They really played well in all aspects of the game," said Delaware State's Lavan. "For the three years I've been in this league that's kinda typical of what Buddy Pough brings to the game."

What's also typical for the Bulldogs is that much of their success rests on the arm and legs of junior quarterback Cleveland McCoy. Against the Pirates, McCoy ran 17 times for 114 yards, including the game's only touchdown, and also completed 8-14 passes for 81 yards. For the season McCoy has completed just 48% of his passes for 740 yards, four TDs and seven interceptions, but he's also run for 269 yards and three scores. Yet, as capable as he is of keeping defenses off-balance McCoy certainly doesn't have to do it all by himself. He is joined in the backfield by two of the top three backs in the conference. Senior DeShawn Baker has carried the ball 121 times for 688 yards and six TDs and when he's needed a break the Bulldogs' offense has not missed a beat, as freshman William Ford has 537 yards on 60 carries (8.9 yard average) for another six scores. The trio has given the Bulldogs the most potent rushing offense in the conference, averaging over fifty yards per game more than the second-place Hornets.

Indeed, the majority of SCSU's offensive success is found on the ground, but that is not to say McCoy doesn't have capable receivers at his disposal when he needs them. Gerald McCloud, a 6'2" senior, has caught ten passes for 175 yards and two touchdowns while 6'2" freshman Terrance Smith has chipped in with ten catches of his own for 167 yards and a touchdown. Eleven other Bulldogs have caught at least one pass this season, though the team has scored just five touchdowns through the air. Whether they look to run or pass SCSU's offense features a solid line, led by MEAC offensive lineman of the week James Lee. The 6'6", 300 pound senior was credited with eight pancake blocks against Hampton.

When asked about the Bulldogs' offensive weapons during the teleconference, namely Baker, Ford and McCoy, Lavan jokingly responded "I'm trying to see if Buddy can leave them at home." And while the Hornets' defense ranks in the middle of the conference pack in most team categories there is plenty of individual talent on that side of the ball. Senior defensive back Tyrone Kelly ranks eighth in the conference with seven tackles per game while senior linebacker Ken-Won Miller ranks tenth with 6.9 per game and 2 sacks. Senior defensive back Jamel Trott has chipped in with 35 tackles and two forced fumbles while senior defensive back Kofi Amoah has recorded 33 tackles, two fumble recoveries and seven pass break-ups. The Hornets may also hold an advantage in the kicking game where junior place kicker Josh Brite has made all four of his field goal attempts this year, including two last week against Morgan State from 48 and 49 yards. DSU also blocked two punts during the 29-7 victory.

As was mentioned earlier the Hornets boast the MEAC's second-best rushing offense and their scoring offense (30.4 ppg) is second only to Hampton's. A major reason for that success is the running ability of senior Emmanuel Marc, who leads the conference with 749 rushing yards and seven TDs. He is joined in the Hornets' backfield by sophomore quarterback Vashon Winton, the conference's fourth-best passer (79-130, 959 yards, nine TDs, two ints.) who has also run for 167 yards and five touchdowns. And when Winton does look to pass his primary target is no doubt 6'3" senior wide out Shaheer McBride who is third in the conference in receptions (5.71) and tops in receiving yards (90.9) per game. Against Morgan State, McBride had eight catches for 134 yards and a touchdown, his best performance since the 206 yards and four touchdowns he put up against St. Francis in week two. Still, despite their weapons coach Lavan thinks his offense can play better than they have.

"We have to do the basic things in order to function in our offense," said Lavan. "We'll need to pass the ball a lot better. We haven't had much consistency [throwing the ball] the last couple games."

SCSU hopes they can force Delaware State into more offensive inconsistency and leading the defensive charge will be sophomore linebacker Tony White (38 tackles, sack, two fumble recoveries), freshman LB David Erby (33 tackles, sack, two forced fumbles) and sophomore LB Marshall McFadden (33 tackles, two ints.). Coach Pough knows he and his players will have their hands full on Saturday night, but they plan to ride the momentum from last week's victory as long as they can.

"This is a strange sensation. Ordinarily we'd be trying to prepare ourselves after a loss," said Pough. "It's a lot easier to do this, though, I guarantee you that."