2010 Patriot League Preview
By Charles Burton

Predicted Order of Finish

1. Colgate
2. Holy Cross
3. Lehigh
4. Lafayette
5. Bucknell
6. Georgetown

Players of the Year
Offense: QB Greg Sullivan, Sr., Colgate
Defense: DE Mude Ohimor, Sr. Holy Cross

Biggest Shoes To Fill:
QB Dominic Randolph, Holy Cross
What more can be said about the four-year starter for the Crusaders? Start with the fact that in his four-year career he ended owning almost every significant passing record on the books. Continue with the fact that not only was he the leader on offense last year (3,776 yards passing, 63.9% completion percentage, 34 passing TDs), he also led Holy Cross in rushing (480 yards, 7 TDs) as well. Add to this the fact that last year he delivered his program its first Patriot League title since 1991 and its first appearance in the FCS playoffs since 1983. He has left his mark on the Holy Cross program – and dominated the Patriot League - in a way that few other players have.

Singular Sensations

Throughout the season last year, Holy Cross quarterback Dominc Randolph's exploits had a tendency to be the story from week to week.

Records fell one by one as the weeks rolled on. Teams around the Patriot League - including Fordham, whose decision to offer football scholarships meant that this year it won't be eligible for the Patriot League title - fell one by one to the singular sensation Randolph. Teams around the league already know he was an incredible passer. Now the fifth-year senior had developed a running game, too.

Randolph's career up until 2009 had been one of the kid who had come so tantalizingly close to success, but unable to taste it. At his high school, he sat behind an elite quarterback prospect in Rob Schoenhoft and watched him break all the passing records. While head coach Tom Gilmore would see Randolph's potential and saw him win a battle for the quarterback position in 2005, their dreams of Patriot League titles and appearances in the FCS playoffs would come down to one game, one play: the painful interception in the closing minutes in 2007 at Fordham to lose 24-21. The agonizing ability to get that last come-from-behind score in 2008 to lose to Colgate 28-27.

Three years. Three 7-4 records. And Randolph had had enough. 2009 would be the year that Randolph exacted his revenge.

It started against Colgate. Vengeance for the last-second loss . A 42-28 win - led by Dominic's 100-yard rushing performance - would be an emphatic start to his quest. He would score every touchdown - either with his arm (4) or his feet (2).

Then, Fordham. Facing off in what was billed a battle of future NFL quarterbacks, its 42-27 win wasn't as individually dominating as the previous week. Skelton, now on the NFL's Arizona Cardinals, passed for more yards - but on the one statistic that mattered, it was Randolph's touchdowns (4) that outperformed Skelton (0).

Lehigh - a team that helped sink the Crusaders' title hopes in 2006 - was next on the docket. Up most of the game, the Mountain Hawks thought themselves on the brink of a shocking upset - until Randolph found Freddie Santana at the goal line to escape Bethlehem 24-21.

And finally, the Leopards - a team that wrecked their chances at an at-large playoff bid in 2007, and the one team that could stand in Randolph's way in 2009. One game, one singular sensation. In a driving rain, conditions that favored the physical play of the Leopards.

And Randolph delivered. Down 19-7 midway through the second quarter, Dominic simply refused to let history repeat itself. In the last five minutes of the first half - and right after a Lafayette touchdown - Randolph struck back in two plays to cut the lead to five. Then, one failed Lafayette offensive drive later, he would engineer another drive - punctuated by his one-yard run - to give the Crusaders a lead they wouldn't relinquish.

Randolph was a singular sensation that Patriot League folks will be talking about an awfully long time.

With Randolph gone, picking the Patriot League champion seems to come down to quarterbacks. And the **Colgate Raiders** boast the returning triggerman with the most experience: senior quarterback Greg Sullivan. The Raiders also have a budding superstar - if he isn't already - in junior runningback Nate Eachus. Dick Biddle's team will be strong - the question is can defensive back Coree Moses lead a relatively inexperienced defense to be good enough to win the Patriot League? Colgate plays the first two games of the year against Monmouth (out of the NEC) and Furman (out of the SoCon) at Andy Kerr Stadium while the crown jewel of its out-of-conference schedule is a trip to longtime rival Syracuse in late

September. Georgetown, Lafayette and Holy Cross loom at home as crucial Patriot League contests.

Can the **Holy Cross Crusaders** win titles without Dominic Randolph? That's the million-dollar question facing Tom Gilmore's squad, despite the fact that they return many veteran players on both sides of the ball. Randolph's four main targets return, including wideout Bill Edger, and defensive end Mude Ohimor will be a big feature in the Crusaders' solid defense. But will the new starting quarterback come anywhere close to replace Dominic? Holy Cross' out-of-conference schedule won't make things easier as it plays UMass of the CAA (on the road) and perennial Ivy League title contenders Harvard (on the road) and Brown (at home). Howard of the MEAC, Fordham, Lehigh and Bucknell all visit Fitton Field this year for exciting home games.

Is this the year that the **Lehigh Mountain Hawks** turn things around? Despite their two consecutive wins over Lafayette in the most-played college football rivalry, Lehigh limped to a 4-7 record last year. But plenty of lettermen return - notably offensive lineman Will Rackley and linebacker Al Pierce - which gives Lehigh fans a lot of hope that the talent on their team can finally come together and win a Patriot League title. The Mountain Hawks don't exactly have a cupcake schedule either – facing off against the defending national champions (Villanova, at home), a perennial Ivy League powerhouse (Harvard, on the road) and a team that has made in the FCS playoff quarterfinals five of the last six years (New Hampshire, on the road). Princeton, Fordham, Bucknell and Colgate fill out their home schedule, while their annual game against hated rival Lafayette in the 146th meeting of "The Rivalry," will be played at Easton.

The **Lafayette Leopards** also have the tools to win the Patriot League as well. It seems like every year Frank Tavani'ss team can be called "Linebacker U," and Michael Schmidlein is well on his way to following in the footsteps of Mark Leggerio and seemingly never-ending fountain of great Patriot League linebackers. The offense is still settling on a starting quarterback, but it's certain that wideout Mark Layton will be a formidable target for that triggerman. The Leopards' home opener comes against league mate Georgetown, and the Leopards will have their hands full with defending Ivy League champions Penn on the road before welcoming Harvard at home. Stony Brook, the defending champions of the Big South also visit historic Fisher Field, as do Holy Cross and Lehigh (in the 146th meeting of "The Rivalry").

Under first-year head coach Joe Susan, the **Bucknell Bison** will be trying to establish themselves back in the upper echelon of the Patriot League. As always, their defense, behind defensive end Josh Eden, will be solid, but the offense - moving from a triple-option to a pro-style offense - might endure growing pains, despite the presence of budding star running back Jeremiah Young. The Bison will play a regional western Pennsylvania rival to start the year against Duquesne (on the road) and hold an interesting three-game Ivy homestand against Dartmouth, Cornell and defending Ivy League champion Penn. Lafayette, Fordham and Colgate will provide strong Patriot League competition at home at Christy Matthewson Stadium.

Rebuilding seems to be the byword for coach Kevin Kelly's **Georgetown Hoyas** - again, after a nightmarish 0-11 season last year. With new offensive coordinator Dave Patenaude, the is hope in Hoyatown from players like linebacker Nick Parrish and wideout Keerome Lawrence that this is the year that Georgetown escapes the Patriot League cellar. At Multi-Sport Field this year, the Hoyas will welcome Wagner, Marist, Holy Cross, Bucknell and Lehigh.

The **Fordham Rams** won't be eligible for the Patriot League title in 2010, though Tom Masella's troops have plenty to play for. With NFL quarterback John Skelton gone, Ram fans hope transfer quarterback Blake Wayne will be the answer at the helm of Masella's spread offense,while linebacker Nick Mageria should anchor a solid unit. Can the Rams get to 9-2 and get back to the playoffs? The Rams open the season at Bryant while Rhode Island, Assumption, Lafayette, Georgetown and Colgate will pose interesting and important games at Rose Hill in the Bronx.

Patriot League Games To watch in 2010

Sept. 4. Howard at Holy Cross. The defending Patriot League champions lead things off against the Bison of the MEAC in the first meeting between the two schools. Crusader head coach Tom Gilmore is 4-1 in home openers during his head coaching career at Holy Cross.

Sept. 11. Villanova at Lehigh. The Mountain Hawks will open their home football season against the defending FCS national champions. The last time Lehigh beat Villanova at home? 1924, when its 14-7 win was a tune-up for the big game against Lafayette.

Sept. 18. Lafayette at Penn. A stiff rivalry has grown between Penn, the defending champions of the Ivy League, and Frank Tavani's team. The last three games in this series have all gone the Leopards way with the winning margin being a touchdown or less.

Sept 25, Colgate at Syracuse. The Orange needed an 11th game to fill out their schedule, and an old rival, Colgate, came to rescue them. The game will mean that the Raiders and Orange will meet for the 66th time in their history in this upstate New York battle between the urban fans of Syracuse and the rural fans of Colgate.

Oct 2, Harvard at Lafayette. While the Leopards are 3-11 lifetime versus the perennial Ivy League title contenders, last year's Lafayette win - a 35-18 drubbing at Cambridge - will certainly be fresh on the minds of Harvard head coach Tim Murphy and his Crimson.

Oct 9. Fordham at Lehigh. While not a league game,

it's still a significant game for Tom Masella and his Rams in their quest for the playoffs. In their history, the Rams have never beaten Lehigh in Bethlehem, amassing a 2-20 record lifetime against the Mountain Hawks.

Oct 16, Bucknell at Georgetown. The last three meetings in this series have been determined by eight points or less. Both are circling this game as a must-win on their schedule.

Oct 23, Holy Cross at Colgate. In this 73rd meeting between these old rivals, the Raiders and Crusaders know this game will once again be crucial to their title hopes – and the Raiders hope that home-field advantage at Andy Kerr Stadium is the difference. Two years ago, Colgate won a thrilling 28-27 game at home to clinch the Patriot League title.

Oct 30, Colgate at Lehigh. If Lehigh has designs on the Patriot League title, this game has to be circled as a must-win on its calendar. The Mountain Hawks have lost three straight to the Raiders, including a 27-20 loss last year in Hamilton.

Nov. 6, Lafayette at Colgate. A wild 56-49 victory by the Leopards could have been what ultimately doomed Colgate's chances at an at-large bid to the playoffs last year. Rest assured the Raiders will have not forgotten that game last year - and Dick Biddle's squad also undoubtedly knows that the Leopards have lost six of their last seven trips to Andy Kerr Stadium.

Nov 13, Holy Cross at Lafayette. Last year's 28-26 thriller at Holy Cross is what ultimately denied the Leopards the Patriot League title last year. Don't think for a second that Lafayette head coach Frank Tavani won't have revenge on his mind.

Nov 20, Lafayette at Lehigh. It will be the 146th meeting in "The Rivalry," the most-played game in all of college football. There's only one thing Lehigh and Lafayette fans can agree on: They hope that this game will have implications for the FCS playoffs. Last year, Lehigh crushed Lafayette's hopes at a Patriot League title or at-large playoff bid with a thrilling 27-21 overtime victory in Bethlehem.

Conference Capsules

Bucknell Bison
Location: Lewisburg, Pa.
Stadium: Christy Mathewson-Memorial Stadium (13,100)
Head Coach: Joe Susan (first year at Bucknell, 10-0 overall)
Key Losses: QB C.J. Hopson, RB/KR A.J. Kizekai, WR Shaun Pasternak, OL James Phelan, DT Will Braaf, LB Sam Nana-Sinkam, LB Greg Jones, LB Brigham Farrand
Key Returners: QB Burke Batten, FB Ryan Smith, RB Jeremiah Young, OL Ian Del Bello, DE Josh Eden, DT Robert De La Rosa, LB Travis Nissley, FS Akhiel White
Historical Note: Head Coach Joe Susan has an odd distinction: He is the only active Division I head coach in 2010 that is undefeated. In 2000, he guided Davidson to a perfect 10-0 record and a Pioneer League title.
Last Year: A promising 3-2 start came apart in the middle of the year, though a late win over eventual league champion Holy Cross would give the Bison a 4-7 record. After the season, head coach Tim Landis resigned to take a job at San Jose State.
This Year: Scrapping the triple-option that was a staple under Landis, Susan comes from Rutgers with a resume a mile long as an assistant coach and hopes in turning around the program. RB Jeremiah Young and DE Josh Eden should provide him two excellent building blocks.

Colgate Raiders
Location: Hamilton, N.Y.
Stadium: Andy Kerr Stadium (10,200)
Head Coach: Dick Biddle (113-51-0, 113-51-0 overall)
Key Losses: RB Jordan McCord, WR Pat Simonds, TE Adrien Schriefer, OL Zach Posey, DE Austin Douglas, DT Paul Mancuso, LB Greg Hadley, LB Garrington Spence, SS Uzi Idah
Key Returners: QB Greg Sullivan, RB Nate Eachus, WR Doug Rosnick, OL Vittorio Ottanelli, DE Zach Smith, LB Chris DiMassa, CB Coree Moses
Historical Note: Rooted in a longstanding rivalry versus fans in the urban and rural countryside of upstate new York, Colgate and FBS Syracuse play each other in 2010, renewing a 119-year old rivalry that was last contested in 1987.
Last Year: Colgate had a fantastic 9-2 record in 2010 – but was skunked for the Patriot League championship thanks to a 42-28 loss to Holy Cross and wild 56-49 loss to Lafayette. On Selection Sunday the Raiders hoped their 9-2 record would be enough to make the playoffs – but it wasn't.
This Year: With the only quarterback in the league with extensive experience returning in QB Greg Sullivan, it's no wonder why they're the pick to win the league in 2010. But they have a lot to replace, especially on defense: can CB Coree Moses help make Colgate be a dominating unit on "D"?

Fordham Rams
Location: Bronx, N.Y.
Stadium: Jack Coffey Field (7,000)
Head Coach: Tom Masella (21-24, 38-48 overall)
Key Losses: QB John Skelton, WR Asa Lucas, OL Robby Reis, OL Andrew Tyshovnytsky, DE Darzell Wright, LB James Crockett, SS Isiejah Allen, CB Kevin Colbert
Key Returners: QB Blake Wayne, RB Carlton Koonce, RB Xavier Martin, WR Jason Caldwell, TE Stephen Skelton, DE Jordan Bledsoe, LB Nick Magiera, LB Clifton Stuckey, CB Isa Abdul Al-Quddus
Historical Note: Fordham and Georgetown have a long-standing rivalry in football, having played 54 times with the first meeting occurring in 1890. Interestingly, Fordham did not play Georgetown in its "seven blocks of Granite" era in the 1930s.
Last Year: For the second straight year, the Rams suffered through a roller-coaster of a 5-6 season. QB John Skelton provided plenty of fireworks but couldn't beat the elite

teams of the Patriot League to make a run at the title.
This Year: Ineligible for the Patriot League title, transfer quarterback Blake Wayne looks to pick up where Skleton left off, and LB Nick Mageria hopes to improve the Fordham defense significantly in 2010. The Rams think they have a team that can qualify for the FCS playoffs as an at-large team if they take care of business.

Georgetown Hoyas
Location: Washington, D.C.
Stadium: Multi-Sport Field (3,500)
Head Coach: Kevin Kelly (5-38, 5-38 overall)
Key Losses: QB James Brady, RB Charlie Houghton, RB Robert Lane, WR Brandon Floyd, TE Collin Meodor, DE Chudi Obinawu, DB Chris Rau, SS Travis Mack, DB Nick Rattay
Key Returners: QB Scott Darby, RB Phillip Oladeji, WR Keerome Lawrence, WR Jamal Davis, OL Dan Semler, DE Andrew Schaetzke, LB Nick Parrish, SS David Quintero
Historical Note: One hundred years ago in 1910, Fordham dropped football as a result of the sport's violent turn – with "mass plays" and players becoming severely injured or killed. With Georgetown heavily suspected to be next to drop football, the Hoyas instead responded with a 7-1-1 record, including a dominating 15-0 defeat against Virginia.
Last Year: A devastating 0-11 season meant head coach Kevin Kelly cleaned out his offensive coaching staff, hiring new offensive coordinator Dave Patenaude after Hofstra folded its football program.
This Year: The Hoyas are excited about Patenaude's new offense in DC – and WR Keerome Lawrence and LB Nick Parrish are desperately hoping that that excitement translates into Patriot League wins in 2010.

Holy Cross Crusaders
Location: Worcester, Mass.
Stadium: Fitton Field (23,500)
Head Coach: Tom Gilmore (39-28, 39-28 overall)
Key Losses: QB Dominic Randolph, WR Nick Cole, OL Aaron Jones, OL Chris Smith, DT Alex Carson, LB Marcus Rodriguez, SS Michael Wright
Key Returners: QB Ryan Taggart, RB Matt Bellomo, RB Eddie Houghton, WR Bill Edger, WR Luke Chmielinski, WR Freddie Santana, TE Alex Schneider, OL Mike McCabe, DE Mude Ohimor, LB Sean Lamkin, FS Anthony DiMichele, PK Rob Dornfried
Historical Note: Before this year, Holy Cross' only playoff appearance came in 1983. Despite entering that game with a 9-1-1 record – its only blemishes being a 10-10 tie with Harvard and a blowout 47-7 loss to Boston College – the Crusaders would find themselves upset at home to Western Carolina, 28-21 thanks to a late Jeff Gilbert touchdown pass.
Last Year: Dominic Randolph chose to return for his final year of eligibility – to get the elusive Patriot League title he was unable to get his first three years. Thanks to his stellar play, Holy Cross ended the year with a 9-2 record and the Patriot League title he so desperately wanted.
This Year: So much talent returns for the Crusaders, including WR Bill Edger and DE Mude Ohimor. The million-dollar question is: Will a brand-new quarterback and the rest of the offense be able to bring enough to replace what he provided?

Lafayette Leopards
Location: Easton, Pa.
Stadium: Fisher Field (13,750)
Head Coach: Frank Tavani (60-53-0, 60-53-0 overall)
Key Losses: QB Rob Curley, RB Maurice White, RB De'Andre Morrow, OL Ryan Hart-Predmore, NG Andrew Poulson, DT Ian Dell, LB Mark Leggerio, FS Eric McGovern
Key Returners: QB Ryan O'Neil, QB Marc Quilling, RB Jerome Rudolph, RB Vaughn Hebron, WR Mark Layton, WR Mitchell Bennett, OL Anthony Buffulino, OL Andrew Anastor, DE Doug Gerowski, LB Mike Schmidlein, SS Donald Ellis, P Tom Kondash
Historical Note: A hundred years ago in 1910, Lehigh wasn't the biggest game on the schedule – it wasn't even the final game of the season. A 41-0 pasting of Dickinson (Pa.) instead was the finale of Lafayette's schedule – putting it at 7-2, with its only losses to national powerhouses Penn and Princeton.
Last Year: An 8-3 record seems like a pretty good season, right? Not to Lafayette fans – which saw their Leopards lose 27-21 in overtime to hated rival Lehigh to end their dreams for an at-large bid to the FCS playoffs.
This Year: The defense, led by LB Mike Schmidlein, promises to be a dominating unit once again. But can the offense, retooling with a new quarterback, get the ball enough to WRs Mark Layton and WR Mitchell Bennett to win the Patriot League title?

Lehigh Mountain Hawks
Location: Bethlehem, Pa.
Stadium: Murray Goodman Stadium (16,000)
Head Coach: Andy Coen (20-24, 20-24 overall)
Key Losses: QB J.B. Clark, FB Anthony Fossati, WR James Flynn, OL Frank Giacalone, NT B.J. Benning, LB Matt Cohen, SS Jesse Sanchez
Key Returners: QB Chris Lum, QB Michael Colvin, FB Jaren Walker, RB Jay Campbell, WR Jake Drwal, OL Will Rackley, DT Andrew Knapp, LB Al Pierce, LB Troy Taylor, FS John Venerio, CB/PR Jarard Cribbs, CB/KR John Kennedy
Historical Note: Ten years ago, head coach Kevin Higgins and QB Phil Stambaugh led Lehigh to an 11-0 regular-season record and a dominating first-round victory in the I-AA playoffs over Western Illinois, 37-7.
Last Year: A rough 4-6 season going into the final game of the year was salvaged with a dramatic 27-21 overtime victory over Lafayette in the 145th edition of "The Rivalry." The win would be their second straight over the Leopards – spoiling their chance for a postseason at-large bid in the process.
This Year: Lehigh fans are hungry for a winning season and a Patriot League title: Despite their losing records, you could make the case they were only a few points away. With RB Jay Campbell and LB Al Pierce leading the way, the Mountain Hawks hope to return to the top in 2010.◦■

2010 Southern Conference Preview
By Myron Hosea

Predicted Order of Finish

1. Elon
2. Appalachian State
3. Samford
4. Furman
5. University of Tennessee at Chattanooga
6. Wofford
7. Georgia Southern
8. The Citadel
9. Western Carolina

Offensive Player of the Year: Devon Moore, Runningback, Appalachian State
Defensive Player of the Year: Mark LeGree, Safety, Appalachian State

Biggest Shoes to Fill: Armanti Edwards, QB, Appalachian State
First, how can you replace someone who achieved what Edwards did in his four seasons guiding the Mountaineers offense? Simply, you can't. You look for someone who can lead your team, understand the offense, make plays, enable other playmakers and protect the football. If someone does that, Appalachian State's offense will be just fine. Coming out of spring practice, the candidates at quarterback were junior DeAndre Presley and freshman Jamal Jackson. While Jackson is bigger (6-3, 195 to 5-11, 170), Presley does have the edge in experience despite playing wide receiver a year ago. Presley filled in capably for Edwards late in the 2008 season, keeping the Mountaineer playoff train running.

Change Is the Word

Change. While there doesn't appear to be much change in the offing in the standings – Appalachian State and Elon should once again battle for the SoCon title – change is present in every program – enough change to make the season exciting.

For the conference as a whole, the change involves the playoffs. The expanded FCS playoff system offers the SoCon the opportunity to put four teams in the postseason. The conference has come close during the last decade, but generally speaking, only three SoCon teams have made the playoffs. The question is, does the conference have a team ready to step forward and be that fourth playoff-quality team?

Here's a look at key changes facing each of the SoCon teams.

Appalachian State – For the defending league champions, the change is obvious: There will be a new quarterback leading the way. Replacing Armanti Edwards represents huge change. Can DeAndre Presley and Jamal Jackson handle the change?

The Citadel – Change in Charleston means a new offense. The Bulldogs are making the shift to the triple option, which is one way to handle the loss of talented receiver Andre Roberts. As if such a change isn't difficult enough, The Citadel will attempt it without any of last year's quarterbacks.

Elon – The Phoenix will try to follow up a playoff season with even more success, but the team will have to overcome big change at wide receiver. Terrell Hudgins set all kinds of school and national records in his four seasons. It's a big change for the Phoenix offense to look out to the wide side of the field and not see the sure-handed receiver.

Furman – Change for the Paladins occurs at quarterback, where Jordan Sorrells has completed a fine four-year run. Furman is not used to beginning a season without a seasoned starter under center.

Georgia Southern – Like The Citadel, the Eagles are returning to the old standard – the option offense. It will be a big change in Statesboro that the faithful hope will bring back the old standards in the standings.

Samford – Change in Birmingham involves having to handle being one of the favorites for a top-three finish. With just two SoCon seasons behind them, the Bulldogs are considered capable of finishing third, quite a change for this program.

University of Tennessee at Chattanooga – The change for the Mocs involves starting a season following a winning campaign. Successful seasons – even at 6-5 – have been rare in the city by the river, but UTC fans certainly are excited and looking for more. That's a pretty big change.

Western Carolina – Change in Cullowhee lies within the coaching staff. Four assistants are starting their first season on the staff as the Catamounts seek to truly change their fortunes on the gridiron.

Wofford – Counter to Samford and UTC, the Terriers have to deal with the change of following up a losing season. Wofford's had a great run during the last decade, but it will be interesting to see how the

program responds to a 3-8 season.

Now, let's take a glance at each of the SoCon teams.

Elon kept its steady progress under Pete Lembo going last year, breaking through to grab a playoff spot. The Phoenix nearly went farther as it dropped a three-point decision to then defending-national champ Richmond. The talent is present to help Elon capture the conference title this year.

One primary element of the Phoenix rise has been the passing game, and that shouldn't change in 2010 despite the loss of prolific pass-catcher Terrell Hudgins. Quarterback Scott Riddle returns for his fourth season at the helm of the offense, and Elon will lean more heavily on his playmaking. He led the SoCon in passing a year ago, completing 285 of 439 passes for 3,345 yards and 23 touchdowns – and just seven interceptions.

Lance Camp (45 catches, 585 yards), Sean Jeffcoat (27, 366, three touchdowns) and Jeremy Peterson (14, 102) will be counted to step forward as Riddle's primary receivers.

Elon has managed greater balance in the offense the last three years, and three runningbacks give the Phoenix strength in the ground game. Jamal Shuman ran for 677 yards and three touchdowns. Brandon Newsome rushed for 455 yards and seven scores. A. J. Harris added 474 yards and two touchdowns. All three can catch, too. Harris grabbed 28 passes for 268 yards and a touchdown while Shuman caught 17 and Newsome 12.

One of the keys to a successful offense involves restocking the line to give Riddle time to throw and the runners lanes for yardage. Only guard John Rubertone and tackle Corey O'Shea return as starters.

The Phoenix defense ranked as one of the best around last year, allowing only 13 points and 248 yards, both tops in the Southern Conference. Some key players have moved on, but enough experience and talent remains to make a stout defense.

The secondary got crunched with the loss of three starters and a key reserve. Only cornerback Terell Wilson (nine passes defended, three interceptions) returns. Andrew Straus made a bid for playing time, picking off two passes in the spring game.

It's a much better situation at linebacker as all three starters return. Joshua Jones made 89 tackles and had two interceptions. Dale Riley and Brandon Wiggins made 75 and 71 stops, respectively. Travis Greene, Zach Henderson and Lionel Shoffner can provide depth.

End Brandon Ward (5.5 sacks) and tackle David Hunt (16) anchor the front wall for the defense. Jordan Gibson and Olufemi Lamikanra will see lots of playing time there.

Adam Shreiner contributed greatly in his first season as placekicker. He booted 17 field goals and made 42-of-44 extra points to score 93 points in 2009.

The Phoenix go on the road three times in the first month of the season visiting Duke, Richmond and Georgia Southern. The schedule also features a trip to Boone for the showdown with Appalachian State.

Naturally, the main headline for the 2010 **Appalachian State** season will be taking the field without Armanti Edwards, the two-time Payton Award winner who guided the Mountaineers to so much success over four years. Let's not lose sight of the fact, however, that this remains a deeply talented team under head coach Jerry Moore. Appalachian State easily could make a deep run in the playoffs.

Going far does depend on the quarterback play the team receives from DeAndre Presley or freshman Jamal Jackson. Though he played wide receiver most of 2009, Presley backed up Edwards in 2008 so he is not unfamiliar with the offense.

Of course, neither Presley nor Jackson needs to try to be Edwards. They just have to run the offense. They have plenty of talent around them. Edwards and left tackle Mario Acitelli are the only starters missing.

Runningback Devon Moore can be a focal point of the offense after racking up 1,374 yards rushing and 19 touchdowns. Moore shows great hands catching passes, too, which boosts the passing game considering the Mountaineers welcome back many talented wide receivers: Matt Cline (85 receptions, 981 yards), Brian Quick (61, 982), Blake Elder (24, 311), CoCo Hillary (37, 514), Tony Washington and B. J. Frazier. There's also tight end Ben Jorden (16, 226) and wide receiver Travaris Cadet, last year's backup at quarterback.

Guards Pat Mills and Matt Ruff, right tackle Orry Frye and center Brett Irvin return to provide blocking for quarterbacks and runningbacks.Daniel Kilgore steps in at left tackle.

The defense also has to replace a four-year starter in linebacker Jaques Roman. Like the offense, there's

plenty of talent on the defensive side, too. D.J. Smith becomes a fourth-year starter at weakside linebacker position. He made 137 tackles in 2009. The other linebackers will be Brandon Grier on the strongside and Jeremy Kimbrough in the middle.

Lanston Tanyi (7.5 sacks) and Jabari Fletcher (6.5 sacks) return at defensive ends. Demery Brewer and Jordan Gary will get time at end, too. The defensive tackles will be Bobby Bozzo and Gordy White.

Consider the secondary a strong point. Mark LeGree (70 tackles, seven interceptions) is back at strong safety. Ed Gainey returns at one corner after intercepting four passes and making 61 tackles. Troy Sanders is the new right cornerback. Dominique McDuffie, the hero of the first-round victory over South Carolina State last year, is the free safety.

Placekicker Jason Vitaris returns after scoring 115 points a year ago. Sam Martin is back to do the punting.

The Mountaineers begin defense of their most recent SoCon crown by opening at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. The critical game versus Elon is Oct. 9 in Boone. Furman and Wofford also are home games. Appalachian State closes the regular season with a game at Florida.

If anyone thought **Samford** would be an easy out when it entered the SoCon two seasons ago, well, woops. The Bulldogs have been competitive and were two last-play blocked kicks away from higher finishes each of those campaigns. Head coach Pat Sullivan has a solid team in Birmingham, one that could push for a playoff invitation.

Samford has lived on a strong running game spiced with a quick-strike passing game balanced by a tough-as-nails defense. The Bulldogs ended the season behind only Elon in the conference in scoring defense (17.5 point a game) and total defense (284.5 yards per outing). Look for more of that formula in 2010.

Seven starters return on defense, led by middle linebacker Bryce Smith (102 tackles, four interceptions). Three starters up front make things easier for Smith: end John Michael Clay (six sacks), nose guard Patrick Hatcher and tackles (Jason Gaines).

Three-fourths of the secondary returns, including safeties Andy Davis and Thomas Broussard. Jamael Lett returns at one corner position.

The offense centers around tailback Chris Evans, a workhorse who rushed 241 times for 1,152 yards and seven scores last season. He'll carry a big load again this season. Quarterback Dustin Taliaferro has two full seasons as a starter behind him and should challenge for all-conference honors. He completed 190 of 321 passes for 1,692 yards and nine scores. Wide receivers Riley Hawkins (34 catches) and DeMarcus Covington (24) should be his top targets.

Clearing the way from the offensive line are guards Charlie Sanford and Jacquez Gray and tackles George Allers and Thomas Gray.

Both kickers – placekicker Cameron Yaw (12-of-18 field goals, 23-of-23 extra points) and punter Bob Hooper (41.5 average) – are back.

The season starts on the road at Florida State followed by a key FCS encounter at Northwestern State. Samford gets Appalachian State (home) and Elon (away) on successive weekends to start the SoCon slate.

The string of nonplayoff seasons for **Furman** has stretched unusually long, making the Paladin faithful a little anxious about where the program is headed. Yet after his team thumped archrivals Georgia Southern and Wofford in the final two games to ensure another winning season, head coach Bobby Lamb seemed confident - an attitude that continued through the spring. He still leads a young team, but these Paladins could challenge for a playoff spot, especially if the SoCon can snare an extra spot with the expanded playoff bracket.

The prospects of that idea becoming reality rests to a large degree with the quarterback. For the first time in awhile, Furman does not have a quarterback with starting experience in the program following the graduation of Jordan Sorrells, who left Furman as the school's all-time passing leader. Most fans expect Chris Forcier, who arrived from California last summer, to be the replacement. He finished as the third-leading rusher with 129 yards but attempted only nine passes. Forcier and Cody Worley, a senior who's been around the program for a while, were locked in a spring battle that should carry into the fall. Dakota Derrick could figure into the competiton as well.

The eventual starter will have the benefit of having one of the best trios of runningbacks in the conference. Tersoo Uhaa led the team with 535 yards rushing and 13 touchdowns. Jerry Williams ran for 483 yards and three scores as a freshman. And Mike Brown, who missed much of the season with an

injury, looked healthy during spring. Plus, the quarterbacks have a stable of quality receivers led by Adam Mims, who snared 74 passes for 878 yards and four touchdowns. Sedderick Cunningham and David Hendrix are reliable receivers, and Tyler Maples appears ready to give Furman four solid receivers. Daniel McFadden also made an impression this spring.

Despite losing two starters, the offensive line should be a strength. Tackle Antonio Frazer, guard Ryan Lee and center Daniel Spisak are the anchors of the 2010 line.

Furman's defense fared poorly in 2009 when you look at the statistics (last in total defense at 431 yards a game), but it was young.

Linebacker Kadarron Anderson is the heart of the defense following a monster season (123 tackles). He'll team with Chris Wiley (71) and Bandit Julian Hicks (64) to man the middle of the defense.

Both corners – Jordan Griffin (48 tackles) and Ryan Steed (four picks) – return as do free safety Nathan Wade (77 stops) and rover Max Lerner (60). They'll need to work together to improve a pass defense that surrendered 258 yards a game. A stronger pass rush – Furman recorded just eight sacks last season – will help the secondary. Lamb hopes youngsters Ricky Lang and Josh Lynn can produce a rush. Furman moved Brandon Boykin to end for the spring game, and he lit up the offensive backfield. Nose tackles Justin Brown and Pete Sanders will be vital to the defense as well.

Chas Short is expected to step into the placekicking role.

Furman opens with a tough home game against Colgate, but it's not until the season's second weekend. Then it's the Palmetto State triangle with road trips to South Carolina and Wofford sandwiching a home game with The Citadel.

Russ Huesman's first year as head coach at his alma mater – **University of Tennessee at Chattanooga** – couldn't have gone much better when you consider how far the Mocs had fallen. They finished 6-5 and 4-4 in the SoCon, the best finish in some time, and the team clearly exhibited a different attitude. Chattanooga has the opportunity to go farther this year with nine starters returning on offense and seven on defense. They won't surprise anyone, however.

After starting his college career at Tennessee, quarterback B.J. Coleman returned to his hometown to put a spark in the UTC offense. He tossed 17 touchdowns and just nine picks while throwing for 2,348 yards. His leadership will be critical in keeping last year's momentum headed in the right direction. He'll look to returning starter Chris Pitchford to guide a mostly new group of wide receivers that includes Marlon Anthony, Joel Bradford, Chris Marshall, Brian Sutherland, Jeff Veres and Sloan Allison. Garrett Hughes returns at tight end.

The entire offensive line is back with Adam Miller and T.J. Hurless at right tackle and guard, respectively, Chris Harr and Omre Harris at left tackle and guard, respectively, and Justin Galyon at center.

As a freshman, Chris Awuah had to step up at tailback and did so, leading the team with 459 yards. Erroll Wynn missed 2009 but has 1,804 yards rushing in his career. J. J. Jackson adds depth at tailback.

One reason for UTC's huge improvement in 2009 was the play of the defense. The Mocs finished second in the SoCon and 13th nationally in passing defense and sacks. The four starters lost include significant players such as Josh Beard, who had 12 sacks, and long-time starter at linebacker Joseph Thornton. Huesman, however, has players who can keep the improvement going.

Joshua Williams returns at defensive end where he made seven sacks. Jaron Norfleet is expected to start at the other end. Nick Craig is back at the nose with Nick Davison stepping in at tackle.

The Mocs have returning starters at outside linebacker, though J. D. Dothard moves up from safety. Ryan Consiglio made 80 tackles last years and earned defensive MVP of the spring game. Shane Heatherly and J. D.'s brother, Wes Dothard, will look to step in at middle linebacker.

Jordan Tippett had five interceptions in 2009 and returns at one safety position. Chris Lewis-Harris is the free safety. Buster Skrine (45 tackles, two interceptions) holds down one corner while Kadeem Wise came out of spring as the other corner.

The Mocs are looking for a replacement for four-year placekicker Craig Camay.

UTC gets an idea of how far it has advanced when it welcomes defending SoCon champ Appalachian State in the conference opener in week one (Sept. 4). That's followed by a game at Jacksonville State and then a home game with Eastern Kentucky. The Mocs

visit Auburn late in the season.
Last year, the best place to find a photo description of Wofford football was in a dictionary next to definitions for "bad luck" and "snake bit." For example, take its home game with Georgia Southern. Depleted by injuries, Wofford sends out a little-used fullback who goes the distance on his first carry. He's carried off injured on his second. Then, trailing by five late, the Terriers get the ball around midfield but turn the ball over and lose.

Yes, an unusual collection of injuries and turnovers snapped Wofford's string of eight straight winning seasons. This year, head coach Mike Ayers and company will try to build on the depth and toughness carved from the season. Despite all of the troubles, Wofford didn't lose its ability to produce on the ground, placing second nationally with 270 yards rushing a game.

The ground game should be strong again, especially if talented fullback Eric Breitenstein and halfback Jeremy Marshall return from injuries. Quarterback Mitch Allen had good and bad moments running the offense, but he'll benefit from a full year at the helm when he rushed for 633 yards and six touchdowns while registering 605 passing yards and seven scores. Mike Rucker (602 yards rushing) started every game at one halfback spot and played a key role in the return game. Fullback Michael Scott (576) returns as well. When Allen does throw, his chief target is 6-foot-4 wide receiver Brenton Bersin (15 receptions, 356 yards, four touchdowns).

Wofford is known for a having a solid offensive line and the 2010 version should continue that reputation. Four starters – all seniors – return: guards Pat Illig and Ben Wilmoth, center Trey Johnson and tackle Clark Bishop.
The injuries and a tough schedule featuring two FBS teams made circumstances difficult on the defensive side. The Terriers finished last in the SoCon in scoring defense and eighth in total defense. Several experienced players give Wofford hope for better efforts on defense in 2010.

Defensive ends Ameet Pall (eight tackles for loss, four sacks) and Alex Goltry (three sacks) return to anchor the front with nose tackle Eric Eberhardt (32 tackles). The linebacking corps lost Gary Blount to graduation, but returns several players. Mike Niam is expected back from injury after recording 23 tackles in just three games. SeQuan Stanley looks to improve on an impressive freshman season when he made 55 stops. Anthony Carden and Keaton Thompson also are returning starters.

The secondary has plenty of experience, too, paced by free safety Tommy Irvin, the team's leading tackler a year ago with 74. Kendall Bratcher, Preston Roseboro, Stephon Shelton and Blake Wylie all made starts at cornerback.

Christian Reed (five of seven field goals and 47 points) returns, but placekicker Chris Tommie will have to be replaced.

The schedule includes just one FBS team this year (the opener at Ohio), but the Terriers must play Elon, Samford and Appalachian State on the road.

Georgia Southern once dominated the conference and the nation, but the football fortunes in Statesboro have hit rocky times in recent years. The school made a coaching change in the offseason returning to the last successful staff it had. The school selected former Eagles assistant Jeff Monken, who served under Paul Johnson when Georgia Southern last won a national title.

Monken followed Johnson to Navy and then to Georgia Tech. He brings with him a return to the ground-oriented option offense that so defined the Eagles for many years. Of course, that means a serious transition from a pass-oriented offense and all of the changes that brings with it.

Such an offense depends heavily on the quarterback, and the starter likely could be someone new to campus. Jaybo Shaw, the No. 2 quarterback in Georgia Tech's option scheme the last two seasons, transferred during the offseason and would have to be considered a prime candidate. Quarterback A. J. McCray was the leading rusher in the spring game. Monken signed three other quarterbacks in this year's recruiting class.

He also signed five runningbacks as the rebuilding of the option offense has begun. Several players had rushing attempts in the spring game, including familiar names such as Darreion Robinson, Zeke Rozier and Brandon Nolley.

Jamere Valentine (51 receptions) and Patrick Barker (40) return at wide receiver.

Expect new names on defense as well as the Eagles look for a stout defense to help out the new offense. Defensive lineman Brent Russell (11 tackles for loss, six sacks) made an immediate impression as a freshman last year, and he will be a leader this season. Linebackers Dion Dubose (80 tackles), Christian Jordan and Tavaris Williams (47 tackles, two interceptions) comprise a strong linebacking

corps. The secondary could be strong with Darius Eubanks (58 tackles), Hudson Presume (34), Laron Scott (57) and E. J. Webb leading the way.

One strength for the Eagles is placekicker Adrian Mora. He made 16 field goals in 2009 and finished with 67 points.

The Eagles have two key road games early at Navy and at Coastal Carolina before opening the conference schedule at home against Elon.

The Citadel appeared headed for a rise in the conference just a few seasons ago, but those dreams have found a more disappointing reality of late. Last year, the Bulldogs could not build on a two-game winning streak to start the second half of the season, closing with three straight losses.

Thus, the offseason has been one of change for head coach Kevin Higgins and the Bulldogs. A triple-option style offense is now in place, and there have been changes in the coaching staff in an attempt to kick-start the team.

Higgins will have a new quarterback running the new offense as all of last year's quarterbacks have left the program for one reason or another. Brian Hill, Cam Turner and Alexander Wall are the quarterbacks on the roster, and The Citadel signed three more in the latest recruiting class.

Runningbacks Van Dyke Jones (420 yards) and Terrell Dallas (357) return to give the Bulldogs strength in the running game. They also are two of the top five returning receivers for a team that lost one of the most dynamic players in FCS in Andre Roberts. When the quarterbacks do look for a receiver, they will turn to tight end Alex Sellars (16 catches) and wide receivers Scott Harward (38), Kevin Hardy (14) and Luke Caldwell (11).

Four returning starters on the offensive line – guards Jameson Bryant and Cory Pope, center Thomas Suggs and tackle Lincoln King – will help the new offense go.

The Citadel didn't field the best or the worst defense a year ago. With a new offense, though, there could be more pressure on the defense to make stops and grab turnovers.

The secondary should be a strength as three of four starters return, including cornerback Cortez Allen and defensive back Joseph Boateng. Both intercepted three passes apiece and made 57 and 40 stops, respectively. Demetrius Jackson (50 tackles) is the other returning starter. Rod Harland (56 tackles) and Keith Gamble could step into a lead role.

Jordan Gilmore (95 tackles) and Jeremey Buncum (52) headline the linebacking corps. Up front, however, things are a bit thinner as defensive end Chris Billingslea is the only returning starter. Quintin Turner played well in the spring game and could find a key role on the defensive line.

The Bulldogs not only will miss Roberts' pass-catching ability, but also what he brought to the return game. They will need players to step up on special teams to give themselves chances in SoCon games, which include trips to Furman, Appalachian State, Wofford and Samford. The Citadel also visits Arizona in week two.

Western Carolina has struggled to find solid footing on which it can climb out of the league's bottom tier. Still, Dennis Wagner and the staff have worked steadily to build a program. Despite the 2-9 record a season ago, the Catamounts stayed close in several games.They won at Eastern Kentucky late in the season before losing to Appalachian State in Boone by just five in the regular-season finale.

Offensive production is a key for a team that averaged only 14 points a game. The Catamounts do possess experienced talent on offense. Quarterback Zack Jaynes begins a third campaign as a starter. He passed for 1,790 yards and nine touchdowns in 2009. He can hand off to a pair of sophomore runningbacks in Michael Johnson (568 yards and six touchdowns rushing) and Dion Wilson. Jaynes can throw to a talented wide receiver in 6-3 senior Marquel Pittman, who snared 50 passes last year.

Matt Winter and Nathan Postelle lead the blocking from the left side of the line. Ed Pino, Teddy Rhoney and Jacoby Hammon round out the front wall.

Defensively, Western Carolina gave up almost 200 yards rushing per game, so the Catamounts will look to improve there. Senior defensive lineman C. J. Johnson will be counted on to anchor the line along with Trey Selby, Buddy Robinson, Brian Johnson and Charles Johnson. Rock Williams and Brandon Vaught are linebackers while Adam Hearn – a former starter at quarterback and wide receiver – returned to the Catamounts and will start at the new Drop position.

Seniors safeties Mitchell Bell and Angelo Brown headline the secondary that also features cornerbacks Jaron McNeil and Jideofo Okwudiri.

Western Carolina welcomes back placekicker Blake Bostic and punter Blake Cain.

The 2010 schedule doesn't lend much help to a rebuilding program. The Catamounts open at North Carolina State and two weeks later, pay a visit to nearby Gardner-Webb - a team that beat Western Carolina by a touchdown in 2009.

2010 Southern Conference Games of the Week

Appalachian State at Chattanooga – Sept. 4
The Southern Conference race starts early this year as the Mocs host defending conference champ Appalachian State. Chattanooga brings momentum from the best season in some time against a Mountaineer team officially beginning life after Armanti.

Colgate at Furman – Sept. 11
The Paladins come off the unusual week one open date to host one of the consistently strong FCS programs in Colgate. This will be a good early test for a Furman team breaking in a new quarterback.

Elon at Richmond – Sept. 18
The Phoenix and Spiders played one of the more entertaining games in the 2009 playoffs. Can they deliver another thriller in this rematch?

The Citadel at Furman – Sept. 25
Once upon a time, these in-state rivals played at the end of the season. This year, they open their SoCon slates against each other.

Samford at Elon – Oct. 2
Since joining the league in 2008, the Bulldogs have been one of the more intriguing teams. This represents one of the key home games Elon must capture to take the conference title. Of course, they mustn't look ahead.

Elon at Appalachian State – Oct. 9
Here's the looking ahead part for Elon from last week. The Phoenix has not been able to get past Mount Mountaineer the last two seasons. The two teams could be playing to decide the conference title.

Furman at Samford – Oct. 16
Furman has beaten Samford the last two years by narrow margins saved by last-moment blocks of kicks. That alone makes this the game of the week.

Wofford at Elon – Oct. 23
By this point in the season, we should know whether the Terriers have returned to their status of title challengers. The clash of offensive styles makes this interesting.

Furman at Appalachian State – Oct. 30
Yeah, it's kind of a traditional thing, but this one is almost always good. And Furman's shot at the league crown still has to go through the Rock.

Appalachian State at Georgia Southern – Nov. 6
The last time Appalachian State visited Statesboro, the Mountaineers and Eagles played one of the best games in years. Expect Georgia Southern to give Appalachian State its best effort.

Samford at Chattanooga – Nov. 13
The western outposts of the SoCon will be challenging for spots at the top of the conference this year. This game will help decide which one has the most success.

Georgia Southern at Furman – Nov. 20
One of the fiercest rivalries in the conference is always a good way to close out the regular season. Can Georgia Southern continue the trend in this series of the visiting team winning?

Conference Capsules

Appalachian State Mountaineers
Location: Boone, N.C.
Stadium: Kidd Brewer Stadium (21,650)
Head Coach: Jerry Moore (189-76 at Appalachian State, 216-123-2 overall)
Who's Back: DL Jabari Fletcher, TE Ben Jorden, S Mark LaGree, RB Devon Moore, WR Brian Quick, LB D. J. Smith
Who's Gone: OL Mario Acitelli, DL Malcolm Bennett, QB Armanti Edwards, CB Cortez Gilbert, LB Jacques Roman
Last Year: 11-3/8-0, 1st – Mountaineers came up inches shy of another trip to FCS title game.
This Year: 9-2/7-1 – Mountaineers will battle Elon once again for the SoCon crown.
Fun Fact: In 2009, placekicker Jason Vitaris (115 points), runningback Devon Moore (114), and quarterback Armanti Edwards combined to score 337 (72 percent) of Appalachian State's 465 points.

The Citadel Bulldogs
Location: Charleston, S.C.
Stadium: Johnson Hagood Stadium (21,000)
Head Coach: Kevin Higgins (24-32 at The Citadel, 80-57-1 overall)
Who's Back: LB Tolu Akindale, DB Cortez Allen, DL Chris Billingslea, RB Terrell Dallas, RB Van Dyke Jones, TE Alex Sellars
Who's Gone: OL Daniel DeHaven, LB Jordan Gilmore, DL Terrence Reese, WR/PR Andre Roberts

Last Year: 4-7/2-6, tie 7th – Bulldogs couldn't build on brief midseason win streak.
This Year: 4-7/2-6 – New offense keeps Bulldogs competitive but doesn't take them above the .500 mark.
Fun Fact: What's the difference between a 2-6 conference record and 6-2? For The Citadel in 2009, it was just 17 points. That's the total margin of defeat in four of the Bulldogs' six SoCon losses.

Elon Phoenix
Location: Elon, N.C.
Stadium: Rhodes Stadium (11,250)
Head Coach: Pete Lembo (29-17 at Elon, 71-29 overall)
Who's Back: WR Lance Camp, LB Joshua Jones, RB Brandon Newsome, QB Scott Riddle, LB Dale Riley, RB Jamal Shuman
Who's Gone: DL Andre Campbell, OL David Harrison, WR Terrell Hudgins, DL Eric Ludwig, DB Karlos Sullivan, OL Chris Werden
Last Year: 9-3/7-1, 2nd – Phoenix finally break through to the postseason.
This Year: 8-3/7-1 – Trip to Boone is big, but Elon faces plenty of other landslides on the SoCon trail.
Fun Fact: Only two Elon games – the seven-point victory at Furman and the three-point loss at Richmond – finished with margins less than 14 points. The margins in six games ranged from 25 points to 56 points.

Furman Paladins
Location: Greenville, S.C.
Stadium: Paladin Stadium (16,000)
Head Coach: Bobby Lamb (62-34 at Furman and overall)
Who's Back: LB Kadarron Anderson, RB Mike Brown, WR Adam Mims, CB Ryan Steed, RB Tersoo Uhaa, RB Jerry Williams
Who's Gone: PK Matthew Cesari, OL Tyler Haynes, DB Julian Hicks, QB Jordan Sorrells, TE Chris Truss, WR R. J. Webb
Last Year: 6-5/5-3, 3rd – Paladins avoided a losing season by closing with victories over rivals Georgia Southern and Wofford.
This Year: 7-4/5-3 – Furman will be better, but will it be good enough to reach the playoffs?
Fun Fact: The Paladins remain a rather youthful team with only 10 seniors on the 89-man roster. More than half of the players are in the junior (23 players) and sophomore (27) classes.

Georgia Southern Eagles
Location: Statesboro, Ga.
Stadium: Allen E. Paulson Stadium (18,000)
Head Coach: Jeff Monken (First year at Georgia Southern and overall)
Who's Back: DB Darius Eubanks, PK Adrian Mora, DL Brent Russell,
Who's Gone: LB Terrione Benefield, DE Harland Bower, OL Cole Fountain, DB Darrell Pasco, DL Markeith Wylie
Last Year: 5-6/4-4, tie 4th – Youthful team couldn't reach winning season, leading to a change of coaches.
This Year: 3-8/2-6 – Under new regime – featuring a familiar face as head coach, Eagles seek to emulate seasons of far past, not recent past.
Fun Fact: It's back to the future in Statesboro as the Eagles return to the option offense. In the spring game, 17 players ran the ball. Only five of them logged rushes in 2009 for a total of 405 yards.

Samford Bulldogs
Location: Birmingham, Ala.
Stadium: Seibert Stadium (6,700)
Head Coach: Pat Sullivan (15-18 at Samford, 39-60-1 overall)
Who's Back: DL John Michael Clay, DB Andy Davis, RB Chris Evans, P Bob Hooper, LB Bryce Smith, QB Dustin Taliaferro
Who's Gone: LB Ryan Anderson, LB C. J. Brown, DE Rumiko Forrester, DB Ty Levie, WR Jonathan Lowery, C Jon Weber
Last Year: 5-6/3-5, 6th – Bulldogs didn't sneak up on anyone but remained a tough out.
This Year: 7-4/5-3 – 2010 should be another step forward for Samford.
Fun Fact: Samford opens the season at Florida State, a team the Bulldogs haven't played since 1950. Also, the Seminoles new head coach, Jimbo Fisher, played quarterback at Samford.

University of Tennessee at Chattanooga Mocs
Location: Chattanooga, Tenn.
Stadium: Finley Stadium-Davenport Field (20,668)
Head Coach: Russ Huesman (6-5 at Chattanooga and overall)
Who's Back: RB Chris Awuah, QB B. J. Coleman, OL Chris Harr, DB Buster Skrine, DB Jordan Tippit, DL Joshua Williams
Who's Gone: DE Josh Beard, PK Craig Camay, WR Blue Cooper, LB Joseph Thornton
Last Year: 6-5/4-4, tie 4th – New staff brought new hope and a winning season.
This Year: 5-6/4-4 – Mocs can't slide up on anybody now; success comes harder second time around.
Fun Fact: UTC is, of course, in Chattanooga, Tenn., just a short drive from the state line with Georgia. No surprise then that 66 of the 74 players on the Mocs roster hail from Tennessee or Georgia.

Western Carolina Catamounts
Location: Cullowhee, N.C.

Stadium: E. J. Whitmire Stadium (13,742)
Head Coach: Dennis Wagner (5-18 at WCU, 49-55-1 overall)
Who's Back: DB Mitchell Bell, QB Zack Jaynes, RB Michael Johnson, WR Marquel Pittman, LB Ricky Schwarz, RB Dion Wilson
Who's Gone: DB Chris Collins, DB Antoine George, LB Adrian McLeod, NG Gene Singletary
Last Year: 2-9/1-7, 9th – Rebuilding continued to prove challenging in the western North Carolina mountains.
This Year: 2-9/1-7 – Patience will still be the operative word in Cullowhee.
Fun Fact: Catamounts coaches remain relatively new to the program: four – including head coach Dennis Wagner – are in their third season, one is in his second and four are in their first at Western Carolina.

Wofford Terriers
Location: Spartanburg, S.C.
Stadium: Gibbs Stadium (13,000)
Head Coach: Mike Ayers (144-104-1 at Wofford, 155-125-2 overall)
Who's Back: QB Mitch Allen, OL Clark Bishop, FB Eric Breitenstein, OL Pat Illig, RB Mike Rucker, LB SeQuan Stanley
Who's Gone: LB Gary Blount, QB Stev Davitte, DB Mychael Johnson, WR Justice Joslin, OL Matt Vick, P Chris Tommie
Last Year: 3-8/2-6, tie 7th – Injuries and turnovers helped wash away a promising season.
This Year: 5-6/3-5 – Turnaround will prove difficult for the Terriers.
Fun Fact: Wofford suffered numerous injuries, but those hardships mean an experienced team in 2010. The Terriers will have 13 offensive players and 14 defensive players who have started games.■

Southland Conference 2010 Preview
By Jason Plotkin

Predicted order of finish

1. Stephen F. Austin
2. Southeastern Louisiana
3. Central Arkansas
4. McNeese State
5. Texas State
6. Sam Houston State
7. Northwestern State
8. Nicholls State

Players of the year
Offense: QB Jeremy Moses, Stephen F. Austin, Sr.
Defense: DB Tommy Connors, Southeastern La., Sr.

Biggest shoes to fill: Bradley George, QB, Texas State
Though there were other great options, namely Larry Hart of Central Arkansas, the quarterback situation at Texas State is not so clear. George started for several years and helped revitalize a TXST program looking for consistent winning, something that has not been common for the group from San Marcos since its days as a Division II power.

Every year, a surprise team seems to emerge from the Southland Conference that quite frankly, has no business being there.

In 2009, Stephen F. Austin was the top dog at the end of the year after proving critics wrong when Jeremy Moses became much more consistent and created an offensive showcase that brought attention to him and his program just several years after a 0-11 campaign.

Texas State was much the same team in 2008. Though it finished second in the official standings behind Central Arkansas, the Bobcats were not high on the radar until quarterback Bradley George and runningback Karrington Bush pushed the team into the Division I postseason for just the second time in school history.

In both cases and numerous others throughout the SLC's recent history, quarterback play has been crucial. At the start of the season, there is a possibility that each of the programs - sans Nicholls State and SFA - could be led by Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) transfers. Ironically, the two schools are projected to be on opposite ends of the spectrum with the Colonels in the cellar and the Lumberjacks primed to win their second straight conference title.

Moses will have every chance to lead **Stephen F. Austin** to that title.

The offensive stalwart for the Lumberjacks, Moses is on pace to break several league records, including career passing yardage, touchdowns and total offense. Recognized as one of the top quarterbacks in the nation, Moses lifted J.C. Harper's squad from 0-11 to 4-8 to 10-3 since the two took over at the helm of the program.

One thing that has come to Moses' credit is that he has been able to continually produce the results, regardless of questions at the wide receiver position.

Bolstering the Lumberjacks' chances is the less heralded defense. Possibly caught in the shadow of the offense, the SFA defensive forces are talented and have become a formidable group.

Despite losing All-American Tim Knicky, the Lumberjacks possess Buck Buchanan possibility Jabara Williams. Williams, who received several All-American nods last year, averaged 8.7 tackles per game on the year and had 9.5 tackles for losses. Other names to watch for are defensive lineman Kenneth Charles and linebacker Devin Ducote.

It's always tough to loss a multiyear starting quarterback, which Mike Lucas and **Southeastern Louisiana** did, when Brian Babin completed his eligibility last year.

Enter Tyler Beatty, who appeared in nine games last year and had a 107.7 passer efficiency rating while throwing for 483 yards in limited action. Beatty will have at his disposal Simmie Yarborough, one of the best wide receivers in the league after totaling 57 receptions for 803 yards and 12 touchdowns a season ago.

The ultimate goal for the Lions, however, will be to finish strong after dropping two games at the end of the season that left them on the sidelines when the playoffs rolled around. Having a healthy Tommy Connors will allow them to do that. Connors, one of the top secondary players in the conference, could have a chance at playing on Sundays upon returning after a medical redshirt year.

Linebacker Mark Newbill has left quarterbacks and opposing players in his path for the last few years and no one might benefit more in the secondary than Curtis Strong, another defensive back, who was one of the league leaders in interceptions a year ago.

Central Arkansas head coach Clint Conque has had a competitive squad since beginning the transition to Division I in 2006. The program topped the SLC standings with a 10-2 mark in 2008 and after losing five to end the season in 2009, will look to return to contention for the top spot.

The Bears showed promise early last season when they defeated Football Bowl Subdivision member Western Kentucky. This year's promise will fall on the shoulders of whichever quarterback will fill in for Robbie Park, who finished his tenure in Conway, Ark., last year.

Former Arkansas Razorback quarterbacks line the sidelines as Nathan Dick and Jim Youngblood serve as viable options. Those two also will have plenty of options should they take the snaps with wide receivers Willie Landers and Isiah Jackson in fine form after strong 2009 campaigns.

Brent Grimes will no longer be the runningback as he has moved on, but Conque should feel optimistic that he could have three good years in Jackie Hinton to supplement the strong passing attack.

Defensively, end Larry Hart will be playing on Sundays in the National Football League and Conque does not return his top three tacklers (Hart was not among the group). Linebacker Lamar Moore is the top returning tackler with 50 tackles a year ago and defensive lineman Markell Carter had 47, including 11.5 for losses a year ago.

In Lake Charles, La., **McNeese State** is not a program that has had to rebuild, it reloads. It's easy to think that Matt Viator's staff will have plenty of holes to fill because it lost key players on the offensive side such as QB Derrick Fourroux, TE Wes Mangan, RB Toddrick Pendland and WR Immanuel Friddle.

These four players were consistent threats to score and give problems to an opposing team's defense, but now they are all gone. Who can step in?

Quarterback is a big question mark as Fourroux's younger brother suffered a career-ending injury this spring. The team added Tulsa transfer Jacob Bower in June, but it remains young at the position with other options, including Zack O'Quinn and Cody Stroud.

At runningback, Champlain Babin seems to be up to the task of filling Pendland's void and Corday Clark will be expected to do the same for Mangan. Babin and Clark received playing team last year and were productive.

Defensively, the Pokes were young, but they did step up on the biggest stages – including holding then-No. 7 SFA to just 16 points and 270 yards. Similar performances will be the direct outcome of the young team growing up with FS Malcolm Benson standing in as one of the youngsters that might soon begin picking up recognition.

Texas State will no longer have Bradley George behind center and for head coach Brad Wright, there have been no clear options for a replacement. George, who exhausted his eligibility last year after a 7-4 campaign, likely will be replaced by redshirt junior Tyler Hawkins, who has appeared in 11 games during his collegiate career.

Other options for TXST, include juniors Bryan Hill and Alvaro Garcia. Hill has yet to take a snap for the

Bobcats after transferring from Houston in 2008. He redshirted at the FBS school in 2007. Garcia played in four games as a reserve quarterback before moving to wide receiver, where he played 11 games in 2009. He had 22 receptions for 305 yards.

Could a true freshman step in as the starting quarterback? If Wright is comfortable and Tyler Arndt is ready, he could be the solution. Arndt, who was signed in February, was ranked as one of the top 32 quarterbacks in the nation per ESPN, throwing for more than 7,100 yards and 75 touchdowns during his time at Cuero High School (Texas). If none of the above is ready, the Bobcats reportedly could add Texas-El Paso quarterback Andy McCloud before the season.

On the bright side offensively, runningback Karrington Bush should be back to full health while offensive lineman D.J. Hall is one of the top players at his position in the country. Defensively, the team will have to reverse the trend of a defense that gave up more than 2,000 yards of rushing and 28.8 points per game.

Head coach Willie Fritz will welcome a new group of players to **Sam Houston State** with 25 true freshmen on a team that is already young with 26 of 44 players on the post-spring two deep coming in as redshirt freshmen or sophomores.

The good thing for Fritz is that he will be able to implement his system with several players who could be impact players for the Bearkats. Most importantly, Auburn transfer Tyrik Rollison is reportedly joining the squad and will have four years of eligibility after redshirting last season. A highly touted quarterback out of high school, Rollison will be joined by his top target at Sulphur Springs (Texas), wide receiver Jace Jackson, who is not presently on the two-deep.

Defensively, the Bearkats lost several key players, including linebacker Luke McCall, but defensive coordinator Scott Stoker's side of the ball had many young players who stepped up and could play a vital role in stopping some of the explosive offenses the league has to offer.

Heading into last season, there were many who believed in the hype surrounding the **Northwestern State** program under first-year head coach Bradley Dale Peveto. All those good feelings faded quickly as the program lost all four nononference games before suffering seven straight SLC losses.

Known for the Purple Swarm defense, the Demons allowed 36.5 points and 422.1 yards per game while challenging the pass-happy Southland. Not making matters much easier for Peveto is that he lost four All-SLC defenders in tackle Albert Smith, linebacker Blake Delcambre, and safeties Wesley Eckles and S Gary Riggs.

Offensively, the Demons also struggled by posting 16.5 points per game while three quarterbacks attempted more than 100 passes. On the bright side, Paul Harris emerged as a potential name to remember. The then-freshman was 81-of-144 for 978 yards with five touchdowns and a 117.81 passing efficiency. A name to keep an eye on, Harris could emerge as the starter over one-time Louisville transfer Tyler Wolfe, who appeared in a few games last year.

The team has plenty of room to grow, especially after signing 35 players in February. Just three are transfers from the JUCO or FBS ranks. The future will be bountiful if the nationally ranked recruiting class steps up, but it likely will be another tough year for the Demons.

If there is one thing new **Nicholls State** head coach Charlie Stubbs knows about, it's how to run an offense. Stubbs has been an offensive coordinator at various schools for the last 14 years, including Oregon State, UNLV, Louisville, Alabama and Tulsa. With that offensive mind-set, Stubbs will change offensive protocol at NSU from the option to a more pass-friendly offense.

This might end up being a culture shock for the Colonels, who completed just 64 passes in 149 attempts with an average of 95.5 yards per game last season. Without wide receiver Antonio Robinson back, Stubbs will look for playmakers and perhaps a new quarterback.

One of his signees this spring is no stranger to the quarterback position as Beaux Hebert, son of former New Orleans Saint star Bobby Hebert, will join the squad and is one of three incoming quarterback signees. Any of the trio could supplant Laquintin Caston, who is moving to wide receiver from the quarterback position for playing time.

Games of the Week

Lamar @ McNeese State, Sept. 4
McNeese leads the I-10 rivalry 19-8-1, but the Cards gained the last victory in the series back in the program's final year, 1989.

Tennessee-Martin @ Southeastern La., Sept. 11

The first of a home-and-home, SLU needs to take advantage of the game to build its at-large resume.

Stephen F. Austin @ Northern Iowa, Sept. 18
Highest profile of FCS vs. FCS games for SLC in nonconference play. Lumberjacks can prove their spot in national rankings.

Cal Poly @ McNeese State, Sept. 25
Cal Poly has continuously been a challenge for the SLC and on the second of back-to-back trips to the SLC, could continue that run.

Sam Houston State @ Lamar, Oct. 2
Another rival for the Cards, one that goes back to 1951. SHSU won five games in a row before LU stomped the Kats 41-0 in 1989.

Texas State @ Southeastern La., Oct. 9
SLU is 1-12 all-time in the series against TXST, the lone win coming last year in San Marcos. SLU needs to start a streak to hold its own in the SLC race.

McNeese State @ LSU, Oct. 16
Can it be? LSU playing an in-state FCS? The first of several for the Tigers will put Pokes on grand stage.

Sam Houston State vs Stephen F. Austin (Reliant Stadium), Oct. 23
The SLC experiment with a neutral site classic kicks off with the Battle of the Piney Woods. Always an entertaining game, SHSU could throw a wrench in the SFA well-oiled machine.

Sam Houston State @ Northwestern State, Oct. 30
What could be an insignificant game as far as SLC title goes, features the return of former Demons coach Scott Stoker to Natchitoches as an opposing assistant.

Central Arkansas @ Texas State, Nov. 6
A win for the Bobcats last year in Conway by three points ended a string of fits. TXST could move into SLC title contention with a home victory.

Southeastern La. @ Stephen F. Austin, Nov. 13
The two favorites in the SLC collide a week before the end of the year. Which team will emerge? And will the winner be in the driver's seat for the automatic bid?

McNeese State @ Central Arkansas, Nov. 20
A game that has in the last few years meant plenty to the SLC title picture. If SFA or SLU falters, the same could hold true this season.

Conference Capsules

Central Arkansas
Location: Conway, Ark.
Stadium: Estes Stadium (8,500)
Head Coach: Clint Conque (11 seasons at UCA, 73-43)
Who's Back: K Eddie Carmona, WR Willie Landers, WR Isiah Jackson, DL Markell Carter
Who's Gone: DE Larry Hart, RB Brent Grimes, QB Robbie Park
Last Year: 5-7, a promising start turned to a quick drop as the Bears fell in their final five games.
This Year: 8-3, could find itself in contention for playoffs, game at SFA could determine in or out
Fact: UCA will be playoff eligible in 2010. The last time the Bears sniffed the playoffs was in their last eligible year in Division II, a trip to the 2005 quarterfinals, where they narrowly fell to North Alabama.

McNeese State
Location: Lake Charles, La.
Stadium: Cowboy Stadium (17,500)
Head Coach: Matt Viator (five years at McNeese, 33-10)
Who's Back: RB Champlain Babin, TE Corday Clark, K Josh Lewis, FS Malcolm Benson
Who's Gone: QB Derrick Fourroux, TE Wes Mangan, RB Toddrick Pendland, WR Immanuel Friddle
Last Year: 9-3, won six consecutive games before getting stomped 49-13 at home in a first-round game against New Hampshire.
This Year: 5-6, a challenging nonconference slate with two FBS games and Cal Poly
Fact: McNeese has lost four straight first-round playoff games – three at home – since the team's run to the 2002 Division I title game, a loss to Western Kentucky.

Nicholls State
Location: Thibodaux, La.
Stadium: Guidry (12,800)
Head Coach: Charlie Stubbs (first season at Nicholls)
Who's Back: QB LaQuinton Caston, P Patrick Dolan
Who's Gone: RB Marlin Meeks, WR Antonio Robinson, LB Yashua Willis
Last Year: 3-8, won final two games in the last year of the Jay Thomas era
This Year: 1-10, Colonels play three guarantee games and incorporate new offense
Fact: Stubbs might be new to head coaching but has 31 years as a football coach, including the last 14 as an offensive coordinator. Stubbs' last stop was as an offensive coordinator for fellow SLC newcomer Willie Fritz (SHSU) at Division II Central Missouri.

Northwestern State

Location: Natchitoches, La.
Stadium: Turpin (15,971)
Head Coach: Bradley Dale Peveto (second season at NWST, 0-11)
Who's Back: QB Paul Harris, OL Michael Booker, TE Justin Aldredge
Who's Gone: DT Albert Smith, LB Blake Delcambre, S Wesley Eckles, S Gary Riggs
Last Year: 0-11, the preseason hype faded rapidly for the Demons under first-year head coach
This Year: 4-7, the growing process for Paul Harris continues, but with strides
Fact: The team won seven games in 2008 before going 0-fer in 2009, its first winless campaign since an 0-1 year in 1907, the first year of the program's existence.

Sam Houston State
Location: Huntsville, Texas
Stadium: Bowers (14,000)
Head Coach: Willie Fritz (first season at SHSU, 220-66 overall)
Who's Back: SS Randy Stewart, LB Will Henry, K Miguel Antonio
Who's Gone: RB James Aston, QB Blake Joseph, LB Luke McCall
Last Year: 5-6, posted an 0-5 mark away from Bowers Stadium
This Year: 5-6, Bearkats still seeking a quarterback, year two of Stoker defense keeps team in games
Fact: 26 of 44 players in post-spring two deep are redshirt freshmen or sophomores. SHSU lost 28 lettermen, most since 1993 and will have 25 true freshmen join squad in August.

Southeastern Louisiana
Location: Hammond, La.
Stadium: Strawberry Stadium (7,400)
Head Coach: Mike Lucas (fourth season at SLU, 14-20)
Who's Back: LB Mark Newbill, DB Tommy Connors, WR Simmie Yarborough, DB Curtis Strong
Who's Gone: QB Brian Babin, RB Jasper Duckworth, K Jeff Turner
Last Year: 6-5, with a chance to win the SLC and two home games remaining, SLU lost to SFA and Nicholls on consecutive weekends at Strawberry Stadium.
This Year: 8-3, a victory over an FBS is likely for SLU that has tough trips to UCA and SFA
Fact: Mike Lucas is no stranger to the SLC, serving 15 years as an assistant at Sam Houston State before joining SLU. This offseason, Lucas signed a three-year extension and was named Louisiana Coach of the Year.

Stephen F. Austin
Location: Nacogdoches, Texas
Stadium: Homer Bryce (14,575)
Head Coach: J.C. Harper (fourth season, 16-22 at SFA)
Who's Back: QB Jeremy Moses, DL Kenneth Charles, LB Devin Ducote, LB Jabara Williams
Who's Gone: DE Tim Knicky, OL Karl Glimp, WR Aaron Rhea
Last Year: 10-3, SFA won its first SLC title since 1999 on the backs of 20 All-SLC selections
This Year: 9-2, tough OOC games vs Texas A&M, Northern Iowa before rolling in conference
Fact: Jeremy Moses could become the Southland's all-time leader in completions, passing yards, touchdown passes and total offense by the end of this season. Among his career accolades: He has had 14 four-touchdown passing games during his career and has 18 games with at least 300 passing yards.

Texas State
Location: San Marcos, Texas
Stadium: Bobcat Stadium (14,104)
Head Coach: Brad Wright (fourth season, 19-16 at TXST)
Who's Back: RB Karrington Bush, OL D.J. Hall, RB Alvin Canady
Who's Gone: QB Bradley George, WR Mishak Rivas, DE Travis Houston
Last Year: 7-4, a 2-3 start to league play negates a strong finish to SLC slate
This Year: 5-6, not the year needed when trying to plug oneself for FBS
Fact: Texas State is in the midst of "The Drive," a facility and overall athletic enhancement effort to move the university into the Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS). This is the university's second attempt at such a move after a failed attempt a decade ago.■

Southwestern Athletic Conference Conference 2010 Preview
By Brandon Williams

Predicted Order of Finish
East
1. Alabama A&M
2. Jackson State
3. Alcorn State
4. Alabama State
5. Mississippi Valley State
West
1. Prairie View A&M
2. Texas Southern
3. Grambling
4. Southern
5. Arkansas-Pine Bluff

Championship Game
Prairie View A&M over Alabama A&M

Offensive Player of the Year: K.C. Black, QB, Prairie View
Defensive Player of the Year: Christian Anthony, DE, Grambling

Biggest Shoes to Fill: Bryant Lee, QB, Southern
Whoever wins Southern's starting QB role: Either Hasoni Alfred, Jeremiah McGinty or LeAndre' Thompson will face the task of replacing Bryant Lee. All Lee did was earn two SWAC Offensive Player of the Year honors, throw for 8,134 yards and 70 touchdowns en route to rewriting the Jaguars' record book. New coach Stump Mitchell won't throw the ball as much as former coach Pete Richardson did, but the winner will also be required to move the ball without the services of all-SWAC wideout Jumorris Stewart, TE Warren Matthews and RB Brian Threat.

Nestled near the outskirts of downtown Houston, Texas, Johnnie Cole and a host of hungry Tigers lie in wait.

Last year's strong finish has the third-year Texas Southern coach ravenous for a chance to snap the school's 43-year hiatus from hoisting a Southwestern Athletic Conference crown. After eight straight losing seasons, the Tigers won five of their last six to finish with a 6-5 record, fueling optimism about the program's future.

That fuel burns brighter when TSU looks about 70 minutes east of campus, where the rival Prairie View Panthers wield the power in the SWAC while able to point at the shiny 2009 conference championship that takes a predominant position in the athletic department's trophy case.

There's little to believe PV coach Henry Frazier's squad is willing to relinquish the crown anytime soon, especially when he returns 18 starters from last year's team, including quarterback K.C. Black and five other first-team all-SWAC performers. The Panthers, who have a 25-5 record during the last three seasons, are no flash in the pan as their run of success has been staked by Frazier's ability to recruit quality players in the talent-rich Houston area.

Yet neither Cole nor Frazier can afford to ignore a Grambling team that is coming off an uncharacteristic 7-4 campaign, including the school's first loss since 1987 to Prairie View that eventually cost them the West division title. Like TSU and Prairie View, Coach Rod Broadway's Tigers have a ton of returning firepower, including QB Greg Dillon, RBs Frank Warren and Cornelius Walker and DE Christian Anthony, the reigning SWAC defensive player of the year.

The balance of power in the West will likely be decided by the time the sun sets on Sept. 25. By then, Prairie View will have played Texas Southern (Sept. 5) and Grambling (Sept. 25), which will provide clear evidence as to who has the inside track on claiming a golden ticket to Birmingham, Ala., for the Dec. 11 title game.

In Cole's perfect world, the West division championship will come down to the Nov. 13 tilt in Houston between TSU and Grambling. TSU's lone loss in its final six games was a 47-33 defeat to Grambling, a game in which TSU statistically dominated but self-destructed by committing six turnovers.

It's almost easy to forget the East division, which had a "does anyone want to win this?" feel for much of the 2009 season before Alabama A&M won its last two regular-season games to claim a berth in the title game, where it fell to Prairie View, 30-24. Despite the loss of leading rusher Ulysses Banks and WR Thomas Harris, the Bulldogs enter the 2010 campaign as the favorite to repeat in a division filled with drastic change during the offseason.

* Jackson State hopes to regain its spot atop the division after its offense went the way of the 8-track last season, averaging an anemic 13.9 points per game. To that end, coach Rick Comegy sent coordinator James Woody packing in favor of the "Air Raid" attack designed by new offensive honcho Ernest Wilson.

* Mississippi Valley State icon Willie Totten's eight-year coaching reign ended in a 3-8 wimper as the

Delta Devils bring in first-time head coach Karl Morgan, who'll attempt to bring the program back to glory behind an offense that will be more boom and pound than flash and dash.

* Alabama State pilfered offensive guru Melvin Spears from TSU to bring life into a unit that failed to score more than 24 points during a 1-7 nosedive that offset a promising 3-0 start.

* For Alcorn State, drastic change will be good for a defense that allowed more than 32 points per game in 2009. The Braves also will have to find a replacement for QB Tim Buckley, who brought stability to the position.

Morgan won't be the only new face pacing the sidelines this fall. Former St. Louis Cardinals runningback Stump Mitchell will usher in a new era at Southern as he replaces Pete Richardson, whose 17-year run came to an abrupt end as the Jaguars stumbled to 6-5 after entering the season with SWAC title ambitions. Mitchell's first steps will be more daunting as Southern must begin life without record-setting QB Bryant Lee and and big-play WR Jumorris Stewart.

Mitchell also will be one of three SWAC coaches with NFL experience, joining former Washington Redskins linebacker Monte Coleman (Arkansas-Pine Bluff) and Alabama State's Reggie Barlow (Jacksonville, Oakland).

Games of the Week

Sept. 5: Prairie View vs. Texas Southern (at Reliant Stadium): TSU gets to measure its progress against arch rival and defending champion Prairie View in the Labor Day Classic. The Panthers have dominated the series in recent years, so a Tigers win would really jump start coach Johnnie Cole's squad.

Sept. 11: Jackson State vs. Tennessee State (at Memphis): The Tigers' new-look "Air Raid" offense gets a challenge from a Tennessee State team that owns one of the best defenses in the rugged Ohio Valley Conference.

Sept. 18: Alabama A&M at Texas Southern: Two of the conference's best quarterbacks look to light it up as Bulldogs signal caller Deaunte Mason squares off against the Tigers Arvell Nelson.

Sept. 25: Grambling vs. Prairie View (at Dallas): The balance of power in the SWAC is on the line, with the winner possessing the driver's seat in the West division. Mentally, the Tigers never recovered from last season's 35-32 defeat, their first loss to the Panthers since 1987.

Oct. 2: Arkansas-Pine Bluff at Southern: Seems like old times for Golden Lions coach Monte Coleman and Jaguars coach Stump Mitchell, both of whom were rivals when both played in the NFC East during the 1980s. Coleman was a linebacker for the Washington Redskins, spending much of his time trying to stop Mitchell, an all-purpose running back/returner for the St. Louis-Phoenix Cardinals.

Oct. 9: Alabama A&M at Jackson State: Don't expect much scoring here, as recent meetings have been defined by hard-hitting defenses. JSU needs to prove its offense has improved beyond last season's lackluster 13.9 points per game effort.

Oct. 16: Alcorn State at Grambling: NFL scouts will have an eye on this one, as Braves DE Malcolm Taylor and Tigers DE Christian Anthony are both potential selections in the 2011 draft.

Oct. 23: Savannah State at Alabama State: The Hornets welcome a Tigers team that will join the Mid Eastern Athletic Conference next season. Savannah State has had eight coaches in the past 12 seasons and was the focus of an ESPN Outside the Lines story involving Robby Wells, who was forced to resign right before national signing day before filing a discrimination suit against the school that nearly sunk the program.

Oct. 30 Grambling at Arkansas-Pine Bluff: A normally docile Golden Lions offense roared to the tune of 49 points in a win over the Tigers last season that effectively killed Grambling's West division hopes.

Nov. 6: Alcorn State at Alabama A&M: The Braves come into the season as the biggest threat to unseat the Bulldogs as East division champs. This would be their chance to prove that.

Nov, 13: Grambling at Texas Southern: TSU knows they missed a chance at an upset during a 47-33 loss last season. The Tigers outgained Grambling 385-214, but repeatedly shot themselves in the foot with six turnovers.

Nov. 20: Prairie View A&M at Alabama A&M: These two face off for the third time in less than a year. If the season goes as expected, a fourth meeting will happen in Birmingham, Alabama three weeks later.

Nov. 27: Grambling vs. Southern: Regardless of record, no game better defines the intensity and

passion of the SWAC than when the Tigers and Jaguars cap off the regular season. No one can refer to themselves as a fan of the conference unless they've experienced the sights and sounds of the weekend in New Orleans.
Dec. 11: SWAC Championship (Birmingham, Alabama): It all comes down to being here.

Conference Capsules

Texas Southern University Tigers
Location: Houston, Texas
Stadium: Delmar (12,000/Grass), Reliant (69,500/grass)
Head Coach: Johnnie Cole (10-13/25-29)
Who's Back: QB Arvell Nelson, WR Joseph Anderson, LB Dejuan Fulghum
Who's Gone: WR Brian Haith, K/P Stephen Solomon
Last Year: 6-5 First winning season since 2000
This Year: 7-4 Cole closes gap on rival Prairie View
Fact: TSU now owns longest title drought in SWAC (1968)

Prairie View A&M University Panthers
Location: Prairie View, Texas
Stadium: Blackshear (11,000/grass)
Head Coach: Henry Frazier III (34-19/60-43)
Who's Back: QB K.C. Black, RB Donald Babers, DE Quinton Spears
Who's Gone: WR Gabriel Osaze-Ediae, KR Anthony Weeden, DB Anthony Beck
Last Year: 9-1 School's first SWAC title since 1964
This Year: 10-1 Panthers show once again how SWAC West is won
Fact: Black's 22 TD passes in 2009 set a team record

Grambling State University Tigers
Location: Grambling, Louisiana
Stadium: Eddie G. Robinson
Coach: Rod Broadway (26-10/60-21)
Who's Back: QB Greg Dillon, RB Frank Warren, DE Christian Anthony
Who's Gone: OL Revay Smith, P Fabian Carter
Last Year: 7-4 Inconsistency on both sides of the ball hampered GSU
This Year: 8-3 Another season of trailing Prairie View
Fact: Anthony was the only player in either FCS or FBS to lead his team in both sacks and interceptions

University of Arkansas-Pine Bluff Golden Lions
Location: Pine Bluff, Arkansas
Stadium: Golden Lions Stadium
Coach: Monte Coleman (5-5)
Who's Back: WR Raymond Webber, DT Ibraham Abdulai, CB Raymond Duplechain
Who's Gone: RB Mickey Dean, LB Freddie Fairchild, DB Kevin Thornton
Last Year: 5-5 Win over Grambling highlighted Coleman's initial coaching campaign
This Year: 4-7 Defensive losses too much to overcome in rugged West
Fact: Head coach Monte Coleman and assistants Vernon Dean and Dennis Winston own a combined seven Super Bowl rings

Southern University Jaguars
Location: New Orleans, Louisiana
Stadium: A.W. Mumford
Coach: Stump Mitchell (1st season)
Who's Back: S Jason House, RB Gary Hollimon, WR LaQuinton Evans
Who's Gone: QB Bryant Lee, WR Jumorris Stewart, RB Brian Threat
Last Year: 6-5 Offensive breakdowns cost coach Pete Richardson his job
This Year: 5-6 Jags face uphill climb to avoid West cellar
Fact: House, who led the FCS in interceptions, began 2009 as a WR

Alabama A&M Bulldogs
Location: Huntsville, Alabama
Stadium: Louis Crews
Coach: Anthony Jones (61-33/79-46)
Who's Back: QB Deaunte Mason, DL Frank Kearse, CB Korey Morrison
Who's Gone: RB Ulysses Banks, WR Thomas Harris, OL Charles Meade
Last Year: 7-5 East title run offset by loss to Prairie View in championship game
This Year: 7-4 Mason must live up to potential to avoid slide
Fact: Banks and Harris left as the school's all-time leading rusher and receiver, respectively

Alcorn State University Braves
Location: Lorman, Mississippi
Stadium: Jack Spinks (22,500)
Coach: Ernest Collins, Jr. (3-6)
Who's Back: RB Arnold Walker, DE Malcolm Taylor, WR Edward Johnson
Who's Gone: QB Tim Buckley, OL Issac Williams, WR Ryan Singleton
Last Year: 3-6 Porous defense allowed 30+ points five times
This Year: 4-6 Improved defense offset by questions at QB
Fact:

Jackson State University Tigers
Location: Jackson, Mississippi
Stadium: Mississippi Veterans Memorial (65,000)
Coach: Rick Comegy (24-20/114-46)

Who's Back: S Kerry Hoskins, RB Bloi-Dei Dorzon, WR Keenan Tillman
Who's Gone: QB Trae Rutland, DL Terrance Onyuike, DB Malcolm Palmer
Last Year: 3-7 Offense managed an FCS-low 13.9 ppg

This Year: 5-6 New "Air Raid" offense plays to strengths of solid receiving corps
Fact: Only SWAC team not to score more than 25 points in a game last season

Alabama State University Hornets
Location: Montgomery, Alabama
Stadium: Cramton Bowl (21,800)
Coach: Reggie Barlow (12-21)
Who's Back: WR Nicholas Andrews, WR Darius Mathis, DT Kynjee Cotton
Who's Gone: LB Adrian Hardy, DB Rechard Johnson, RB Rahmond Taylor
Last Year: 4-7 A 3-0 start was wiped out by 1-7 finish
This Year: 3-8 Critical season looms for Barlow
Fact: New OC Melvin Spears orchestrated high-powered TSU attack in 2008-09

Mississippi Valley State University Delta Devils
Location: Itta Bena, Mississippi
Stadium: Rice-Totten (10,000)
Coach: Karl Morgan (1st season)
Who's Back: WR Chris Williams, LB Rory Malone, CB Markkus Davis
Who's Gone: QB Paul Roberts, OL Robert Ogletree S Ryan Burciaga
Last Year: 3-8 Coach Willie Totten's reign ended after eight seasons at alma mater
This Year: 1-9 New offensive scheme will take time with undermanned unit
Fact: Morgan begins third stint in SWAC, having served as an assistant at Alcorn State and Southern.■