

It's official, Florida A&M leaving MEAC

By LUT WILLIAMS
BCSP Editor

The defections from the Mid Eastern Athletic Conference continued last week as the Florida A&M University Board of Trustees voted unanimously Thursday to move to the league's HBCU NCAA Div. I sister conference, the Southwestern Athletic Conference.

The SWAC followed suit Thursday unanimously approving FAMU as its 11th member in a special executive session meeting of its Council of Presidents and Chancellors.

The move would take effect in the 2021-2022 season meaning the upcoming 2020-2021 season will be the Rattlers last in the MEAC.

"While we have had a long-standing relationship competing in the Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference, Florida A&M's impending move to the Southwestern Athletic Conference is one that is in the best interest of the University," said FAMU President **Larry Robinson**, Ph.D. after the vote was taken. "The positive impacts on student athletes, cost savings, re-establishment of long-term rivalries and opportunities to generate revenue are among the key factors in this decision."

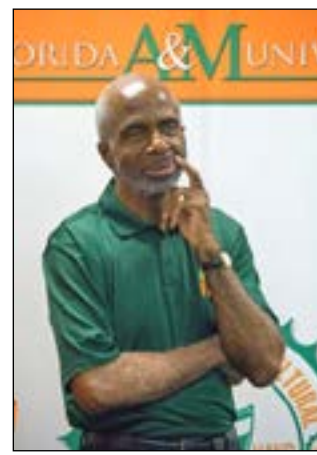
FAMU is the fourth former MEAC member deciding to leave the conference in the last three years following the departure of **Savannah State University** back to NCAA Div. II status and the **Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Conference** in 2017, **Hampton University's** decision later that same year to move to the Big South Conference and **North Carolina A&T's** decision announced in February of this year to join Hampton in the Big South.

In losing the Rattlers, the MEAC falls to nine full members, just seven that play football. It also loses one of the most storied programs in black college sports history. In addition to its world-renowned marching band, the *Marching 100*, the MEAC is losing a stalwart in football that has produced legends such as football coach **Alonzo "Jake" Gaither**, Pro Football Hall of Famer and Olympic track legend "**Bullet" Bob Hayes** among others. FAMU athletics have also been among the best in the MEAC in baseball, softball, men's and women's track and field and men's tennis.

As of press time Tuesday, the MEAC had not issued an official response.

Similar to N. C. A&T's and Hampton's announcements of their move to the Big South, FAMU officials identified reduced travel expenses as one reason for the move.

FAMU's vice president of athletics, **Kortne Gasha**, said the move will save the university roughly \$400,000 per year, because of a closer proximity to other teams in the SWAC. Gasha also said joining the SWAC could also be a



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better way to generate football revenue.

The SWAC is the perennial leader in black college and Football Championship Subdivision (FCS) home attendance regularly racking up the gaudiest numbers for their rivalry games. The conference has led the FCS in home attendance 42 of the past 43 years.

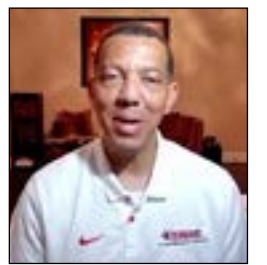
In the 2019 season, SWAC member **Jackson State** was the FCS attendance leader, averaging 33,762 over five home games and the league had two other teams, **Alabama State** and **Southern**, in the top seven. FAMU was tenth.

Unlike NC A&T's move to the Big South, there was little to no mention of academics for the move though reduced travel time will likely result in increases in class time.

collective commitment to excellence in all facets," added Hugine.

"It's going to give us an opportunity to expand from a media standpoint, from a sponsorship standpoint and also from an overall environment standpoint," said SWAC Commissioner **Dr. Charles McClelland**. "Florida A&M travels and when our institutions travel to Florida A&M, you know it's going to be competitive, you know, it's going to be exciting. So some have said it's going to be the start of a mega-superblack college conference. I won't go that far, but I can tell you we're pretty strong right now and we're happy and sufficient that Florida A&M has allowed us in with bringing that large and strong of a brand to the already

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"Florida A&M University is a great fit for the Southwestern Athletic Conference," said **Dr. Andrew Hugine**, President of **Alabama A&M University** and Chairman of the SWAC Council of Presidents and Chancellors. "FAMU's strong athletics history, academic mission, along with its location within our natural geographical footprint made this a perfect unification for Florida A&M University and the Southwestern Athletic Conference."

"FAMU boast a strong loyal base of alumni, fans, and supporters and they have shown a

strong brands that we have."

FAMU originally joined the MEAC in 1979 after being long-time members of the SIAC and on the heels of its Division I-AA national football title win, the only national football title for a Div. I HBCU. It would leave the conference in the mid-1980s and operate as an independent Division I-AA program for a few years before coming back into the fold. After briefly operating as a Division I-A independent in 2004, FAMU's football program re-joined the MEAC the following year.

BCSP Notes



RILEY: During his playing days from 1969-1983 with the Cincinnati Bengals.

Florida A&M legend Ken Riley passes

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — **Florida A&M** football legend **Ken Riley** passed away on Sunday morning at the age of 72 according to a release from the university.

The former Rattler quarterback, head coach and athletics director was one of the cornerstones of FAMU athletics and beyond throughout his historic 15-year career in the National Football League. Riley reportedly suffered a heart attack.

Riley played all four years (1966-69) under center for the Rattlers under legendary coach **Alonzo "Jake" Gaither** and was the last quarterback to play in Gaither's tenure (1945-69). He was part of a series of interviews of coaching legends in February 2019 talking about his time under Gaither's tutelage.

After his playing days in Tallahassee, he was a sixth round selection of the Cincinnati Bengals in the 1969 NFL Draft where he would convert to cornerback, a position that he remained for his entire career in the NFL, all with the Bengals.

He rarely missed a game as a pro. Over fifteen seasons, he played in 207 games (1969-83) with 201 starts. His best season was perhaps in 1976, when he recorded nine interceptions with 141 return yards, one touchdown, and two fumble recoveries.

His nine interceptions set a franchise record for most interceptions in one season, and would remain the team record for 30 years until it was broken by Deltha O'Neal in 2005.

But despite his success in the 1976 season, Riley was not selected to play in the Pro Bowl. Meanwhile, his defensive back teammate **Lemar Parrish**, a **Lincoln (Mo.)** product who recorded just two interceptions and missed half the season with injuries, was a Pro Bowl selection. Many believe Riley was overlooked because he was steady and not flamboyant player in contrast to Parrish.

Riley continued to be an impact player for Cincinnati throughout the rest of his career. In 1981, he recorded five interceptions and one fumble recovery, assisting his team to their first ever Super Bowl appearance against the San Francisco 49ers in Super Bowl XVI.

In his final NFL season (1983), at 36, Riley recorded eight interceptions, 89 return yards, two touchdowns, and two fumble recoveries.

He finished his time in pro football in 1983 with 65 interceptions, only behind Hall of Famers Emlen Tunnell, Dick Lane and Paul Krause.

He is currently fifth all-time.

He remains the only defensive back in the top five of career interceptions to not be in the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Perhaps upon his death, he will receive the HOF recognition due him for his accomplished career.

After his decade and a half of playing in the pros Riley would become a coach, eventually becoming the head man at FAMU in 1986. In eight seasons on the sideline at Bragg Memorial Stadium, Riley's Rattlers would win two **Mid Eastern Athletic Conference** titles and he was twice named the conference's coach of the year.

Riley would finish his career as a coach with a 48-39-2 overall record before serving as athletics director from 1993-2004.

Riley's accolades are plentiful. He was a Rhodes Scholar candidate as a student at FAMU, a three time All-Pro with the Bengals, a FAMU Hall of Famer and a Black College Football Hall of Famer.

MEAC wraps up 2020 meetings; Changes championship formats

NORFOLK, Va., — The 2020 **Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference** (MEAC) Spring Meetings, the annual gathering of the MEAC's Presidents and Chancellors, Athletics Directors, Senior Woman Administrators and Faculty Athletics Representatives, began Tuesday, May 26, and concluded on Friday, May 29. All meetings were conducted virtually.

In an effort to make travel less expensive for member institutions and the conference office, many of the championships will be shifted to a more centralized location for 2020-21 and the number of teams participating will be reduced.

Baseball, bowling, softball, tennis and volleyball will each see their championship fields decreased to four teams, and each championship will be shortened by a day (reducing a day of travel and lodging for participating institutions).

In addition, the men's golf championship will go from a three-day event to two days, with 36 holes being played on the first day. The championship field will remain the same.

Indoor and outdoor track & field will each have their respective schedules condensed from three days to two, though the fields will remain the same.

The MEAC Basketball Tournament format has also been changed; first-round games will now be held on campus sites, with games being hosted by the higher seeds. Quarterfinal games through the championship game will be played in Norfolk, Va. at the Scope Arena.

The MEAC did not name Talmadge Layman Hill or Mary McLeod Bethune All-Sports Award winners for 2019-20 due to the suspension of winter championships and spring sports because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The MEAC will hold its next event on Friday, July 31 with the 2020 MEAC Football Media Day. The event will be held virtually over Zoom due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Editor's Note: This meeting was conducted before Florida A&M announced their intention to leave the conference. The conference has made no subsequent announcement or response since FAMU's announcement.

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HELLO!



Florida A&M Sports logo

SWAC BOUND: Florida A&M leaving one HBCU conference (MEAC) next year for another (SWAC).

MOVIN'
ON

FLORIDA A&M MOVING TO, HOOPSTERS STAYING IN SWAC; CIAA SPEAKS; FAMU'S KEN RILEY PASSES

Statement from the CIAA on Racism, Social Justice, & Equality

WE CAN FIND SOLACE AMONGST EACH OTHER. OUR CIAA BOARD, STUDENTS, ALUMNI, ACADEMIC AND ATHLETIC LEADERS AT OUR COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES HAVE FOUGHT AND CONTINUE TO FIGHT FOR JUSTICE, CIVIL RIGHTS AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE ACROSS THE WORLD.

THE CIAA WAS FOUNDED IN 1912 BY HBCUS, WHICH THEMSELVES WERE CREATED BECAUSE OF DISCRIMINATION AND RACISM. OUR INSTITUTIONS REMAIN A HAVEN FOR OUR COMMUNITY AND WE STAND READY TO SUPPORT OUR MEMBERSHIP.

TOGETHER, WE SERVE AS A BEACON OF HOPE AND A CATALYST FOR CHANGE

STATEMENT FROM THE CENTRAL INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION

CIAA

UNDER THE BANNER

WHAT'S GOING ON IN AND AROUND BLACK COLLEGE SPORTS

SWAC TO SWAC:

Two decorated SWAC hoopsters, one from the men's side and one from the women's side, have made decision to transfer to other teams in the league.

ALABAMA STATE TO ALCORN STATE: The former SWAC Men's Basketball Rookie of the Year, **Jacoby Ross** is transferring from **Alabama State** to **Alcorn State**.



Ross

Ross averaged over 12 points in his first two seasons at Alabama State. But he entered the transfer portal after Jackson native and NBA champion **Mo Williams** was named the head coach of the program last month.

He started just six times as junior, however, and his point production dipped to just 6.4 per game on 32 percent shooting.

"I feel really comfortable with the new coaching staff and they're gonna let me rock out for my last year," Ross told sports journalist Greg Levinsky. "I have a point to prove in the SWAC. A lot of people think I fell off because of the bad year I had last year, but that's not the case. I'll be back and way better."

TEXAS SOUTHERN TO ARKANSAS-PINE BLUFF:

Former **Texas Southern** standout and SWAC player of the year **Joyce Kennerson** is coming back into the league in the 2020-2021 season, her last year of eligibility, playing for **Arkansas-Pine Bluff** and new coach **Dawn Brown**.

While at Texas Southern, the 5-4 Kennerson averaged 9.9 points as a freshman, 18.3 points per game as a sophomore and was the league's player of the year as a junior when she averaged a league-best 24.3 points and was in the top five statistically in 3-pointers (.66, 2.3 3pg., 3rd), 3-point percentage (.346, 2nd) and free throw percentage (.757, 5th).

She totalled over 1,600 points during her three years with TSU. Kennerson took a medical leave in 2018-2019 and gave birth to a baby boy in February of 2019.

Brown faced Kennerson when she was the head coach at **Prairie View A&M** from 2014-16.



Kennerson