

Bethune-Cookman to join SWAC in 2021

By LUT WILLIAMS
BCSP Editor

The number of teams deciding in 2020 to leave the NCAA Div. I Mid Eastern Athletic Conference after the coming year reached three last week as **Bethune-Cookman University** added its name to the list

B-CU, an MEAC member since 1979, announced last Thursday that it will join **Florida A&M University** in moving from the MEAC to the other HBCU Div. I conference, the **Southwestern Athletic Conference (SWAC)**, after the 2020-2021 season. FAMU, also in the MEAC since 1979, announced its move three weeks earlier.

FAMU and B-CU were preceded by **North Carolina A&T State University** who announced in February that the 2020-2021 season would be its last in the MEAC before taking up residence in the Big South Conference. N. C. A&T was one of the founding members of the MEAC in 1970.

Coupled with **Hampton University's** decision to leave the MEAC and join the Big South in 2017 and **Savannah State's** decision during the same year to leave the MEAC and move back to the Div. II **Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Conference**, the MEAC has now lost five institutions in just three years.

Among the reasons for their departures, both Hampton and N. C. A&T cited the onerous financial and time constraints that travel in the MEAC footprint, particularly in trips to the Florida schools (B-CU in Daytona Beach and FAMU in Tallahassee), had placed on the institutions and their student/athletes' class participation. As it stands now, the moves will leave the MEAC next season (2021-2022) with just eight full members and only six that play football.

B-CU and FAMU see the moves as geographical and competitive fits.

THE B-CU DECISION

The realignment recommendation was made to the B-CU Board of Trustees via a special committee led by school President **E. LaBrent Chrite**, Vice President of Intercollegiate Athletics **Lynn W. Thompson** and other integral stakeholders from the university's community including members of the Executive Leadership team.

"Bethune-Cookman's move to the Southwestern Athletic Conference is one that is clearly in the best interest of the University, particularly during this major shift in higher education and intercollegiate athletics," said Chrite in the press release announcing the move.

"We believe this is a logical next step in the evolution of our University. Moreover, it reflects our commitment to strengthening the University's long-term competitiveness and viability, while providing the best possible experience for our student-athletes."

"For 40 years Bethune-Cookman University's brand has been synonymous with the MEAC," said Thompson. "I want to thank Commissioner **Dennis Thomas** and the entire MEAC family because it has provided a treasure chest of unforgettable moments, invaluable relationships and life changing championships for our student-athletes, as they represented our university and the MEAC across the nation."

"We were charged by our Board of Trustees to study the changing landscape, analyze the data and prevailing trends and make a recommendation that would position our program and our University on a trajectory for long-term success. Joining the SWAC gives us the opportunity and momentum to align with a new set of great universities who share our same mission, vision and history and we will need the entire Wildcat Nation to join us on this exciting journey."

Bethune-Cookman's move was approved by SWAC membership on Tuesday, June 23rd,



Bethune-Cookman University President **E. LaBrent Chrite**

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and a formal offer was then extended to the university by SWAC Commissioner **Dr. Charles McClelland**.

"We're extremely excited to welcome Bethune-Cookman University to the Southwestern Athletic Conference," said McClelland. "The Wildcats undoubtedly align with our core principles and strategic plan. The addition also brings to our league an institution with academic prowess, a world-renowned marching band, along with an enthusiastic base of alumni, fans and supporters. Bethune-Cookman's alliance

with the Southwestern Athletic Conference from a competitive standpoint strengthens us in all of the sports in which the Wildcats compete. Many of our member institutions have competed against B-CU for decades and will now have the opportunity to do so on a yearly basis.

"Bethune-Cookman's addition to the Southwestern Athletic Conference ultimately puts us in a great position to expand our brand in a manner that will bring a high level of value to our league and membership."

The MEAC responds . . .

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The **Mid Eastern Athletic Conference** has engaged a nationally-known consulting firm to assess the conference and help chart its future in the midst of changes that have seen three prime institutions announce it will leave the league after this year (see story above).

Howard University President Dr. Wayne I. Frederick, chairman of the **Mid Eastern Athletic Conference's** Council of Presidents and Chancellors, and conference Commissioner **Dr. Dennis Thomas** held a generous 90-minute Zoom press conference Friday to announce how the conference intends to move forward in light of its most recent challenges.

Collegiate Sports Associates, a firm based in North Carolina run by founder and president Todd Turner, a former athletics director at UConn, N. C. State, Vanderbilt and Washington that includes former Virginia Athletics Director Craig Littlepage and former Notre Dame head coach Tyrone Willingham among its partners, will undertake the comprehensive review of the conference.

The company will meet with conference officials and its eight remaining member institutions to examine everything from the league's current state, its economic outlook, potential opportunities for expansion inside and outside the HBCU environment – including Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) – that will include geographic realities and academic fits. This will take place while the conference navigates the challenges for its institutions and athletic programs in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the ongoing nationwide protests regarding systemic racial inequalities all in the midst of a 50th celebration of the founding of the conference (in 1970).

"I think what we have to do is make sure we provide a compelling case not just for why folks should stay, not just for the sake of staying, but why competing in the MEAC is good for these institutions as well," said Frederick. "Tradition and legacy certainly is a part of that but like everything else in the HBCU world, we also have to be realistic about the marketplace around college athletics and therefore we have take measures that we could do that."

They began by stating that the league, now made up of eight members situated between Orangeburg, South Carolina (**South Carolina State University**) and Dover, Delaware (**Delaware State University**), will now return to the original footprint of its founding by seven institutions in 1970 while acknowledging that the league has expanded and contracted over the past five decades.

In touting its assets, Thomas, in his 18th year leading the conference, noted that the MEAC is the *only* FCS conference in the nation that has 18 consecutive years of revenue distribution to its member institutions. The total over that span is \$35 million.

"There are tremendous assets in the MEAC," said Thomas. "We are now a compact, regionalized conference beginning in 2021-2022. We'll see what the future holds for us."

"We do feel our conference is strong but we also feel we have work to do to strengthen it," said Frederick.

Frederick is a distinguished researcher and surgeon and Howard alum who earned Bachelor of Science and medical degrees at the school by the age of 22. He returned to lead the institution in 2014. He has been consulted nationally and is considered one of the leading experts in the nation dealing with the pandemic as he leads the university and Howard University hospital.

In addition to his comments, he announced that he along with the presidents or deans of the **Morehouse School of Medicine**, the **Meharry School of Medicine** and the **Charles Drew University of Medicine and Science**, an HBCU graduate school in Willowbrook, California, were holding a webinar Tuesday (June 30) for all HBCU presidents to lead discussions around testing and contact solutions for all HBCU campuses.

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Howard University President **Wayne I. Frederick**

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Bethune-Cookman logos

AUDI FIVE, YO! Bethune-Cookman becomes the third to announce this year and one of five institutions to leave the MEAC since 2017.

BACK & FORTH

MEAC LOSES BETHUNE-COOKMAN, KEEPS DELSTATE, GIRDS FOR THE FUTURE; CANCELLATIONS CONTINUE

UNDER THE BANNER

WHAT'S GOING ON IN AND AROUND BLACK COLLEGE SPORTS

DELSTATE STAYING IN MEAC, PARTNERS WITH PEAK SPORTS:

Dover, Del. – Despite rumors to the contrary, **Delaware State University** is remaining in the **Mid Eastern Athletic Conference**.

DSU President **Dr. Tony Allen** said in a virtual meeting Tuesday that the Hornets, one of the founding members of the conference, are staying put.

"You don't have to expect any changes. I know you've heard all the rumors," said Allen of unconfirmed reports DSU was moving to the Northeast Conference (NEC). "We've been very thoughtful about this with respect to how we affiliate, what we need from the athletic conference, particularly the MEAC and what our go-forward path is as we move.

"We honor that rich legacy," said Allen. "We are a founding partner."

DSU also announced a partnership with **PEAK Sports Management** to oversee sponsorship and multimedia rights, while enhancing the Hornets' marketing brand.

Under the partnership, Peak Sports MGMT will sell and manage all sponsorship inventory for DSU Athletics, including radio, television and live streaming opportunities, venue signage, program advertising, digital and web content, game sponsorships and special events.

"Peak is exceptional in building relationships, engaging communities and tailoring partnerships in mutually beneficial ways," said **Dr. D. Scott Gines**, Delaware State University Director of Athletics. "As we prepare to enter a new year with more student-athletes and home competitions than ever, I cannot think of a more opportune time to springboard our brand and extend the reach of Delaware State Athletics."

Delaware State will be the first **Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference** member and Historically Black College and University to partner with Peak Sports MGMT.

"Peak Sports is extremely proud of our partnership with Delaware State," said Ryan Holway, President Peak Sports MGMT. "With the vision of great leadership from **Dr. Tony Allen** and **Dr. Scott Gines**, we will achieve great things for the University, athletics programs and most importantly the student-athletes.

Delaware State currently fields 18 NCAA Div. I sports. Fourteen teams compete in the **Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference**. Women's lacrosse is a member of the Southern Conference and equestrian competes in the Eastern College Athletic Conference. Women's golf and women's soccer are independent. Women's triathlon will become the university's 19th varsity sport and 13th women's program beginning in 2021-2022 season.

JSU PARTNERS WITH OPENDORSE:

JACKSON, Miss. – **Jackson State University** and Opendorse, the leading athlete marketing platform that helps the biggest brands in sports share content on social media, announced a groundbreaking partnership that makes JSU the first Historically Black College & University (HBCU) to invest in building the brands of its players and partner universities on social media.

"We fully understand the power of the social space for all involved, and the high engagement opportunities presented by our coaches, administrators, student-athletes and alumni," said JSU Vice President and Director of Athletics **Ashley Robinson**. "Opendorse is at the front of social space mobilization, and we are proud to create this landmark partnership."

This first-ever partnership with Opendorse will allow JSU to share content on social with their entire athletic ecosystem —through the social channels of current student-athletes, athlete alumni, coaches, sports administrators, and university athletics accounts creating access and opportunities no other HBCU has been able to offer before.

"Jackson State is a proven leader in student-athlete development in college athletics," said Blake Lawrence, Opendorse CEO. "As changes to Name, Image, and Likeness regulations near, programs that make the commitment to providing students with the best tools and technology will be in a strong position to win. We're thrilled to welcome JSU as our first Historically Black College & University (HBCU) partner, and look forward to helping the program and its student-athletes maximize the power of their voice with social media."

BCSP Notes

Morehouse cancels fall athletics

ATLANTA – In a letter published on the school's website, **Morehouse College President David A. Thomas** has announced the cancellation of all Maroon Tiger Fall sports.

"This will affect our cross country and football sponsored athletic teams," said Thomas. "I want all of our scholar-athletes, parents, and alumni to know that the College will honor all athletic scholarship awards."

"Like all of the decisions we've made related to COVID-19, this was a difficult one but was made with the health and well-being of our students and community in mind," Thomas continued. "It follows my intention to maintain a safe campus in hopes that our students will be able to return in August. Our Maroon Tiger teams travel to other NCAA institutions and cannot compete without breaking from social distancing guidelines still maintained by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Sporting events also invite individuals to our campus who will not be subject to the testing and monitoring that we plan to implement for our students, faculty, and staff."

A decision regarding the Winter and Spring athletic seasons will be "forthcoming later in the year".

Other Cancellations - Compiled by Onnidan.com staff Saint Augustine's

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 *Blue & White Homecoming Experience* at **Saint Augustine's University** will be a virtual event. The Homecoming game will still occur with limited spectator capacity on Oct. 24

The Detroit Football Classic

Southern University versus **Tennessee State University** in the *Detroit Football Classic* on Sept. 5 has been cancelled along with Southern's

home game on Sept. 12 against **Florida A&M**. **Jackson State** also was forced to cancel its Sept. 5 season opener against **Langston University**, because Langston and other N.A.I.A. schools have been prohibited from playing before Sept. 12.

Shaw University

Shaw University has cancelled all in-person Homecoming activities for 2020, with the exception of the Homecoming football game against **Johnson C. Smith** on October 24.

Fayetteville State University

FSU has cancelled Homecoming and all in-person associated activities. The game will be played as scheduled on October 31, 2020 at 2 p.m. with reduced fan capacity.

Winston-Salem State University

WSSU has also cancelled Homecoming festivities.

North Carolina Central University

Due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions and NCCU's desire to ensure the health and safety of all planned attendees, all in-person events for the 2020 Ultimate Homecoming Experience have been cancelled.

The Homecoming football game will proceed with reduced spectator capacity.

Pro Football Hall of Fame Classic

The *Pro Football Hall of Fame Classic* will make a decision on scheduling by July 1.

MEAC/SWAC Challenge

The *MEAC/SWAC Challenge* scheduled for September 6 between **South Carolina State** and **Grambling State**, is still going forward, according to **Dennis Thomas**, the Commissioner of the **Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference** and John Grant, Executive Director of the MEAC/SWAC Challenge and Celebration Bowl.