

Ta'mar Scott, Bulldogs defense key victory

# Alabama A&M, first SWAC championship

*Special to Sentinel-Voice*

Birmingham, AL — Alabama A&M's football team has been to the SWAC Championship Game four times since its inception in 1999. The problem for the Bulldogs is that they had never won the championship.

As the old saying goes, if at first you don't succeed, try, try, and try again.

The Bulldogs used a stout defense led by All-SWAC linebacker Johnny Baldwin's game-high 11 tackles to defeat Arkansas Pine Bluff 22-13 in winning its first SWAC Championship Game before a crowd of 30,213 at Legion Field.

The Bulldogs forced Arkansas-Pine Bluff into three turnovers, which led to nine A&M points, while holding Arkansas Pine Bluff and its high-powered offense, ranked second in the league, to 122 yards of total offense.

Meanwhile, the Bulldogs racked up 346 yards of total offense, 189 of those on the ground led by Nic Luke's 76 yards on 15 carries and Ta'Mar Scott's 58 yards on 12 carries and 2 TDs. Scott was named the game's Offensive MVP.

"Our defense, I thought, made some great plays," said Alabama A&M head coach Anthony Jones.

"We never allowed them to get anything going. We were constantly changing our defensive schemes up and

giving them different looks, and they were somewhat thrown off balance the entire game."

The Golden Lions were playing without SWAC Offensive Player of the Year quarterback Chris Wallace in the first half, who had to sit after being ejected in the third quarter from UAPB's game with Texas Southern on Nov. 18 after an altercation with TSU defensive back Stacey Thomas.

The loss of Wallace was evident as the Golden Lions offense punted on its first possession then on their next possession turned the ball over on a fumble by Martell Mallett.

The Golden Lions defense, ranked next to last in the conference, was up to the task, however, blocking a Jeremy Licea 28-yard field goal, then holding the Bulldogs to a 28-yard field goal late in the first quarter, which gave Alabama A&M a 3-0 lead.

But Arkansas-Pine Bluff would take the lead early in the second quarter as quarterback Johnathan Moore found Jason Jones for a 44-yard touchdown and the Golden Lions led 7-3. Alabama A&M could manage only another Lecia field goal from 35 yards late in the second quarter and trailed 7-6 at halftime.

The Bulldogs received the ball to start the second half

but went three-and-out and were forced to punt. Enter Wallace for the Golden Lions in the third quarter, and his first pass of the game was intercepted by Antonio Nelson at the UAPB 47. After a 4-yard rush by Scott, Kelcy Luke rushed for seven yards and a Bulldogs first down. But he was hit late out of bounds on the play by Justin Bass and injured his left ankle, knocking him out of the remainder of the game.

Back-up quarterback Stanley Allen came in, but it

was all Scott the rest of the drive as he rushed for 12 yards then scampered 14 yards into the end zone for a touchdown. Allen's two-point rush attempt failed, but the Bulldogs led 12-7.

On its next possession, Alabama A&M continued to run the ball as Scott and Luke continued to carry the load. Thomas Harris was thrown into the mix and his 27-yard carry put the ball at the UAPB 19. The Bulldogs drive stalled and they had to settle for a Licea 24-yard

field goal late in the third to extend their lead to 15-7.

The Bulldogs defense continued to dominate as Arkansas-Pine Bluff managed just 30 yards total on its next four possessions. All the while, Nic Luke and Scott continued to rack up the yards, rushing for 134 between them as Scott rushed for his second touchdown of the afternoon from five yards out, extending the Bulldogs lead to 22-7 with 8:35 remaining.

"We didn't generate any

continuity and when you're playing a good football team you have to make plays through the air and on the ground," said Pine Bluff head coach Mo Forte. "We got outplayed today."

Martell Mallett, the SWAC's leading rusher carried the ball 12 times for just 25 yards. Wallace was 6-of-12 for 45 yards with two interceptions.

Scott said, "I can't explain how I'm feeling right now. What more can a guy ask for?"

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Alabama A&M head coach Anthony Jones holds up the SWAC Championship trophy as Southwestern Athletic Conference Commissioner Robert Vowels (left) looks on.

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