

Athletic Department



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Shaw University Football Team Ranked 25th in *Sporting News* Preseason List

(RALEIGH, NC) – The Shaw University Football team has been ranked 25th in Division II by the *Sporting News*. This is the first national ranking for the Bears, who reinstated their football program in 2003.

“National recognition of this kind is a reflection of Coach (Darrell) Asberry’s work, along with the talent and dedication of the players who have helped build this program, and those that will be taking the field this year,” said Jacques Curtis, Athletic Director of Shaw University. “This helps to raise awareness of Shaw from a national level and gives us visibility to help build the University and its athletic programs.”

The Bears have won back-to-back Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association (CIAA) Championships, and three of the past six titles. The back-to-back titles are a first for the University.

Shaw Head Coach Darrell Asberry said, “We have had success, but cannot rest on what we’ve accomplished. A pre-season ranking is both recognition of what has been done in the past and an expectation of what this team will do in 2009. It is our job to live up to that expectation ... and to exceed it.”

The Shaw football team returns most of its key offensive players from a unit that finished first in the CIAA in scoring offense, total offense, passing offense, first downs, third down conversion, and red zone offense. They were second in the conference in rushing offense.

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Quarterback Travis Robinson (Sr., Rockingham, NC) was 89-191 for 1,559 yards in 2008. Two of the team's top three receivers return from last year. DeAndre Okanji (Sr., Ontario, CA) caught for 658 yards and six touchdowns, while Julius Gregory (Jr., Portsmouth, VA) added 366 yards and five TDs.

All three of the Bears' top rushers return, led by Raymond Williams (Jr., Cleveland, OH) who ran for 768 yards and eight touchdowns. Aaron Ellison (Sr., Hawthorne, FL) ran for 571 yards and six touchdowns, and Johnny Wooten (So., Garland, TX) ran for 486 yards and five TDs.

Shaw's defense led Division II in 2008 in total defense, rushing defense, sacks, and tackles for a loss. The Bears led the CIAA in rushing defense as well. But that defense has lost its top five tacklers, including two-time CIAA Defensive Player of the Year, Louis Ellis, who has signed a two-year contract with the Miami Dolphins.

The Bears had a deep bench in 2008, and many of those players are expected to step up and continue the stifling defense Shaw has become known for. James Duplessis (Sr., Covington, LA) had 44 tackles and 3.5 sacks last season and is expected to step into a leadership role. Dwayne Moss (Sr., Petersburg, VA), 20 tackles and 3.5 sacks, will take a starting spot on the defensive line.

On special teams, Shaw returns two of the CIAA's top two placekickers in Caleb Reid (So., Virconia, NC), who was 6-8 in field goals and 49-52 in PATs; and Lincoln Shepherd (So., Mobile, AL), with 9-15 for field goals and 1-3 in PATs. Robert Brown III (Sr., Miami, FL) led Division II in punt returns in 2007, and is expected to return to that form in 2009.

The Bears open their season at home on August 29 with a rematch of the 2008 CIAA Championship game. Elizabeth City State University comes to Durham County Memorial Stadium looking to avenge their 36-7 loss in last year's title game.

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Shaw University was founded in 1865 and is the oldest historically black university in the south. Shaw University is a private, co-educational liberal arts University, that awards degrees at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. The primary mission of Shaw University is teaching with the commitment to maintain excellence in research and academic programs that foster intellectual enhancement and technological skills. The Shaw University athletic department has a long history of success, including back-to-back CIAA Football Championships (2007 and 2008), four straight women's basketball championships (2002/03 – 2005/06), the reigning five-time men's tennis champions, and the reigning women's tennis champions.