



Hampton University Goes On the Record Regarding Its Transition From MEAC to Big South

HAMPTON, Va. (February 20, 2018) — Reports from athletic officials at some MEAC schools that Hampton University has opted out of playing Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference (MEAC) football opponents in the 2018 season are inaccurate and misleading. The truth is that Hampton University has offered to play a full schedule of MEAC football games in 2018, but the MEAC refuses to sit down and talk to Hampton University about any transition to the Big South Conference. Instead, they have issued a set of unreasonable demands which Hampton University finds totally unacceptable.



For example, MEAC has levied vindictive sanctions against our student athletes, stripping Hampton University students and coaches of Conference Superlatives, such as bowl games, automatic NCAA tournament berths, MEAC Player of the Week, All-Conference team honors, Coach of the Year, or even selection to the Commissioner's All-Academic Team.

Hampton University Senior Vice President Paul C. Harris sees the MEAC's actions as an attempt to punish student-athletes for the university's strategic decision to leave the conference.

"I am appalled that, after a 22-year rewarding and productive relationship and numerous conference championships, the MEAC wants to hang Hampton University student-athletes out to dry. These are the same talented young people whose NCAA appearances have resulted in millions of dollars being poured into MEAC coffers," Harris said.

Hampton University, in a letter dated Dec. 4, 2017, from President Dr. William R. Harvey, stated its willingness to play a full (8-game) MEAC football schedule and remain eligible for the 2018 Celebration Bowl; to allow the MEAC to retain a pro-rated portion of \$520,000 Hampton University received from the NCAA when HU participated in its 2015 men's basketball tournament; to compete in 3-4 football games in 2019-2022; and to schedule four MEAC games in women's volleyball, men's and women's basketball, and softball.

Instead of accepting those favorable offers, MEAC set into action a list of unreasonable demands that were sealed officially on Feb. 5, in a letter from Dr. David Wilson, current chair of the MEAC Council of Chief Executive Officers (CCEO):

1. Hampton University must schedule a full 8-game MEAC slate for its 2018 football season. (This demand hamstring Hampton University from scheduling games with its future conference teams in the Big South.)
2. Hampton University will not be eligible for any MEAC championships following its effective date of withdrawal from MEAC. (This demand eliminates any opportunity for Hampton University to earn a bid to a bowl game in football, an automatic invitation in basketball for winning a conference championship, and from being considered for an at-large bid in other sports.)
3. Hampton University will not be eligible for any conference superlative awards such as Player of the Week, Coach of the Year, etc. (This demand penalizes every Hampton University student athlete and coach who excels on the playing field or in the classroom.)
4. Hampton University will be a non-conference opponent for all MEAC member institutions. (This demand makes Hampton University the only independent college in NCAA Division I football, effectively ending hope of qualifying for a bowl game.)
5. Hampton University is required to compete in a full (8-game) MEAC football schedule for 2019 – 2021 unless both institutions agree not to play. (This three-year demand is impossible, since Hampton University will belong to the Big South and will schedule 8 conference games these seasons. In addition, Hampton University is being forced to pay financial losses caused by failure to play MEAC opponents.)
6. Hampton University will not be eligible for any MEAC revenue distribution from MEAC subsequent to June 30, 2018, including any future revenue that would otherwise be obligated to a current MEAC conference member. (This demand means that Hampton University would receive no more revenues from MEAC, including event revenue sharing, from playing a member school during the remainder of this year.)
7. MEAC is assessing a \$250,000 financial penalty against Hampton University for its failure to comply with MEAC Constitution and Bylaws. (This demand has no basis in the MEAC Constitution and Bylaws, and means that Hampton University would have to take money away from student athlete programs.)

The CCEO determined to not allow Hampton University a voice by opening the Feb. 2 conference call by voting down the agreed-upon face-to-face meeting with MEAC membership. Hampton University is appealing that decision, but the MEAC has arranged for the appeal to be heard by the same CCEO that made the underlying decision. One must assume that it will be heard by the same judge, jury and executioner.

Hampton University openly acknowledged it missed a July 1, 2017 deadline to notify MEAC of its intentions to move to the Big South Conference, which it announced Nov. 16, 2017. Importantly, however, Hampton University missed the deadline due to ongoing discussions with

several other conferences regarding potential membership, not because of negligence or bad faith or antipathy toward MEAC. In fact, in full transparency, Hampton University held numerous open conversations with MEAC officials about its plans to move up in conference status, disclosing information referencing negotiations outside the conference.

Over the past few years, higher ranking athletic conferences have courted Hampton University for potential conference membership, including the Big South (ranked No. 25). Hampton University engaged in exploratory discussions with several other conferences and, at all times, again, kept MEAC Commissioner Dennis Thomas apprised of those exploratory discussions.

When Hampton University carefully considered its move to the Big South Conference, it weighed more than just athletics. Part of Hampton University's mission is building character. Intrinsic and extrinsic rewards are part of our Athletics Program. HU builds leaders and champions inside and outside the classroom.

“Our founder, General Samuel Chapman Armstrong, wanted ‘everything’ at his ‘institution to excel’ and that includes athletics,” Harris said. “Joining the Big South is consistent with Hampton’s mission for excellence across the board,” Harris said.

MEAC is ranked No. 31 among the 32 NCAA Division I athletic conferences in the nation, which equates to being at the bottom of Division I as referenced in several conference power rankings. Hampton University desires to unite athletics with its celebrated upward trajectory in academics.

The move by the MEAC denies rewards for excellence on the field and is inconsistent with Hampton University's core values and mission – to develop young men and women with a strong, positive self-image.

“Relegating our student-athletes to second class status within MEAC violates our core values,” said Harris. “Hampton University's decision to join the Big South was animated by what is in the best interest of the university,” Harris said. “It’s about long-term growth, increased exposure and greater opportunities for strategic partnerships.”

Hampton University has made repeated requests to meet with the MEAC Council of Chief Executive Officers and MEAC Commissioner Dennis Thomas to discuss and work out the terms and conditions of Hampton University's withdrawal from the conference. Inexplicably, the MEAC steadfastly has refused to meet with Hampton University officials.

The MEAC's refusal to meet with Hampton University renders its commitment “to improve relationships among members and to manage the tensions that frequently surface in a competitive environment” no more than an empty promise.

Hampton University is an advocate for its students. Hampton University made its offer in the spirit of continued collaboration and mutual trust. As a strong advocate for HBCU's, Hampton University wants to unite in the common goal of preparing students to thrive in their lives beyond the collegiate experience, and enrich the communities in which they live. Hampton

University is committed to a forward-thinking transition that will be beneficial to HBCU students, MEAC student-athletes and Hampton University's student-athletes.

It is clear that the MEAC is not committed to ensuring "intercollegiate athletics will maintain its proper role in higher education," as is misleadingly stated in the MEAC Constitution and Bylaws.

For more information contact Ms. B. Da'Vida Plummer, Assistant Vice President Marketing/ Media at 757-727-5405 or via email davida.plummer@hamptonu.edu .