By Matt Smith  
Sports Editor

The NFC won their 12th consecutive Super Bowl coin flip to begin Super Bowl XLIII. Unfortunately for the Arizona Cardinals, it was the last thing the NFC won that night.

In a full half that saw the Pittsburgh Steelers run their down-field, high-paced, man-to-man offense, the second half proved to be the perfect ending for the Steel Curtain offense as the Black and Gold past the Cardinals 27-23 to win the NFL’s record sixth Super Bowl.

“Those guys just don’t blink,” Pittsburgh head coach Mike Tomlin said. “They deliver. It’s never going to be pretty or perfect, if you will, but they have a great deal of resolve.”

But the Steelers and quarterback Ben Roethlisberger were perfect on their final drive Feb. 1. Ben marched his offense down to the goal line with just 2:32 remaining on the clock.

Roethlisberger engineered an eight-play, 78-yard drive in the final minutes of the game which ended with a 6-yard adhesive tackle to the goal line to set up a game-winning field goal by game MVP Santonio Holmes.

Kirkman, who hails from Liberty, N.C., made his hands over three Cardinal defenders, grabbing himself all alone in the back of the Cardinals defense and was soon out running the league’s No. 1 ranked defense in the midfield.

The victorious feeling the Cardinals had only lasted for two minutes, though, thanks to Roethlisberger’s heroics.

Not to be outdone by Roethlisberger, the Steel defense came up the Cardinals’ quarterback Randy Bullock on 12 of 14 save opportunities for the Black and Gold.

Roethlisberger finished 21-30 for 256 yards and a touchdown and an interception in his previous Super Bowl XL appearance. Roethlisberger finished the night with just 138 yards passing.

Holmes reeled in nine receptions for 131 yards, and the game-winning touchdown. Bullock was a former Super Bowl champion and MVP, ended the night with 377 yards on 31-43 passing and three touchdowns and an interception.

Kirkman finished his record-breaking post-season with 127 yards receiving and two touchdowns in the game.

Prior to joining the Braves in 2007, Hann played with Bethune-Cookman and had to miss a year to fulfill the NCAA’s transfer requirements.

“We are all very excited that Caylon was recognized for the great 2008 season he had,” head football coach Pete Shinnick said. “It is a tremendous honor for him and we are very proud of him.”

In the team’s second full season, the Braves finished with a 9-1 record under head coach Pete Shinnick.

In the team’s 4-1-2 game turn-around, the Black and Gold also defeated two Division I opponents, taking down both Davidson and Jacksonville.

The Braves are expected to bring 21 starters back in the 2009 season, including 10 players on defense.

Hann garners All-American status

By Matt Smith  
Sports Editor

The 2008 record-breaking season continues for junior defensive back O’Neil and the Braves. O’Neil earned yet another post-season award, this time garnering a spot on the Football Gazette All-American team. 

Hann was named as a third-team selection by the online publication and is the first All-American selection in school history.

Hann has already been named to multiple all-independent and all-regional teams this season.

“Ryan being named pre-season all-conference is an honor for him and I’m glad to see him get the recognition he deserves,” O’Neil said. “We are expecting Ryan to have another all-conference season.

Kirkman ended the season with a team-best 2.88 earned run average while striking out 46 batters in 50 innings of work for the Black and Gold last year.

Kirkman also allowed just 22 hits on the year to opposing sluggers and contributed a season-high 24 strikeouts. Justin Yow to record UNCP’s first no-hitter in 34 years against Francis Marion when the Braves blanked the Patriots 1-0 in Florence, S.C.

The Braves will be looking for their fifth-straight 50-win season in the 2009 campaign and host regional rival St. Andrews to kick off the season on Feb. 1 in a noon doubleheader at Sammy Cox Field.

The All-Conference team selects 11 players from the league’s 10 teams and is voted on by the league’s sports information directors from each school.

Eight schools were represented in the vote, with Francis Marion, North Carolina A&T and Georgia College placing more than one player on the mid-season honors to lead the way for total number of conference representatives.

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Kirkman to All-PBC squad

By Matt Smith  
Sports Editor

After crushing the school’s season save record in 2008, Braves relief pitcher Ryan Kirkman starts off the 2009 season on a high note, as the senior reliever was voted to the 2009 Preseason All-Conference squad.

Kirkman, who hails from Liberty, N.C., made a team-high 34 appearances for the Black and Gold last year.

The senior converted seven passes from opponents to pick games against West Virginia Wesleyan on Oct. 28. The senior also held a key role on special teams, returning 11 kicks for 133 yards and a touchdown for the Black and Gold.

Last season, Hann had to sit out during the Braves’ inaugural campaign due to NCAA trans- fer rules.

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