



RHODE ISLAND FAVORED TO CAPTURE CAA FOOTBALL TITLE IN 2025

RICHMOND, Va. (July 23, 2025) – Rhode Island, which is coming off a program-best 11-3 season that included a share of the CAA Football championship and its first FCS playoff berth since 1985, has been picked to finish atop the standings in 2025 according to a vote of the league’s head coaches.

The Rams received eight first-place votes and 163 points in the preseason poll. Monmouth garnered four first-place votes and was second with 142 points, while Villanova got the remaining two first-place tallies and was third with 139 points. Stony Brook (125 points) finished fourth in the voting and was followed by UNH (119 points), Towson (108 points), William & Mary (104 points) and Elon (98 points). Rounding out the poll were Maine (71 points), Campbell (53 points), Hampton (50 points), UAlbany (47 points), Bryant (32 points) and North Carolina A&T (23 points).

In addition to the poll, coaches voted for the preseason all-conference team. Monmouth graduate quarterback **Derek Robertson** was selected as the CAA Offensive Player of the Year after completing 283-of-435 passes for 3,397 yards and 31 touchdowns last season. He led FCS in passing yards per game (328.1) and total offense (325.3 ypg) in 2024. Rhode Island senior linebacker **A.J. Pena** was chosen as the CAA Defensive Player of the Year after recording 82 total tackles, 22.5 tackles for loss, 12.5 sacks, five quarterback hurries and two fumble recoveries a year ago. He ranked fourth in FCS in TFL’s and second in sacks in 2024.

Rhode Island returns 11 starters from last year’s team that set a program record for wins and reached the second round of the FCS playoffs. Eight of those starters are on offense, including quarterback Devin Farrell, wide receivers Marquis Buchanan and Greg Gaines III and all five regulars on the offensive line. Pena is joined by safety Andre DePina-Gray on defense.

Monmouth, which was 6-6 a year ago, led FCS in total offense (489.9 ypg) and ranked second in scoring (39.0 ppg) in 2024. Robertson guides a familiar cast with top receivers Josh Derry and TJ Speight returning along with tight end Jack Neri and running back Rodney Nelson. The Hawks’ defense is led by safety Deuce Lee.

Villanova finished 11-4 and made the FCS playoff field for the fourth time in six seasons in 2024. The Wildcats feature a potent rushing attack with backs David Avit and Isaiah Ragland running behind All-America center Jake Picard. All-America linebacker Shane Hartzell and lineman Obinna Nwobodo are back on a defense that surrendered just 18.6 ppg.

Stony Brook registered the biggest turnaround in FCS football a year ago with an 8-4 mark in coach Billy Cosh’s first season. Spearheading the offense is All-America running back Roland Dempster, who ranked in the top six in FCS in rushing yards and touchdowns. Linebackers AJ Roberts and Anthony Ferrelli were the Seawolves’ top two tackles last year.

2025 CAA FOOTBALL PRESEASON ALL-CONFERENCE TEAM
(Selected by a vote of Head Coaches)

OFFENSE

<u>Name, School</u>	<u>Cl.</u>	<u>Pos.</u>	<u>Ht.</u>	<u>Wt.</u>	<u>Hometown</u>
Derek Robertson, Monmouth	Gr.	QB	6-2	200	Hartsdale, N.Y.
David Avit, Villanova	So.	RB	6-0	220	Frederick, Md.
Roland Dempster, Stony Brook	Gr.	RB	6-0	225	Staten Island, N.Y.
Trey McDonald, William & Mary	Sr.	FB/HB	6-6	230	Kinnelon, N.J.
Jack Neri, Monmouth	Gr.	TE	6-3	245	Doylestown, Pa.
Marquis Buchanan, Rhode Island	Jr.	WR	6-4	175	Providence, R.I.
Josh Derry, Monmouth	Jr.	WR	5-9	175	Towson, Md.
TJ Speight, Monmouth	Sr.	WR	5-11	170	Fort Meade, Md.
Tre Alexander, Rhode Island	Gr.	OL	6-5	320	Queens, N.Y.
Brock Bethea, Rhode Island	Gr.	OL	6-2	304	Irwin, Pa.
JT Cornelius, Monmouth	6 th	OL	6-6	290	Toms River, N.J.
Niko Papic, Stony Brook	Sr.	OL	6-4	300	Portsmouth, Va.
Jake Picard, Villanova	Gr.	OL	6-4	310	Hope, R.I.
Korion Sharpe, North Carolina A&T	Sr.	OL	6-4	315	Charlotte, N.C.

DEFENSE

<u>Name, School</u>	<u>Cl.</u>	<u>Pos.</u>	<u>Ht.</u>	<u>Wt.</u>	<u>Hometown</u>
Davin Dzidzienyo, William & Mary	Sr.	DL	6-4	295	Northwest, D.C.
Rodney Faulk, Stony Brook	Sr.	DL	6-3	250	Washington, D.C.
Obinna Nwobodo, Villanova	Gr.	DL	6-3	295	Wilmington, Del.
Michael Otty, Bryant	Gr.	DL	6-1	292	Brooklyn, N.Y.
Luke Banbury, William & Mary	Gr.	LB	6-2	235	Pittsburgh, Pa.
Shane Hartzell, Villanova	Sr.	LB	6-0	230	Perkasie, Pa.
A.J. Pena, Rhode Island	Sr.	LB	6-2	243	Montclair, N.J.
AJ Roberts, Stony Brook	Gr.	LB	6-0	230	Staten Island, N.Y.
Myles Brodie, Towson	Gr.	CB	6-2	175	Hyattsville, Md.
Jalen Jones, William & Mary	Sr.	CB	6-0	190	Chesapeake, Va.
Deuce Lee, Monmouth	Jr.	S	5-11	195	Silver Spring, Md.
Xavier Terry, Towson	Sr.	S	5-10	190	Washington, D.C.

SPECIAL TEAMS

<u>Name, School</u>	<u>Cl.</u>	<u>Pos.</u>	<u>Ht.</u>	<u>Wt.</u>	<u>Hometown</u>
Trevin Ewing, Maine	Sr.	KR	5-11	190	Elkton, Md.
TJ Speight, Monmouth	Sr.	KR	5-11	170	Fort Meade, Md.
Carson Jenkins, William & Mary	Jr.	PR	5-10	175	Gate City, Va.
Enda Kirby, Stony Brook	Sr.	PK	6-2	220	Dobbs Ferry, N.Y.
Jeff Yurk, Elon	Sr.	P	6-2	224	Southern Pines, N.C.
Jonathan Ward, Hampton	Sr.	SPEC	5-10	240	Durham, N.C.

CAA FOOTBALL PRESEASON OFFENSIVE PLAYER OF THE YEAR: Derek Robertson, QB, Monmouth

CAA FOOTBALL PRESEASON DEFENSIVE PLAYER OF THE YEAR: A.J. Pena, LB, Rhode Island

Honorable mention: Devin Farrell, QB, Rhode Island; Carter Peevy, QB, Maine; Rodney Nelson, RB, Monmouth; Dylan Magazu, FB/HB, Elon; Sean McElwain, TE, William & Mary; Caleb Burke, WR, UNH;

John Dunmore, WR, Towson; **Ryan McKenna**, OL, William & Mary; **Stephane Voltaire**, OL, Villanova; **Kahmari Brown**, DL, Elon; **Ty Gordon**, DL, William & Mary; **Anthony Ferrelli**, LB, Stony Brook; **Rodney Roane**, LB, Towson; **Christian Thomas**, LB, Maine; **Jamaree Gibson**, CB, Maine; **Brandon Guzman**, CB, Campbell; **Ayinde Johnson**, CB, Rhode Island; **Zahmir Dawud**, S, Villanova; **Will Hicks**, S, Hampton; **Thomas Joe-Kamara**, S, UAlbany; **Devin Vaught**, S, Maine; **Aaron Harris**, KR, North Carolina A&T

2025 CAA FOOTBALL PREDICTED ORDER OF FINISH
(Selected by a vote of Head Coaches)

1. Rhode Island (8 first-place votes)	163
2. Monmouth (4 first-place votes)	142
3. Villanova (2 first-place votes)	139
4. Stony Brook	125
5. UNH	119
6. Towson	108
7. William & Mary	104
8. Elon	98
9. Maine	71
10. Campbell	53
11. Hampton	50
12. UAlbany	47
13. Bryant	32
14. North Carolina A&T	23