



Wittenberg Football 2001 Season in Review

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SETTING THE SCENE: The Wittenberg University Tigers were supposed to be in a rebuilding mode in 2001, a year after the winningest senior class in school history had moved on. But someone forgot to tell the players and coaches, who put together an exciting 9-1 regular season and won two NCAA Division III playoff games on the road before finally falling the national quarterfinals to eventual national champion Mount Union.

Wittenberg won its fourth straight outright North Coast Athletic Conference championship along the way, finishing a perfect 7-0 for a second straight year and capping a record-setting 28-0 four-year conference run for the 2001 senior class. The Tigers' only loss during the regular season came in Week 3 at Alma, 26-24.

While that loss snapped a school-record 33-game regular season win streak, the Tigers embarked on a new one the very next week and extended it to seven by season's end. Wittenberg's run of 29 consecutive NCAC wins remains intact, dating back to Nov. 4, 1997 at Wooster. Wittenberg's run of 34 straight regular season home wins moves into another season. And the Tigers' 10-year run without back-to-back losses remains alive heading into 2002 as well.

THE TURNING POINT: Rarely have the Tigers had their backs pressed against the wall in a regular season game in recent years, but Wittenberg found itself pinned against that proverbial location as the clock ticked down on September 28 against visiting Allegheny. The 2001 season hung in the balance as the Tigers faced a 17-7 deficit with 10 minutes remaining and a Homecoming crowd getting restless.

That's when the Tigers showed their first signs of offensive life, driving downfield to score a touchdown on a pass from quarterback **Greg Cornett (Franklin, Ohio/Franklin)** to wide receiver **Michael Aljancic (Louisville, Ohio/Louisville)**. After a clutch defensive stop forced a Gator punt, Cornett and Aljancic hooked up again four times in a final drive that culminated with a game-winning four-yard touchdown pass with just 16 seconds left in the game.

That play seemed to spark the Tigers, who then defeated Wabash 14-3 in a defensive struggle and swept the last five NCAC games in blowout fashion.

THE SENIOR CLASS: The Senior Class of 2002 joined the Class of 2001 as the winningest in school history. The seniors finished their collective career with a 39-1 regular season record. Their only regular season loss was against Alma on Sept. 15, 2001, which snapped a 33-game regular season win streak. Overall, this year's seniors finished with a 45-5 record, two wins more than last year's group, which wound up 43-4.

This year's seniors also put together a perfect 28-0 mark in NCAC action, the first senior class to finish without a loss in conference play, and a 39-1 regular season mark, equalling the record of last year's seniors. The 2002 Senior Class included: wide receiver **Michael Aljancic**, linebacker **Nic Black (Piqua, Ohio/Piqua)**, defensive end **Tim Daoust (Toledo, Ohio/Central Catholic)**, safety **John Hauser (Columbus, Ohio/Bishop Hartley)**, defensive tackle **Mike Houck (Cincinnati, Ohio/Colerain)**, defensive tackle **Juan Howard (Wooster, Ohio/Wooster)**, defensive back **Jason Jackson (Columbus, Ohio/South)**, offensive lineman **Matt Leisure (Canton, Ohio/McKinley)**, defensive back **Brian LeRoy (Lakewood, Ohio/Lakewood)**, wide receiver **Josh McCoy (Wooster, Ohio/Wooster)**, defensive back **Justin Oliver (Huntsburg, Ohio/Middlefield Cardinal)**, fullback **Eric Tomich (Newark, Ohio/Catholic)** and safety **Andy Waddle (Springfield, Ohio/Greenon)**. Hauser and Waddle both have eligibility remaining and are considering a return in 2002.

ALL-NCAC: As usual, the victors reap the spoils of their success. Wittenberg placed 14 players on the All-NCAC awards list, while head coach **Joe Fincham (Ohio '88)** claimed Coach of the Year honors for a fourth straight season.

Senior defensive tackle **Juan Howard** claimed the Hank Critchfield Award as the NCAC Defensive Player of the Year. Howard, who became a three-time all-conference choice, had 25 solos and 29 assisted tackles during the regular season, including 17 tackles for a loss of 67 yards.

Joining Howard as the only three-time first-team All-NCAC selections on the team this year was senior wide receiver **Michael Aljancic**. The rest of the Tigers to make first-team were junior tailback **Daniel Grove (Uhrichsville, Ohio/Claymont)**, junior center **Adam McClain (Danville, Ind./Community)**, sophomore offensive guard **Chad Thompson (Ft. Thomas, Ky./Highlands)**, senior offensive tackle **Matt Leisure**, senior defensive end **Tim Daoust**, junior outside linebacker **Andy Pope (Hamilton, Ohio/Lakota East)**, senior safety **John Hauser** and senior cornerback **Jason Jackson**.

Second-team choices included senior defensive tackle **Mike Houck** and senior outside linebacker **Nic Black**. Honorable mention selections were junior quarterback **Greg Cornett** and junior defensive end **Allen D'Andrea (Naples, Fla./Barron Collier)**.

OTHER POSTSEASON AWARDS: **Juan Howard** capped his career with recognition as co-Defensive Player of the Year of the Great Lakes Region by the *National Football Gazette*. He was

one of four players who were named to the all-region teams.

Howard was joined on the first team by running back **Daniel Grove**, who was the only Tiger player to make a dent on the national scene. He was named Honorable Mention All-America by *National Football Gazette* and *d3football.com*. Also earning all-region status was offensive tackle **Matt Leisure** and safety **John Hauser**.

RECORD-SETTER: Senior wide receiver **Michael Aljancic** finished his career as the greatest pass catcher in Wittenberg school history, at least according to the numbers. Aljancic established school records for receptions in a season (54 in 2001) and a career (147). He was amazingly consistent, catching at least one pass in 35 of his 40 career regular season games.

In the playoff victory over Hardin-Simmons, Aljancic topped himself. Reminiscent of the way he and quarterback **Greg Cornett** teamed up to rescue the Tigers' season in Week 5 against Allegheny, Aljancic turned in a 10-catch, 214-yard performance. Both touchdown receptions came in the fourth quarter with the Tigers down by a score each time, the final one coming with just 23 seconds remaining.

THE COACH: **Joe Fincham** ends his sixth year guiding the Tigers with a 63-7 overall record. Fincham is 57-3 in regular season games, 42-2 against NCAC foes and 6-4 in NCAA Division III Playoffs. He became the first Wittenberg coach to earn conference coach of the year honors four straight years. Dave Maurer won the award in the Ohio Athletic Conference three times in four years (1976, 1978, 1979) and Bill Edwards coached at a time when such awards were not given. Maurer and Edwards both also won national coach of the year on two occasions.

Tentative 2002 Wittenberg Football Schedule

Sept. 7	ALBION	7 p.m.
Sept. 14	@ Urbana	7 p.m.
Sept. 28	@ Thomas More	1 p.m.
Oct. 5	DENISON	1 p.m.
Oct. 12	WABASH	1 p.m.
Oct. 19	@ Hiram	1 p.m.
Oct. 26	@ Ohio Wesleyan	1 p.m.
Nov. 2	ALLEGHENY	1 p.m.
Nov. 9	KENYON	1 p.m.
Nov. 16	@ Wooster	1 p.m.
Nov. 23	NCAA Division III first round	
Nov. 30	NCAA Division III second round	
Dec. 7	NCAA Division III Quarterfinals	
Dec. 14	NCAA Division III Semifinals	
Dec. 21	Amos Alonzo Stagg Bowl	