

Force Indy elevates to 2022 Indy Lights with Haitian American Ernie Francis Jr. driving No. 99 from sports page 1

"This is an incredible opportunity," Francis said. "After getting a taste last year and beginning to learn what open-wheel racing is all about, I found myself wanting more. Open-wheel cars are incredible to drive. To know that I'll continue my education with Force Indy and only one step away from the NTT INDYCAR SERIES makes this unbelievably special. I cannot wait to get started."

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In December 2020, African American business leader and former racing team manager Rod Reid announced the formation of Force Indy with the focus on hiring men and women of color, including mechanics, engineers, staffers and drivers. During its inaugural season in the Cooper Tires USF2000 Championship, the team won in thrilling fashion at New Jersey Motorsports Park with driver Myles Rowe.

"Being able to finish our first season with a win showed what this team is capable of doing," Reid said. "We want to thank Myles, who will always be a member of the Force Indy race team, and will continue to offer assistance and mentorship as he pursues another season in USF2000."

"I could not be more thrilled to promote our group to the Indy Lights Presented by Cooper Tires championship with Ernie Francis Jr. His work ethic and history of success speak for itself." Team Principal Reid's years of karting and auto racing experience have proven invaluable. His NXG Youth Motorsports Inc.,

has introduced more than 2,300 students from under-represented communities, ages 11 to 15, to the educational benefits of the sport.

Team Penske will continue to offer mentorship for Force Indy, as the initiative also falls under Penske Entertainment Corp.'s "Race for Equality & Change" announced in July 2020. The goals include recruiting and developing a diverse workforce throughout all levels of INDYCAR and Indianapolis Motor Speedway, ultimately creating a community that fundamentally transforms the sport.

"I was pleased to learn that Ernie would be driving for Force Indy in 2022," Roger Penske said. "As someone who has a history in Trans Am, I know the type of skillset that comes from that series. Ernie will be a wonderful addition to Indy Lights."

"It was inspiring to see the growth of Force Indy during their first season, and we will continue to support their progress and mission as the team continues on a path to compete in the NTT INDYCAR SERIES."

Force Indy will make its Indy Lights series debut Feb. 25-27 on the Streets of St. Petersburg, Florida. The team will continue to use No. 99 on the car in honor of the late Dewey "Rajo Jack" Gatson, who drove a roadster with that number toward the end of his career in 1951. Gatson, one of the winningest African American drivers and mechanics in racing history, never received an opportunity to race in the Indianapolis 500.

"We remain very fortunate to have Team Penske offer its guidance and mentorship," Reid said. "I have been in and around the sport for 40 years. Force Indy remains a labor of love, and our goals are unchanged: focusing on diversity with an eye toward competing in the NTT INDYCAR SERIES and, in honor of Rajo Jack, the Indianapolis 500."

Jalen Duren and Josh Minott secure weekly AAC awards

MEMPHIS, Tenn. – For their play in Memphis' 88-60 win over UCF Saturday night, Tiger men's basketball center Jalen Duren has been named the American Athletic Conference Freshman of the Week and forward Josh Minott has earned a spot on the conference's weekly Honor Roll.

The Freshman of the Week nod is Duren's third of the season (Nov. 22, Dec. 20, Feb. 7), and Minott has now earned four weekly awards in the last six weeks (Freshman, Jan. 3; Honor Roll, Jan. 10; Freshman, Jan. 31; Honor Roll, Feb. 7).

Duren recorded a 14-point, 10-rebound double-double against the Knights, his team-leading third of the season and one off the AAC lead. He also had two assists, two blocked shots and a steal, and he has now blocked at least one shot in each of the 16 games he has played this year. The Sharon Hill, Pa., native leads the AAC in rebounding (7.5 per game) and blocked shots (2.5 per game) this season.

Minott scored a team-high 16 points against UCF in only 14 minutes of play, going 7-for-9

from the floor. He also had three rebounds, two steals and two blocked shots in the contest, with two of his rebounds coming on the offensive end. On the season, Minott is averaging 7.6 points and 4.5 rebounds per game in 16.7 minutes per outing.

Duren, Minott and the Tigers remain home to host Tulane Wednesday night at 7 p.m. The game against the Green Wave is the Military & First Responders Game, as well as the Slive Foundation Game for prostate cancer research. Memphis then hits the road for three-straight contests, playing at Houston (Saturday), at Cincinnati (Feb. 15) and at SMU (Feb. 20) before returning to FedExForum to face Temple on Thursday, Feb. 24.

Tickets and mini plans for 2021-22 are available online at www.GoTigersGoTix.com or by phone at (901) 678-2331.

How to follow the Tigers: For complete information on Memphis Tiger Men's Basketball, visit www.GoTigersGo.com and follow the team's social media channels on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook.

Watch for The Mid-South Tribune's 27th Annual Black History special in February 2022!

NFL and FaZe Clan team up for flag football Super Bowl event ... from sports page 3

fluencer and Guinness World Record Holder Jenna Bandy, all playing alongside special guest, female football player and actress, Toni Harris, with NFL Legends Michael Vick and Brett Favre playing as the teams' quarterbacks. For each team's participation in the flag football game, \$25,000 per team will be donated to youth sports. FaZe Clan's donation will support Snoop Dogg's Youth Football League.

The game takes place at 4pm ET/1pm PT at the Los Angeles Convention Center and will be livestreamed on FaZe Clan's YouTube and Twitch channels. Fans can purchase tickets and learn more about the Super Bowl Experience by visiting NFL.com. Additionally, the NFL and FaZe Clan will work together to incorporate FaZe Clan talent ambassadors into co-branded content and events, while also identifying

Super Bowl LV capsule: LA Rams vs. Cincinnati Bengals ... from sports page 1

coaches in Super Bowl history. Previously, the youngest head-coaching matchup was Super Bowl XLIII with Pittsburgh's MIKE TOMLIN (36 years, 323 days old) and Arizona's KEN WHISENHUNT (46 years, 339 days old).

With a Rams win, McVay (36 years, 20 days on Sunday) would edge Tomlin (36 years, 323 days old in Super Bowl XLIII) as the youngest head coach to win the Super Bowl.

McVay, who was hired by the Rams in 2017 and led the team to a Super Bowl LIII appearance during the 2018 season, is the fifth individual in league history to advance to two Super Bowls within his first five seasons as an NFL head coach.

The individuals to advance to two Super Bowls within their first five seasons as a head coach in NFL history:

Sean McVay, L.A. Rams LIII, LVI
Mike Tomlin, Pittsburgh, XLIII, XLV

Jimmy Johnson, HOF Dallas XXVII, XXVIII

Joe Gibbs HOF Washington XVII, XVIII

Tom Flores HOF, Oakland/L.A. Raiders, XV, XVII

Taylor served as an assistant on McVay's coaching staff with the Rams from 2017-18, including a berth in Super Bowl LIII, prior to becoming the Bengals' head coach in 2019. With wins in each of the first three rounds of the 2021 postseason, Taylor became the third individual over the last 13 years to win each of his first three postseason games as an NFL head coach, joining DOUG PEDERSON (2017-18) and KEN WHISENHUNT (2008). With a win on Super Bowl Sunday, Taylor would become the third individual over the last three decades (1991-2021) to win each of his first four postseason games as an NFL head coach, joining Pederson and BRIAN BILLICK (2000).

SEEDS OF HOPE: Each Super Bowl team entered the 2021 playoffs as the No. 4 seed in its respective conference.

Since the NFL began seeding postseason teams in 1975, Super Bowl LVI is the first that does not include at least one team seeded No. 1 or No. 2. This marks the first Super Bowl in which both teams are seeded No. 4 or lower. The last No. 4 seed to win a Super Bowl was the 2012 BALTIMORE RAVENS (XLVII).

For a 17th consecutive season, the NFL will have a new Super Bowl champion, extending the longest streak without a repeat winner in league history. The last team to win consecutive Super Bowls was the 2003-04 New England Patriots.

Including Cincinnati on Sunday, five of the last 12 teams to appear in the Super Bowl missed the playoffs the previous season. Prior to the Bengals, the 2020 Tampa Bay Buccaneers, 2019 San Francisco 49ers, 2017 Philadelphia Eagles and 2016 Atlanta Falcons reached that pinnacle after missing the playoffs the prior season.

NFL teams have a remarkable record of resiliency. Since 2000, the Bengals are the fifth team to go from "worst to first" in their division and make the Super Bowl in the same season. Three of the four prior teams to do that – the 2017 Eagles, 2009 Saints and 2001 Patriots – won the Super Bowl.

NOT YOUR AVERAGE JOES:

NOT YOUR AVERAGE JOES: Cincinnati quarterback JOE BURROW guided LSU to a College Football Playoff national championship in 2019. With a win on Sunday, he would join Pro Football Hall of Famers JOE MONTANA and JOE NAMATH as the only starting quarterbacks to win both a consensus college football national title and a Super Bowl.

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Burrow, the No. 1 overall pick in the 2020 NFL Draft, is expected

to become the first quarterback ever drafted first overall to start a Super Bowl within his first two seasons. He is also the third quarterback selected in the first round of the NFL Draft to start a Super Bowl within his first two seasons in NFL history, joining Pro Football Hall of Famer DAN MARINO (Super Bowl XIX) and BEN ROETHLISBERGER (Super Bowl XL).

FIRST YEAR WITH HIS TEAM: Only two quarterbacks have won the Super Bowl in their first years with their teams, the Ravens' TRENT DILFER (2000, Super Bowl XXXV) and Tampa Bay's TOM BRADY (2020, Super Bowl LV). The Rams' MATTHEW STAFFORD, acquired by Los Angeles in an off-season trade, could join them on Sunday.

Stafford has at least two touchdown passes in each of the Rams' three postseason games. With two touchdown passes on Sunday, he would join Pro Football Hall of Famer KURT WARNER (2008), JOE FLACCO (2012) and TOM BRADY (2020) as the only players in NFL history with at least two touchdown passes in four postseason games within the same season.

JAMARR CHASING A THIRD ROOKIE RECORD: Cincinnati wide receiver JAMARR CHASE had 1,455 receiving yards in the regular season, most ever by a rookie in the Super Bowl era. He followed that accomplishment with an NFL rookie postseason record 279 receiving yards through the Bengals' first three playoff games this season. The only rookie record he has left in the receiving-yards category is the single-game Super Bowl record, held by TORRY HOLT, who had 109 in the Rams' Super Bowl XXXIV victory.

SUPER COOPER: Rams wide receiver COOPER KUPP led the NFL in each of the three major receiving categories – receptions (145), yards (1,947) and touchdowns (16) – and is the first player in league history to lead the NFL in those three categories for a team that advanced to the Super Bowl. He is the third player to lead the league in receiving yards and appear in the Super Bowl in the same season, joining Pro Football Hall of Famer JERRY RICE (1989 and

1994) and DREW PEARSON (1977).

Kupp has totaled 25 receptions for 386 yards and four touchdowns during the 2021 postseason. On Sunday, he can surpass TRAVIS KELCE (31 receptions during the 2020 postseason) for the most receptions in a single postseason all-time and become the second player ever to reach 500 receiving yards in a single playoff run, joining LARRY FITZGERALD (546 receiving yards in 2008).

HERE'S THE TAKEAWAY: Cincinnati has a plus-five turnover ratio this postseason, on the strength of six Bengals interceptions by six different players, including safety VONN BELL, whose overtime interception of PATRICK MAHOMES set up Cincinnati's game-winning field goal in the AFC Championship Game.

Bengals defensive end TREY HENDRICKSON ranked fifth in the NFL with a career-high 14 sacks this season. He is one of two NFL players with at least 13 sacks in each of the past two seasons.

Linebacker LOGAN WILSON, who led the team this season with four interceptions, had an interception in Cincinnati's win at No. 1-seeded Tennessee in the AFC Divisional Round. The second-year player also led the team with 98 tackles.

DEFENSIVE STALWARTS: Led by AARON DONALD, a three-time Associated Press Defensive Player of the Year who is seeking his first Super Bowl victory, the Rams ranked sixth in rushing defense (103.2 yards per game allowed) and third with 50 sacks.

Donald had 12.5 sacks in the regular season and became the fourth player since 1982, when the individual sack became an official statistic, to register at least eight sacks in each of his first eight NFL seasons. He also has 1.5 sacks during the 2021 playoffs.

Linebacker VON MILLER makes his second Super Bowl appearance after registering 2.5 sacks to earn Super Bowl 50 MVP honors with Denver. Including the playoffs, Miller has a sack in six of his last seven games.

Cincinnati Bengals wide receiver Ja'Marr Chase named 2021 PEPSI Zero Sugar NFL Rookie of Year

Winner Selected by Record Number of Fan Votes via Twitter and on NFL.com/rookies

N.Y., N.Y. - Cincinnati Bengals wide receiver JAMARR CHASE has been named the 2021 PEPSI ZERO SUGAR NFL ROOKIE OF THE YEAR, Pepsi and the NFL announced today. Chase was recognized online at nfl.com/rookies and was awarded a custom designed, Pepsi Zero Sugar branded Rookie of the Year trophy to celebrate his record breaking season on the field and off.

As the No. 5 overall selection in the 2021 NFL Draft, Chase led all rookies and ranked fourth in the NFL with 1,455 receiving yards, the most by a rookie in the Super Bowl era, while his 13 touchdown receptions were the third-most in the league this season. In Week 17, he recorded 266 receiving yards, the most ever by

a rookie in a single game. He also recorded 201 receiving yards in Week 7 and became the first rookie ever and the fifth player in the Super Bowl era to record multiple games with at least 200 receiving yards in a single season, joining Pro Football Hall of Famer CALVIN JOHNSON (2011 & 2012) and DON MAYNARD (1968) as well as JOSH GORDON (2013) and ALSHON JEFFERY (2013). Chase became the fifth rookie in the Super Bowl era with at least 1,000 receiving yards and 10 touchdown receptions, joining Pro Football Hall of Famer RANDY MOSS (1998), ODELL BECKHAM JR. (2014), MIKE EVANS (2014) and JOHN JEFFERSON (1978).

Chase was one of six finalists nominated for this honor. The other finalists were Steelers running back Najee Harris, Patriots quarterback Mac Jones, Cow-

boys linebacker Micah Parsons, Falcons tight end Kyle Pitts and Dolphins wide receiver Jaylen Waddle.

The six finalists were selected for their outstanding performances through the 2021 NFL season. Each week, six nominees were chosen for the Pepsi Zero Sugar NFL Rookie of the Week and fans voted for the winner on NFL.com. Those results were used to help determine the finalists.

This is the Pepsi brand's 21st year as the official soft drink sponsor of the NFL and the 20th year that Pepsi will present the NFL Rookie of the Week and NFL Rookie of the Year award. In the first year where fans could vote online and through Twitter, the Pepsi Zero Sugar NFL

Rookie of the Year award had more votes than any other year in the 19-year history.

PepsiCo products are enjoyed by consumers more than one billion times a day in more than 200 countries and territories around the world. PepsiCo generated \$70 billion in net revenue in 2020, driven by a complementary beverage and convenient foods portfolio that includes Lays, Doritos, Cheetos, Gatorade, Pepsi-Cola, Mountain Dew, Quaker, and SodaStream. PepsiCo's product portfolio includes a wide range of enjoyable foods and beverages, including many iconic brands that generate more than \$1 billion each in estimated annual retail sales. For more information, visit www.pepsico.com.

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- An editorial from The Mid-South Tribune-

Xavier Ramos, SVP and Head of Marketing at FaZe Clan. "On top of many successful collaborations in the past, there is mutual appreciation, support and organic friendship among FaZe talent and NFL players across the league. We greatly value the NFL's respect for the gaming community at large and we're excited to continue to help drive the cultural convergence of gaming and traditional sports."