

'Hitman' Returns to FAMU as New Linebacker Coach

Contributed by Stephanie Houghton
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Earl Holmes will use NFL experience to help Rattlers

Earl Holmes' 6-foot-2, 242-pound frame can be intimidating. His broad shoulders, coupled with an engulfing handshake makes his presence all the more imposing. However, it's these features that helped him earn the famed nickname "The Hitman."

The former Rattler is taking that frame off the field and onto the sidelines as Florida A&M University's linebacker coach for the 2008-2009 season.

"It's been 13 years…and I'm so happy to finally be home," Holmes said.

The Tallahassee native graduated from FAMU in 1995 and one year later was drafted to the NFL Pittsburgh Steelers. During his 11 years in the league, Holmes also played with the Cleveland Browns and Detroit Lions. Now, more than a dozen years later Holmes is determined to use his experience from the NFL to take the Rattler football team back to the winning circle.

"I have always wanted to give back the same support I received when I was on the field," said the All-American linebacker. "I am orange and green, and it's great to be back on the team."

Under the guidance of former head coach Billy Joe, Holmes was named National Black College Player of the Year. He ended his college career with 509 tackles and 6.5 sacks.

For Holmes, being back on "The Hill" is almost as thrilling as being on fourth and goal, helmet on, ready to attack.

"One memory that will never leave me is when we won the MEAC championship," Holmes said. "It was my first ring, and I will never forget it."

Today he is guided by 13-time NCAA champion head coach Joe Taylor. Taylor said he recruited Holmes because of the ambition and experience Holmes has to share with the team.

"During the hiring process we put the best staff together," Taylor said. "And besides him proving he is one of the best, he is a good guy."

Holmes said the team has a solid foundation to build upon, and he hopes to foster his legacy in the FAMU athletic department.

"President Ammons made a good step in hiring a new coaching staff," Holmes said. "When a team loses one game, it's a pinpoint for improvement. But when a team goes 3-8 it becomes a problem."

The Rattlers closed out their last season at 3-8 under former head coach Rubin Carter. Holmes said a compounded effort of new staff and improved recruiting is the key to a stronger unit.

"It's so much talent here (Tallahassee)," he said. "I can't believe so many guys are leaving the area to go to other schools."

Holmes said his driving force in his college years was the fact that he was able to play in front of his home crowd.

"It's nothing like playing in front of a stadium filled with family and friends," Holmes said. "That's what motivated me to play harder. My mother was at every game."

Taylor agreed with Holmes that the recruiting process was key. He also said the players' need to be surrounded by successful Rattlers such as Holmes, who Taylor said is a living example of hard work paying off.

"These young men need to connect with someone who has won in these colors," Taylor said.

Holmes noted that it is going to take a lot to bring the football team back to glory, but his main focus is recruiting.

"Now that I'm here I am aiming to get all the local talent to come to FAMU," he said. "Speaking from experience, it's

nothing like being and playing in front of family and friends at home."
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Stephanie Houghton writes for The Famuan, the Florida A&M University student newspaper, which originally published this article.