



***2024 Heritage Bowl powered by Riot
Game day: December 7, 2024***

Embargoed until 12:30 p.m., Tuesday, Nov. 19

Zebrowski, Central Missouri to face UTPB in Heritage Bowl Powered by Riot

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CORSICANA – With a combined 79 points lighting up the scoreboard, a record fell in the Heritage Bowl Powered by Riot last year. It may be a short stay at the top.

This year’s NCAA Division II tilt features a pair of juggernaut offenses as the University of Texas Permian Basin makes its return to Corsicana to face the Central Missouri Mules, who are led by reigning Harlon Hill Award winner Zach Zebrowski.

Both teams were playoff qualifiers just a year ago and will meet for the first time.

The Mules (8-3) from the Mid-America Intercollegiate Athletic Association (MIAA) have won five straight and are coming off a 62-47 win over Missouri Southern. They average 39.1 points per game. The Falcons (7-4) have topped 60 three times this year, including twice in the last two weeks. Hailing from the Lone Star Conference (LSC), they cruised past Sul Ross State, 75-7, last weekend.

“This matchup could produce fireworks,” Heritage Bowl Committee Chairman Aric Bonner said. “Both of these teams have beaten teams that made the playoffs, and each may be just a few untimely injuries away from being playoff teams themselves. We may have the most exciting bowl game in the country this year.”

Kickoff is scheduled for noon Dec. 7 at Community National Bank & Trust Stadium. Admission for Navarro County residents, and students of Navarro College, is free.

A misstep against 4-7 Missouri Western in mid-October likely kept the Mules out of the 28-team DII playoffs. They own one of the most impressive wins of the year, beating Pittsburg State, then No. 1 in the country and a No. 3 regional playoff seed, by 24 on the road.

Zebrowski leads the charge. The 6-2 senior from Woodbury, Minn. has followed up his Harlon Hill campaign with another sizzling season. He has thrown for 4,462 yards and 38 TDs while completing 70% of his passes. He has added another seven touchdowns on the ground.

“(Zebrowski) puts up a lot of numbers and does some special things,” said Josh Lamberson, in his third year leading the Mules (23-12 overall). But he is not the only calling card, Lamberson said.

“I think (people) can expect a team that plays extremely hard, plays extremely fast, that likes to do a lot of things offensively, defensively, and on special teams that you might not get to see every day on a college football Saturday. We like to mix it up.”

UTPB becomes the second repeat team to visit Corsicana in the seven-year history of the Heritage Bowl Powered by Riot, the country’s longest running DII bowl game. Incidentally, Coach Kris McCullough has also been here, but in different threads. The Falcons fell in 2021 to Oklahoma Baptist, 24-21, and a year later McCullough led East Central (Okla.) to a 38-21 win over Texas A&M-Kingsville.

After that win, McCullough bolted Oklahoma for West Texas. This trip is somewhat of a homecoming.

“We made some good memories back in 2022 and I look forward to this family making similar memories and come out holding that big star they do for the winner,” McCullough said, referencing the Heritage Bowl Powered by Riot’s custom trophies manufactured by Oil City Iron Works in Corsicana.

McCullough has put together the best two seasons in UTPB history.

The Falcons have a similar resume to UCM, with a win over playoff-bound Central Washington, 14-13, on the road. Two of their losses are to seeded playoff teams, and they have two other headscratchers. The Falcons average 34.5 points per game and only allow 17.0 on defense. The Mules, in contrast, allow 33.4.

“It starts with defense,” McCullough said. “Those teams that get to the postseason year in and year out, they are built on championship-level defenses. We’re fast, we’re physical, we’re strong.”

Tristan Exline, a 6-1 sophomore linebacker from China Spring, leads the Falcons with 96 tackles, 14.5 for losses. Junior running back Kory Harris from Fort Worth leads the offense posting a 1,000-yard season on the ground. He has more than 2,300 in the last three seasons.

To learn more about the Heritage Bowl Powered by Riot and for tickets, visit www.heritagebowl.org.