

## FEATURE



Courtesy photos

**The United States Air Force Academy Falcon football season starts Sept. 2, when they play Cal State-Northridge at Falcon stadium. The Falcons will be televised nationally on NBC when they play at Notre Dame, Oct. 28.**

## CAFB 'home team' ready for season

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It's that time of year again: the time of year that turns fans everywhere into couch potatoes. That's right, it's football season.

Deciding what college team to cheer for can often times be difficult. There are national favorites like the Notre Dame Fighting Irish, Nebraska Cornhuskers and Florida State Seminoles. There are local favorites like the University of South Carolina Gamecocks and Charleston Southern Buccaneers. And then, there is the CAFB home team, the United States Air Force Academy Falcons.

Some of Charleston's leaders of tomorrow are giving their all on the grid iron today. They know they won't be handed their diploma because they're academy football stars, they know they can't sign a big NFL contract straight out of college, they know they aren't guaranteed national television coverage every weekend. They know all of this, and they still find a way to remain motivated students, military cadets and competitive football players year after year.

According to Troy Garnhart, USAFA athletic media relations, the players have breakfast at 7 a.m., followed by classes until about 3 p.m., practices and team meetings until 6 p.m., and dinner at 7 p.m. After dinner, they still have to find time to study, do homework and prepare their uniforms for the next day.

Fisher DeBerry, USAFA Falcons head coach, credits the players with being exceptional student athletes before they even start at the academy.



"Our players are outstanding students before they get here," said DeBerry. "They know the challenge that awaits them, and they have the work ethic to be successful in athletics as well as academics. However, academics certainly takes priority here at the academy."

The team also has to contend with Air Force Instruction weight standards, said Garnhart.

While waivers are granted during the season, AFI standards have to be met before graduation. Even with waivers, the team gives away about 30 to 40 pounds per player every game.

The obstacles the team faces throughout the year can eventually pay off. Along with the thrill of the game and the joy that victory brings, the players can learn a lot about being leaders from their football experience.

"Many former players say playing football was important to their leadership training," said Garnhart. "The Air Force is about teamwork and they learn a valuable lesson about teamwork during their football careers."

Discipline is another important quality the players can take with them when they leave the academy. The military training, along with football skills, can produce top-notch officers, according to DeBerry.

"There is certainly a great correlation between leadership training, football and the military responsibilities they have here," said

DeBerry. "We are not a team that is as disciplined as I would like, but we work hard at it everyday."

As for predictions about this year's record, DeBerry said with a little good fortune, a bowl game isn't unreasonable.

"We are going to have a very competitive team, but we don't have a lot of depth," DeBerry said. "The key to our season will depend upon whether or not we can stay healthy. Unfortunately, last year we lost a player per game and by the end of the season, it caught up with us. If we can stay healthy, we will be in the thick of things."

For more information about the USAFA Falcons, visit their website at [www.AirForceSports.com](http://www.AirForceSports.com).

