Written by Brent Williamson
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The race for the 26th annual Payton Award presented by The Sports Network has been narrowed to a final three for the Football Championship Subdivision's top individual honor. The

2012 finalists are fullback Eric Breitenstein of Wofford, quarterback Taylor Heinicke of Old Dominion, and running back Miguel Maysonet of Stony Brook.

Breitenstein, a senior from Valle Crucis, North Carolina, has been named Southern Conference Offensive Player of the Year in 2011 and 2012. He is just the fourth player in conference history to earn the honor in back-to-back seasons. He led the Southern Conference in rushing for the second straight season with 1,653 yards, a school record. He had 16 rushing touchdowns to lead the conference and was second in scoring.

Last season he ran for 1,474 yards and was fifth in the nation in scoring at 9.50 points per game. He was named All-American by the Associated Press, Sports Network and Phil Steele. Currently he has a school record 5,348 career rushing and is second in career rushing touchdowns. He is the NCAA FCS active career leader in rushing and rushing touchdowns. Breitenstein finished 14th in the voting in 2011 and 19th in 2010. He is the first player from Wofford to be named a finalist for the Walter Payton Award.

Ballots were voted upon by a national panel of sports information and media relations directors, broadcasters, writers and other dignitaries following the regular season on Nov. 19. The top three vote-getters are invited to The Sports Network FCS Awards Presentation on December 17 in Philadelphia.

The Sports Network also presents the Buck Buchanan, Jerry Rice and Eddie Robinson awards. The Buchanan Award honors the FCS defensive player of the year, the Rice Award goes to the FCS freshman of the year and the Robinson Award honors the FCS coach of the year. Those three winners will join the top three Payton finalists at the national awards banquet.

Photo Courtesy: Eric Breitenstein, Wofford College Athletics