

# BLACK COLLEGE FOOTBALL

By Roger B. Saylor

For over 70 years, 1892-1964, there were football playing colleges which had only black students and which, with very rare exceptions, played only teams comprised of black players. These colleges were located in an area bounded roughly on the southeast by Daytona Beach, Florida, on the southwest by Austin, Texas, the northwest by Kansas City, Missouri, and the northeast by Cheyney, Pennsylvania.

In general they fell into two categories: church-related colleges and those supported by their state governments. The names of most of the latter originally included such words as agricultural, mechanical, industrial, institute, or normal (teacher training), thereby including the type of education they emphasized. Some, such as Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, still carry that type of name.

The earliest game showing on any college's record was played in 1892 in North Carolina, with Johnson C. Smith, then Biddle University, defeating Livingstone College 5-0. Howard University is on record as having played the Washington D.C. YMCA in 1893. Other very early games included a 10-0 win by Atlanta University over Tuskegee Institute, and one by Lincoln University of Pennsylvania over Howard by a score of 6-3 in 1894. The first black college record shown in the Spalding Football Guide, the basic source of early college records, was that of Fisk University of Nashville, Tennessee, in 1896. Others known to have started the sport in the nineteenth century included Roger Williams College of Nashville, TN, in 1896; and Morgan College, not yet Morgan State, in 1899. Shaw, Virginia Union, and Virginia State, then Virginia N & I, began in 1900.

Others, in all parts of the South, were added to the football scene in almost every year through the 1920s. As with the rest of the early history, the formation of the leagues and conferences is vague. Supposedly the Georgia-Carolina Athletic Association began operation in 1910 with Allen, Haines Institute, Morris, Paine, Savannah State (then Georgia State), and Walker Baptist as members. The Colored (now Central) Intercollegiate Athletic Association (CIAA) is known to have begun operation in 1912 with Hampton, Howard, Lincoln (PA), Shaw, and Virginia Union as members. The Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (SIAC) was formed late in 1912 as the Southeastern Intercollegiate Athletic Conference. Its members were from Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, and Tennessee. Unfortunately, of these conferences, the early records are available for the CIAA only.

The Southwestern Athletic Conference was organized in 1920 and began operation the next year. The members by 1922 included Bishop, Paul Quinn, Prairie View A & M, Samuel Houston, Texas College, and Wiley, all Texas institutions. Game records for this conference are good right from the start.

Game records, in general, for before 1920 are very sparse and incomplete for virtually all the black colleges, with Howard University and Tuskegee Institute being the possible exceptions. The records for the 1920s are much better, although they are far from complete. SEIAC records are fairly good from 1920-1923 and much better starting in 1924. It is possible to put together some sort of standings of the small college Georgia-Carolina Athletic Association commencing in 1925. This was later renamed the Southeastern Athletic Association (SEAA).

By 1926 the Midwestern Athletic Association (MWAA), the fourth and last of the early conferences was functioning. This was a far-flung group stretching from West Virginia to

Missouri. Other conferences formed shortly after that were the South Central Athletic Conference and the Middle Atlantic Athletic Association (MAAA). The latter included two schools which were definitely not colleges: Bordentown (NJ) Manual Training and Downingtown (PA) Industrial.

Early major powers included Tuskegee (SIAC), Wiley (SWAC), and Wilberforce of Ohio (MWAA). In the latter 1930s, Morgan State emerged as a power in the CIAA. South Carolina State, then South Carolina A & M, dominated the SEAA before shifting to the SIAC in 1932. Atlanta and Talladega were strong in the SEIAC in the early 1920s, but then faded from the football picture.

Most of the normal, teacher training, colleges entered the football scene as two-year institutions, but by World War II they had been upgraded to four-year colleges. Examples were Elizabeth City State, Fayetteville State, Delaware State, and Maryland State. The last was originally Princess Anne Academy and is now Maryland-Eastern Shore.

Post-season games, contests not on the original schedules, were played on an irregular basis prior to World War II with two notable exceptions. The Prairie View Bowl was played in Texas between 1928 and 1962. The Orange Blossom Bowl in Florida was played annually beginning in 1933. Florida A & M, which had a long run of excellent teams at the time, was always the host team. Opponents were selected from the four major conferences, and generally had good records.

There never have been official black college national championship teams, but beginning in 1920 the Pittsburgh Courier selected its own unofficial national champions. The honor was shared by Howard and Talladega that first season. In 1921 Talladega and Wiley, which played each other to a 7-7 tie, were declared co-champions. Hampton was cited

in 1922. The newspaper continued naming national champions through 1980, after which the practice was picked up by the Sheridan Broadcasting Network, also based in Pittsburgh.

In the World War II period of 1942-45, about half of the black colleges dropped football for one or more seasons. Others played limited schedules. Bowl games were played, with a good record not necessarily a prerequisite for an invitation. The next 20 years were, in a sense, the "Golden Years" of black college football. More colleges than in preceding or following years fielded teams. The total, including some two-year institutions, reached about 75 schools. All of the significant early conferences were still in operation except the Middle Atlantic Athletic Association. An Eastern Intercollegiate Conference was formed in 1950, with some two-year schools.

New bowl games were established, but most were short-lived. The Vulcan Bowl was played in

Birmingham, AL. nine times from 1940-1948, to make it the most durable of those open to two invited teams. Florida A & M continued to host its Orange Blossom Bowl games. This pattern was adopted in Texas by Prairie View A & M, which kept its own bowl games going through 1962. Most of its invited guests were other colleges located in the southwest. The principal exception was Central State of Ohio, which defeated Prairie View in 1948 and lost in 1962.

The first breakaway from the community of football-playing black colleges came in 1948 when Cheyney Normal joined the Pennsylvania Conference of state teachers colleges. The second occurred in 1957 when West Virginia State began competing in the West Virginia Intercollegiate Conference, the small college group of that state. Number three was Langston, which started playing in the Oklahoma Intercollegiate Conference in 1958.

By the 1960s the winds of racial integration were blowing strongly, with an effect on black colleges in general, and their football programs in particular, inevitable. The smaller black colleges started dropping football. The Eastern Athletic Conference last functioned in 1960, and the South Central Athletic Conference the following year. Bluefield State joined the West Virginia Intercollegiate Conference in 1963. The Gulf Coast Athletic Conference dropped from the football scene after the 1964 season.

After the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the major southern universities began competing for the services of the promising black players. The black colleges then had strong competition for this reservoir of potentially fine players. The effect was particularly great on the smaller colleges, virtually all of which were gone from the football scene within a few years. The last of their conferences, the Southeastern Athletic Association, folded for football after the 1967 season. One of the major conferences, the Midwestern Athletic Association, had only three members in 1966 and ceased operation after that.

A larger-college conference, the Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference, began operation in 1971. Originally it had seven members, stretching from Delaware to South Carolina. South Carolina State shifted from the SIAC, the others from the CIAA. The new group's territory extended southward into Florida in 1980 when Bethune-Cookman and Florida A & M moved from the SIAC. At that time North Carolina Central returned to the CIAA and Maryland-Eastern Shore dropped football, although retaining its conference membership for other sports. Later transfers from the CIAA have been Hampton and Norfolk State, its first members in Virginia.

In 1953 the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) voted to admit black colleges as members. That meant for the first time a black college could contend for a national small college championship. Since only four entries were selected each year, a conference championship could not mean an automatic invitation. The first black college to be selected was Prairie View A & M in 1963. It won from Kearney State of Nebraska, before losing the championship game to St. John's of Minnesota.

The NCAA began accepting black colleges for membership in 1965. It had started holding regional playoffs in 1964. In 1965 Tennessee State played a 14-14 tie with Ball State of Indiana in the Mideast Region, and Grambling State lost to North Dakota State 20-7 in the Midwest Region. Tennessee State later won the Mideast Region championships from Muskingum of Ohio in 1966, Southwestern Louisiana in 1970, McNeese State of Louisiana in 1971, and the Midwest Region from Drake of Iowa in 1972. In the East Region, Morgan State won the title in 1966 and lost in 1970, while North Carolina Central lost in 1969.

NCAA Division II and Division III championship playoffs started in 1973. There were one or more black college entries in most years, but no champions. Division I-AA playoffs began in 1978,

with the two black college conferences of that division, the Mid-Eastern and Southwestern, eligible for invitations. Florida A & M made history by defeating Jackson State, the other black college entry, and Massachusetts to become the first champion.

The NCAA expanded the Division I-AA playoffs from four to eight teams in 1981, to 12 in 1982, and 16 in 1986. The effect on black colleges was to increase their opportunities for selection. There was a problem though, in that Thanksgiving Day weekend had to be used. Traditional in-state rivalries were renewed annually on that day in Florida with Bethune-Cookman versus Florida A & M, and in Louisiana with Grambling State versus Southern; which made those four unavailable for the playoffs. In 1996 the Florida game was shifted to an earlier date, but the Louisiana game continues to be a big event on Thanksgiving Day. There were black college entries in the tournament most years through 1998, but none reached the championship game.

In the NAIA playoffs, Central State competed annually from 1987-1990 in Division I. The semi-final was reached in 1988 before a loss to Carson-Newman (TN), the eventual champion- Precisely the same results were repeated in 1989. In 1990, Central State captured the title, winning from Fort Hays State (KS), Carson-Newman, and Mesa State (CO). In 1991 Central State lost the championship game to Central Arkansas. The 1992 team won the championship game from Gardner-Webb (NC), while in 1993 a surprise result was a loss to Glenville State (WV) by a score of 13-12 in the semi-final. The 1994 tournament started out with Central State losing to another black college, Arkansas Pine Bluff, which progressed to the final before losing to Northeastern State (OK). By 1995 this playoff was down to four teams. Central State, in its last appearance, won the championship game from Northwestern State (OK), which had eliminated Arkansas Pine Bluff. Langston was in the tournaments in 1973, 1993, and 1994.

The black college conference membership has been quite stable for many years with only minor changes. In Division I-AA the Mid-Eastern AA has increased to nine members for football by adding Hampton and Norfolk State from the CIAA. The Southwestern AC has been rejoined by earlier member Arkansas Pine Bluff; while Alabama A & M left the Southern IAC after the 1997 season and started play in the SWAC in 1999 as its tenth member. In Division II the CIAA has dropped from eleven to nine members with the departures of Hampton and Norfolk State.

In 1991 the Heritage Bowl was instituted for Division I-AA teams, one each from the MEAC and the SWAC. Hopefully, they were to be the conference champions, but those of the MEAC have usually opted for the NCAA national playoffs. In 1999, third place Hampton of that group played Southern, SWAC champion. In parallel, the Pioneer Bowl was established in 1997 for representatives of the Division II conferences. A similar problem exists here also, for conference champions, when given the opportunity, are more likely to choose playing for an NCAA national title. In 1999 Winston-Salem State, the CIAA titleist, defeated Tuskegee, SIAC co-champion, 23-7. Historically, this was the final black college game of the 1990s the Heritage Bowl game having been played earlier that same day.

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FOR SALE: Dr Saylor has announced the publication of his record book on black college football, which is entitled Historically Black Colleges Football Team Record Book 1892-1999. The book is 128 pages, spiral bound and on 8 1/2 x 11 pages. Year-by-year records by school are provided, with text of regional overviews, along with seven pages of other historical text. The postpaid cost of the black colleges Record Book is \$14. As a separate offering, Dr Saylor also has available the all-time scores for individual black colleges. Write to:

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