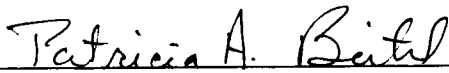
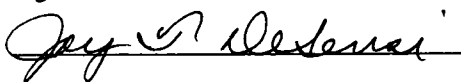


To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith thesis written by Robin Lynn Truiett entitled "PRAIRIE VIEW A&M UNIVERSITY WOMEN'S TRACK AND FIELD 1972-1980: A CASE STUDY OF A HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGE." I have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Science, with a major in Human Performance and Sport Studies.


Dr. Patricia A. Beitel, Major Professor

We have read this thesis
and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council:


Associate Vice Chancellor
and Dean of The Graduate School

PRAIRIE VIEW A&M UNIVERSITY WOMEN'S TRACK AND FIELD
1972-1980: A CASE STUDY OF A HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGE

A Thesis

Presented for the

Master of Science

Degree

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Robin Lynn Truiett

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ABSTRACT

African-American women have been competing in track and field at historically black colleges since the 1920's. Between 1972 and 1980 Prairie View A&M, a historically black college, won and set records at track and field championship meets. The purpose of this study was to investigate Prairie View A&M University between 1972-1980 as a case study of one of the women's track and field programs at a historically black college. Prairie View was selected for this study because historians have already investigated women's track and field programs at Tennessee State and Tuskegee.

In 1966 Barbara Jacket revived the Prairie View women's track and field team, leading it to national recognition in the 1970's. Her teams won the championships of the Association of Intercollegiate Athletic for Women, the United States Track and Field Federation, and the Track and Field Association-United States of America as well as many other significant meets. Several of her athletes became Olympians and received international recognition. This is a story that deserves to be told.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

Track and field became one of the most controversial of sports for women beginning with its inclusion in the 1928 Olympic Games at Amsterdam. Rather than gaining acceptance as an appropriate sport for women, it continued to suffer from preconceived notions based on factors related to gender. "By mid-century the sport had a reputation as a "masculine" endeavor unsuited to feminine athletes."¹ The athletes who withstood this kind of ridicule and continued to compete at a highly competitive level were primarily African-American women, who by mid-century occupied a central position in the sport of track and field. "Beginning in the late 1930's, black women stepped into an arena largely abandoned by middle-class white women who deemed the sport unsuitable, and began to blaze a remarkable tale of national and international excellence."²

Black society in America has always had more 'matriarchal' families than has white society. Perhaps this notion of black women operating in positions of economic and social power in family leadership made the shift to athletic participation more acceptable among members of the black community. Where middle and upper class white women were "protected" from work, politics, and strenuous activity, perhaps the more "emancipated" roles played by black women in all realms of everyday life made

¹ Susan K. Cahn, Coming on Strong: gender and sexuality in twentieth-century women's sport. (New York: Free Press, 1994).

² Ibid.

their emergence into the field of sport more natural. Certainly it is evident that female black athletes engaged very successfully in the intercollegiate sports programs in predominantly black colleges such as Tuskegee Institute, Tennessee A&I, Florida A&M, and Prairie View A&M.³

Between 1920 and 1980, most of the black women track and field athletes competed at historically black institutions for two main reasons. First, many blacks were not welcomed at predominantly white institutions, and second, most of the predominantly white institutions did not have women's track and field teams until the mid-1970's. When historically black university women's track and field teams are discussed, names such as Ed Temple and Wilma Rudolph of Tennessee State (Tennessee A&I) or Tuskegee Institute's Alice Coachman usually come to mind.

Track and field was one of the first sponsored sports for women in black colleges. Tuskegee Institute formed the first highly competitive collegiate women's teams as early as 1923. Tuskegee had sponsored its well known Tuskegee Relays, the first major track meet sponsored by a black college for men. Tuskegee women won the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) in 1937 and 1938.⁴ Perhaps prompted by Tuskegee's action, Prairie View A&M of Texas added women's events to its annual relays in 1936. By the 1940's these black institutions were hosting track meets attended by Tuskegee, Tennessee State, and Prairie View. Tennessee State first sent participants to the Tuskegee Relays in 1944.

³ Harry Edwards, *Sociology of Sport* (Dorsey Press: Homewood, 1973).

⁴Edward Bancraft Henderson, The Negro in Sports. (The Associate Publishers, Inc.: Washington, D.C., 1937).

Tennessee State established a permanent program in 1945 and during the 1950's and 1960's they produced some key Olympians with Wilma Rudolph being the most well known. Tuskegee Institute produced prominent track and field women Olympians during the 1920's, 1930's and 1940's.⁵ In the 1970's Prairie View A&M University in Texas, another historically black institution, achieved dominance in women's track and field as they, too, produced Olympians.

Social Conditions following the Civil War

To study African-American Athletes achieving in the sporting world is more remarkable when placed in the historical context that made achievement in a white world so difficult. During the Civil War, Emancipation Acts were passed in 1862 and 1863 but were not enforced in the South until the end of the War officially abolished slavery in America. Then in March of 1867, the United States Congress passed the First Reconstruction Act to defeat the conservative reconstruction policies of President Andrew Johnson, and this enabled blacks to achieve greater freedom in their new roles as citizens. However, by the 1880's it became apparent to many blacks that Reconstruction had failed, and that slavery had been abolished only to be replaced by a system of segregation and, later "Jim Crowism" which was harsher than slavery in many ways.⁶ Violence was a common method of keeping the African-Americans in a role of subservience for many years. Many southern states also enacted legislation to deprive blacks of their right to vote and other privileges enjoyed by white citizens. In 1890,

⁵ Cahn, Coming on Strong: gender and sexuality in the twentieth-century sport, 1994.

⁶ Edwards, Sociology of Sport, 1973.

southern states passed laws specifically for the purpose of denying blacks the opportunity to engage in the political process. They enacted poll taxes ability to read had to be demonstrated, and each potential voter had to explain an obscure section of the state constitution. Rarely were these laws applied as a condition for voting except for black voters.⁷

Some blacks moved from the South when it became obvious that conditions in there showed little promise for the black citizens. Many of the freedmen thought that the North was the promised land of which they had sung and talked about for so many decades in the slave quarters. However, most blacks were trapped in the South by simple impoverishment, and were forced to turn to the cruel system of sharecropping. This economic condition prevented northern migration and the opportunity to seek a better style of life.⁸

Following the Civil War, educational institutions were founded by northern philanthropists to help educate the millions of newly freed African-Americans. During slavery it had been illegal in many southern states to educate blacks, but after the War Between the States black colleges opened across the South. Hampton Institute in Virginia, Howard University in Washington D.C., and Tuskegee Institute in Alabama became models for black education. The curricula of these institutions, especially Hampton and Tuskegee, were more often vocational than intellectual in character,

⁷ Sanford Wexler, The Civil Rights Movement: An Eyewitness History, (Facts on file: New York, 1993).

⁸ Edwards, Sociology of Sport, 1973.

primarily offering practical skill courses. Although there was a great deal of criticism for the lack of educational opportunities for blacks, particularly by W. E. B. Dubois, this 'practical' orientation prevailed. The major emphasis in many African-American institutions was on agriculture, vocational and mechanical skills, and music.⁹

In 1909, W. E. B. Dubois with the help of 60 other black and white Americans founded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Its purpose was to achieve through peaceful and lawful means, equal citizenship rights for all American citizens by eliminating segregation and discrimination in housing, employment, voting, schools, the courts, transportation, and recreation.¹⁰ During the first ten years of the NAACP, the Court ruled in 1915 against the grandfather clauses which kept blacks from voting, and then in 1917 the Court struck down a municipal ordinance requiring blacks to live in a certain section of town.¹¹

In 1948 Harry Truman was the first President to create a permanent Civil Rights Commission, and he issued an executive order for "fair employment throughout the Federal establishment without discrimination because of race, color, religion, or national origin," which laid a foundation of the Civil Rights Movement. Six years later in 1954, the Supreme Court ruled that "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal in

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ NAACP Online. www.naacp.org/about/factsheet.html, 1998.

¹¹ Sanford Wexler, The Civil Rights Movement: An Eyewitness History, (Facts on file: New York, 1993).

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka.¹² Meanwhile, on December 1, 1955 a black seamstress named Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a Montgomery, Alabama bus to a white man and she was arrested and jailed. The next day, 50,000 black citizens of Montgomery, Alabama began a boycott of the city buses., led by Martin Luther King, Jr. The black citizens of Montgomery kept up the boycott for over a year bringing the bus company close to bankruptcy. The Supreme Court ruled, late in 1956, that segregation on buses was unconstitutional.¹³

The Civil Rights Movement gained momentum during the 1960's under President John F. Kennedy. President Kennedy appointed blacks, Thurgood Marshall to the United States Court of Appeals, named Carl Rowan ambassador of Finland, and appointed Andrew Hatcher associate press secretary. Then in 1962 James Meridith, with the help of the Supreme Court and President Kennedy, was the school's first black to attend the University of Mississippi and later became the school's first graduate . In 1964 the Twenty-fourth Amendment was ratified to the United States Constitution giving blacks the right to vote without being required to pay a poll tax. The Voting Rights Act was passed in 1965 which authorized the U.S. Attorney General to suspend discriminatory voter-registration tests. The number of black voters increased, and in the next several years a few black candidates were elected to local and state offices.¹⁴ Therefore, by the

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Henry F. Graff, AMERICA: The Glorious Republic, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1985).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

1970's opportunities had increased for blacks to succeed politically and economically.

The Founding of Prairie View College

In 1836 land was being claimed by settlers in Texas which had been occupied by the Cherokees until they were forced off the land. In 1837 on President Andrew Jackson's final day in office, he signed a bill recognizing Texas' independence. In the years following, there was debate on whether or not Texas should become apart of the United States. Martin Van Buren who came into office in 1837 following Jackson, rejected Texas as a state. Van Buren was opposed to statehood because Texas would become a slave state, and he was also afraid that granting Texas statehood might mean war with Mexico. John Tyler, who inherited the presidency of the United States after the death of William Henry Harrison, was "a pro-southern administrator" and wanted to see Texas granted statehood. The United States Congress offered acceptance of Texas as a state in February 1845 just before Tyler left the presidency.¹⁵

After Texas was granted statehood, the number of blacks in the state increased due to slavery. At the time of the Texas Revolution, slaves made up about 14% of the approximately 5000 Texans. By 1860 one-third of the population's 183,000 people were black. Then the census of 1870 revealed that there had been some illegal smuggling of African-birth blacks living in Texas, which resulted in the increased in numbers of blacks living in Texas.¹⁶

¹⁵ David G, McComb, Texas: A Modern History, (University of Texas: Austin, 1989 and Graff, AMERICA: The Glorious Republic, 1985).

¹⁶ McComb, Texas: A Modern History, 1989.

Segregation of the races, which was a part of Texas' life before the Civil War, did not end with the passage of the Emancipation Proclamation. In 1891 the Texas legislature passed the "Jim Crow" laws, which created a "separate but equal" social climate even before the 1896 *Plessy vs. Ferguson* case legalized this dual system for all of the United States. City ordinances passed in the last decade of the 19th century in Texas prevented the mixing of the races on trolley cars and in parks. Galveston even segregated its beaches.¹⁷ Churches, schools, restaurants, theaters, and occupational sites continued to practice separation of the races until they, as the rest of the country, were forced to integrate with the Supreme Court's 1954 decision reached in *Brown vs. Board of Education* in Topeka , Kansas.

During the late 1870's, Texas took advantage of the Morrill Act which provided federal support for agricultural colleges. This legislation created the all-white Texas Agricultural and Mechanical College in 1871, which was the first public university in Texas. The purpose for establishing such an institution was to provide a practical, low cost education for white males. Within a few years a similar institution was opened for black males in Prairie View, Texas.¹⁸

Prairie View A&M University became the second oldest state agricultural institution of higher education in the State of Texas. The Texas Constitution of 1876 included a directive for establishing an "agricultural and mechanical college," and pledged that "separate schools should be provided for the white and colored children, and

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

impartial provisions shall be made for both."¹⁹ On March 11, 1878 eight young Negro men became the first of their race to enroll in Texas' first state-supported college for African-Americans in Prairie View, which was just 40 miles northwest of Houston.²⁰

Women Track and Field at Prairie View

Barbara Jean Jacket, Prairie View A&M's head track and field coach for women from 1966-1991, arrived from Port Arthur, Texas in 1964 to be a swimming instructor in the physical education department. At that time there was no women's track and field team at Prairie View. There had been a track team for women earlier but had been dropped in the 1958 season along with all other athletic programs for women.²¹ The earlier track team had been known as the "Chasing Pantherettes" because they apparently only competed in the Prairie View Relays, and they enjoyed little success in the one or two events in which they entered.²² They apparently spent their time chasing the competition.

Coach Jacket re-instituted a women's track and field team at Prairie View A&M University in 1966, two years after her arrival. "I had a lot of energy. I had just left my alma mater, Port Arthur Lincoln High School, where I was the assistant track coach and

¹⁹ Prairie View A&M University 1995-96 Catalogue: 24.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Barbara Jacket, interview by author, 20 March 1996.

²² Joe Booker, *PV Pantherettes...From Rags to Riches*, The Prairie View Panther. 27 April 1973, 8.

assistant basketball coach. And so, I decided that was just what I wanted to do,"²³ said Coach Jacket. She also mentioned that she had considered starting a basketball team but would need from eight to twelve players, but with track only one athlete was essential. Coach Jacket was given two basketballs by Dr. Leroy Moore, the men's basketball coach, and she went to a sporting goods store in Houston and traded them for a dozen gray warm-up suits.²⁴ Then she took the women's old basketball uniforms and cut the lace out of the pants for the athletes' to use as running shorts.²⁵

During the first few years, attracting good athletes was hard for Coach Jacket because she did not have scholarships to entice athletes to Prairie View.²⁶ Heleria Scott of Groesbeck, Texas became the first woman scholarship athlete when she received the only available scholarship in women's track at Prairie View in 1969. However, she quit before the track season began.²⁷ By 1972 Coach Jacket had five scholarships to offer her track and field participants.

Within a few years, Coach Jacket's Pantherettes were receiving national recognition. Between the years of 1974 and 1980, Prairie View A&M University won two Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW) Track and Field Championships, two Track and Field Association (TFA)-USA track titles, two United

²³ Jacket, interview by author, 20 March 1996.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Booker, *PV Pantherettes...From Rags to Riches*, 27 April 1973.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

States Track and Field Federation (USTFF) titles, six Outdoor Southwestern Athletic Conference (SWAC) Championships, three Indoor SWAC Championships and one Astrodome National Federation meet. In the 1976 Montreal Olympics, there were four women athletes from Prairie View. Also in 1976, after winning the AIAW Track and Field Championships, Prairie View A&M University became the first women's track and field team to be sponsored by a tennis shoe company, NIKE.²⁸

In the 1990's, Prairie View A&M University women's track and field teams from two decades ago are the forgotten programs in women's track and field. Many positive actions occurred during the 1970's for women in intercollegiate athletics, such as the passage of Title IX, the formation of the AIAW, and the granting of athletic scholarships that provided opportunities for women to get an education while competing. Perhaps it was the growth of programs during this era that caused the accomplishments of Coach Barbara Jacket and her Pantherettes of Prairie View A&M University to be overlooked. The purpose of this research is to tell the story of the women's Prairie View A&M University track and field teams from 1972-1980, and to analyze the factors that led to this success.

This paper will investigate Prairie View A&M University between 1972-1980 as a case study of women's track and field athletics at a historically black college. Because previous works have been done on Tennessee State's and Tuskegee's track and field programs for women, Prairie View was selected for the study as another prototype of a Historically Black institution with an outstanding athletic program. The first chapter is

²⁸ Jacket, interview by author, 20 March 1996.

intended to provide a brief historical context of social conditions in the United States following the Civil War, the historical significance of Prairie View A&M University, and the background for the formation of women's track and field teams.

The second chapter of the thesis examines the 1972 and 1973 seasons. This chapter discusses the making of a nationally competitive track and field team. It also provides information on Coach Barbara Jacket, the woman behind it all. The third chapter analyzes the years of 1974-76 when Prairie View had the most success on the national and international levels. Chapter four focuses on the final time period being studied, 1977-80. This chapter also discusses how the implementation of Title IX affected a small college such as Prairie View. The fifth and concluding chapter summarizes the major accomplishments of Prairie View's teams, and provides some perspectives on the significance of the events. Areas where further research is needed have been noted.

Both primary and secondary sources were used in the collection of data. The primary sources used in this research were of several kinds, especially interviews and newspapers. An interview with Coach Barbara Jacket, head women's track and field coach from 1966 to 1991, was a key source of information about the teams. Additional interviews with Essie "Kelley" Washington and Carol "Cummings" Kellum, former Prairie View athletes, were also valuable sources of information. Other major sources for data included *The Prairie View Panther* (school newspaper) and *The Panther* (yearbook).

CHAPTER 2

LAYING THE FOUNDATION: 1972-1973

Barbara Jean Jacket through dedication and great effort, reestablished women's track and field team at Prairie View A&M University and led her teams to national success. Coach Jacket had first-hand experience in track and field both as a participant and as a coach. Born and raised in Port Arthur, Texas, she participated in basketball and track and field in high school. In track at Lincoln High School, she competed in the shot put and discus events, and still holds the record in the baseball throw. She attended college at Tuskegee University on a basketball scholarship, but she also competed on the track and field team.¹ She threw the shot put and discus, and ran a leg on the 440-yard relay. At 5' 9" and 125 pounds, Jacket was ranked in the top ten in the country in the baseball throw during the 1950's. After graduating from Tuskegee in 1958 with a bachelors degree in physical education, Coach Jacket returned to her high school alma mater in Port Arthur, Texas as an assistant track and basketball coach.²

Barbara Jacket left Lincoln High School in September of 1964 to accept a position as swimming instructor in the physical education department at Prairie View A&M College. Two years later she began what was to become a dynasty in the 1970's in women's track and field. Although it is the lesser known of the dominant African-American college teams, Prairie View carved a place for itself in the history of the sport.

Between 1966 and 1968, the members of Prairie View women's track and field

¹ Barbara Jacket, interview by author, 20 March 1996.

² Barbara Jacket, telephone interview by author, 1 July 1996.

teams were volunteer athletes with no subsidization. In order to recruit athletes, Coach Jacket posted a sign in the spring of 1966 inviting young women who were interested to come out for the track team; she received four volunteers. These young women, all Texans, were Norma Jean Moss and Margaret Jones from Port Arthur, Delores Isom from Brookshire, and Elaine Waters from Tyler. Their experience in track varied from Moss who had competed in the state meet while in high school to Elaine Waters who had never competed in track.³ These four young women competed in meets at Lamar University in Beaumont, Texas, Texas Southern University in Houston, and Prairie View A&M University. In 1967, as her young athletes' running times improved, Coach Jacket added the Texas Relays to their schedule. From 1967 to 1970, the Pantherettes competed in the same four meets.⁴

The 1971-72 Prairie View track and field squad members were Beverly Davis, Charlene Branch, Mary Wallace, Debra Sapenter, and Charlene Foster.⁵ In the spring of 1972, these young women competed in the Fort Worth "Indoor" Invitational, Madison Relays, Astrodome Meet in Houston, United States Track and Field Federation (USTFF)-National Indoor Championships in Houston, Border Olympics in Laredo, Texas, Grambling Relays, Texas Southern Relays, Prairie View Relays, Texas Relays, Pelican

³ Joe Booker, *PV Pantherettes...From Rags to Riches*, The Prairie View Panther, 27 April 1973, 8.

⁴ Jacket, Telephone interview by author, 1 July 1996.

⁵ Pantherland, Prairie View yearbook, 1972.

Relays (Southern University), and Drake Relays.⁶ The Pantherettes won the Madison Relays and placed second at the Astrodome Meet.⁷

Leading the way for the "Pantherettes" was sophomore Debra Sapenter, a future Olympian. Sapenter had joined the team after reading an announcement on a campus bulletin board in 1970 that invited students to come out for track. She would eventually put Prairie View on the map. "Debra Sapenter came out of physical education class," Coach Jacket said, and "became the world record holder in the quarter mile. That is why we continued to recruit out of gym class."⁸

Debra Sapenter, the Pantherettes' versatile quarter miler, had set her goals on making the 1972 Olympic women's track team. Until she arrived in Prairie View, she had never had the opportunity to compete in track. "I always wanted to run track because my father was a member of the track team at Prairie View," she said.⁹ Sapenter's father, Reginald, was a better than average quarter miler for Prairie View in the mid 1940's. He once held the record in the 440-yd. dash at Prairie View. Like her father, Sapenter was a better than average quarter miler and had the potential of making the 1972 Munich Olympics. In 1971 as a freshmen, she ran a 56.7 which was one of the top times in the nation for women. Sapenter qualified for the Olympic trials, but did not get to compete

⁶ Track Schedule, The Prairie View Panther, 11 Feb. 1972, 8.

⁷ Booker, *PV Pantherettes...From Rags to Riches*, 27 April 1973.

⁸ Jacket, interview by author, 20 March 1996.

⁹ *Pantherettes Eyes Olympics*, The Prairie View Panther, 22 Feb. 1972, 8.

because of a foot injury.¹⁰

On February 12, 1972 at the USTFF National Indoor Championships, Sapenter ran a 55.1 to help the Pantherettes' 880-yd. medley team set a new Astrodome record of 1:43.4 which was one of the best times in the world for women that season. At the conclusion of the 1971-72 season, the Pantherettes had the second best time in the nation in the quarter mile and the fourth best times in both the mile relay and 440- yd. relay.¹¹

Although there were only five scholarships to give, the 1972-73 squad had nine members: Debra Sapenter, Mary Wallace, Shirley Williams, Carol Cummings, Debra Branch, Geraldine Taylor, Elizabeth Labome, Charlene Branch, and Linda Busby.¹² To prepare for the season, the Pantherettes practiced on a six-lane cinder track with the men's team. They also instituted a weight training program for the women that year. To build endurance and stamina for the long season, the young women competed in cross country. "She [Coach Jacket] used to take us in the van, drop us off on 290 or Highway 6, and make us run back to campus. I did not regret it because of the endurance it built,"¹³ recalls Carol Cummings Kellum, former Prairie View track and field athlete between 1972-76.

The Pantherettes were named outstanding team in every relay and meet in which they competed during the 1972-73 season, and Women's Track and Field Magazine

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Pantherland, Prairie View yearbook, 1973.

¹³ Carol Cummings Kellum, interview by author, 19 March 1996.

ranked the Pantherettes number one in the nation.¹⁴ These young women competed in twenty-eight meets and won all, while setting new records in each.¹⁵ The sprint medley set an American record at the Texas Relays, and they ran the second fastest time in the nation in the 4x100 relay (45.6). Individually, the Pantherettes' All-American quarter miler, Debra Sapenter, ran the second best time in the nation with a 54.6, and Shirley Williams and Carol Cummings had the third and fourth best times in the 100-yd. dash. At the National meet in Irvine, California, Prairie View placed second in the sprint medley (1:44.0) and third in the 440-yd relays (46.1).¹⁶

Carol Cummings, a freshmen from Saint Catherine's, Jamaica, was Prairie View A&M's first female international scholarship athlete. Cummings, who represented Jamaica in the 1972 Olympics in Munich, Germany, had been noticed there by Coach Hoover Wright, Prairie View men's track coach, when he served as an American track coach at the Olympic Games.¹⁷ "I was in the 1972 Olympics in Munich, Germany and Coach Hoover Wright, the men's track coach here and also the national (American) track coach, talked to me over there about Prairie View. I received a scholarship and I attended Prairie View,"¹⁸ said Cummings. Prairie View was not the only school to offer

¹⁴ *Pantherettes Running At World Pace*, The Prairie View Panther, 15 March 1973, 8.

¹⁵ *PV Women Track Stars and Coach Off on Tours Abroad*, The Prairie View Panther, 9 July 1973, 8.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Carol Cummings Kellum, interview by author, 19 March 1996.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

her a scholarship. Pepperdine University and University of California--Palo Alto both recruited Cummings. At Prairie View, Cummings competed in the 100, 200, and the 4x100 meter relay.¹⁹

During the summer of 1973, Coach Barbara Jacket, Debra Sapenter, and Shirley Williams gained international experience as members of the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) teams representing America. They traveled to Canada, Germany, Italy, Poland, Russia, and Africa with the United States AAU Team; Sapenter and Williams as competitors and Jacket as an assistant coach (Figure 1).

Debra Sapenter:

USA v. West Germany @ Munich, Germany

-2nd in mile relay (3.33.6)

USA v. Italy @ Turin

-1st in 400m (53.9)

-1st in mile relay (3:37.8)

USA v. Soviet Union @ Minsk

-3rd in 400m but first American (54.0)

-2nd in mile relay (3:37.8)

USA v Africa @ Dakar, Senegal

-2nd in 400m (53.4)

-mile relay in (3:40.5)

Shirley Williams

1st Pacific International Games in Victoria, Canada

-5th in 100m (12.2)

Saskatoon Satellite Meet

-2nd in 400m (56.1)

-1st in 440-yd. relay (46.3)

Coach Barbara Jacket

-1973 Assistant Coach for the United States Junior AAU

Track & Field that toured West Germany, Warsaw,

Poland, Odessa, Russia, and Moscow

Figure 1
International Track Report in 1973

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Shirley Williams, a freshman, was ranked in the top ten among the sprinters in the world. Debra Sapenter was ranked fourth in the quartermile in the world. Meanwhile Coach Jacket's Pantherettes were ranked third in the world.²⁰

From the beginning of the track team's resurrection in 1968 through the 1973 season, Coach Jacket saw her teams go from "rags to riches." "Before Debra Sapenter got here we never found anyone in our recruiting who wanted to come to Prairie View with the talent to get a good program going," said Coach Jacket.²¹ Debra Sapenter attended Prairie View because her parents graduated from Prairie View. Up until Sapenter's success, Prairie View's track teams consisted of volunteers. Once Sapenter began breaking records and scholarships became available, it made it easier for Carol Cummings, Shirley Williams, and others to come and compete as Pantherettes.

The Prairie View A&M women's track team traveled to most of their meets by cars and vans during this period. In order to raise extra money for equipment and travel, the Pantherettes held car washes and sold hotdogs. Running shoes were not a problem for the team because Cummings and Sapenter were running in the top ten in the nation in their events, and therefore were able to get free shoes for the team.²²

While the Pantherettes were out competing and traveling during the late 1960's and the early 1970's, most of the predominantly white schools did not have track and

²⁰ *PV Women Track Stars and Coach off on Tours Abroad*, The Prairie View Panther, 9 July 1973, 8.

²¹ Barbara Jacket, interview by author, 20 March 1996.

²² Carol Cummings Kellum, interview by author, 19 March 1996.

field teams. Few schools fielded any competitive intercollegiate teams for women until a few years after Title IX was introduced in 1972. Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 was passed on June 23.²³ This law states that “no person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program receiving federal financial assistance.”²⁴ This law covers pre-schools, elementary and secondary schools, institutions of vocational education, professional education, undergraduate and graduate higher education. Any program receiving federal financial assistance through grants, loans, or contracts, other than contracts of insurance or guaranty, is covered.

On June 18, 1974, more than two years after Title IX was passed, the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare published proposed regulations for implementing the law. The most undesirable aspect of Title IX, from the women’s point of view, was the impression that men’s performance was the standard of excellence against which to judge women’s programs.²⁵ Perhaps the most significant change brought about by Title IX in 1974 was the introduction of scholarships to the women’s programs.²⁶ Title IX mandated that female athletes be given like opportunities, such as those received by their

²³ Charlotte B. Hallam, *Legal Tools to Fight Sex Discrimination*, Phi Delta Kappan 55 (October 1973).

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Catherine Ley, *Women in Sports: Where Do We Go from Here Boys?*, Phi Delta Kappan 56 (October 1974).

²⁶ Jill Hutchinson. *Women’s Intercollegiate Basketball: AIAW/NCAA*, in Joan Hult & Marianna Trekell, Edse., A Century of Women’s Basketball, Reston, VA: AAHPERD, 1991.

male counterparts, for competing in sport in educational institutions.

While many of the predominantly white institutions were trying to organize teams and establish scholarships for women, the women at historically black institutions were competing and giving scholarships long before Title IX was introduced. Tuskegee Institute had scholarships for their women athletes between 1930 and 1940, Tennessee State had them between 1950 and 1960, and Prairie View A&M during the late 1960's, almost a decade before the white institutions.²⁷ It was also racially acceptable for black women to compete in athletics while the social mores were more limiting for white women. Mr. Ray Carreathers, a professor in Education Administration and the Vice-President for Student Affairs at Prairie View during the 1970's mentioned, "I think that all co-curricular activities would be good at any time on any campus. It does more than build up your athletic ability. It rounds you out as an individual: sharing, getting along, dealing with losses as well as being a winner. It helps develop individuals and anything that has a positive force in an individual is worth continuing."²⁸ Certainly track and field activities were viewed in a positive light at Prairie View.

During the 1972 and 1973 seasons, the Prairie View A&M women's track and field team's were undefeated. The Pantherettes set track records in almost every meet in which they competed. With Debra Sapenter leading the way, the future of Prairie View appeared predictable.

²⁷ Susan K. Cahn, *Coming on Strong: gender and sexuality in twentieth-century women's sport*, (New York: Free Press, 1994).

²⁸ Ray Carreathers, interview by author, 20 March 1996.

CHAPTER 3

TAKING THE NATIONAL INTERCOLLEGIATE SCENE BY STORM: 1974-76

Prairie View A&M University women's track and field team began leaving their mark in the national track and field world in the 1972 and 1973 seasons, but not as much in the intercollegiate world. It was not until the 1974 season that Coach Jacket and her Pantherettes discovered the Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW) and the rest of the collegiate world discovered Prairie View. Prairie View finished first in 1974 and 1976 at the AIAW Track and Field Championships, and finished second in 1975 to University of California--Los Angeles (UCLA). Also, in 1976 the strength of the team was evident as four Pantherettes competed in the 1976 Olympics in Montreal.

What was the AIAW?

The AIAW was the first formal organization sanctioned to govern and legitimize intercollegiate athletic competition for women. This organization was established by progressive, and perhaps radical by traditional female standards, women physical educators. These women wanted organized athletics for women on the intercollegiate level, but did not want the commercialization that was associated with men's athletics and the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA).¹ The purpose of the newly formed AIAW was to "provide governance and leadership dedicated to the assurance of standards of excellence and educational soundness in women's intercollegiate athletics."²

¹ Joan S. Hult, *Women's Struggle for Governance in U.S. Amateur Athletics*, International Review for the Sociology of Sport 24, no. 3 (1989).

² Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women 1981-82 Handbook: 13.

By 1982, the AIAW offered forty national championships in eighteen different sports.³

In the spring of 1973, the AIAW sponsored the first national collegiate track and field championship for women. The championships took place at California State--Hayward. No teams showed up from the schools that later won national track and field championships, such as University of California-Los Angeles, Villanova, Louisiana State University, or University of Tennessee-Knoxville, because those institutions either did not have a women's track team this early or had not reached the competitive level to send one to compete. Division I teams from Oregon, Kansas State, Texas Tech, and Minnesota competed, but they were not major factors at Hayward. The powerhouse institutions were California State-Los Angeles, Seattle Pacific, California State-Hayward, and the AIAW champions of 1973, Texas Woman's University.⁴

The AIAW qualifying standards to compete at the championships were far less restricting than those of the women's national Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) championships. For example, to qualify in the AIAW in the 100-yd. dash, a woman had to run 12.0, while the AAU standard was 10.8 seconds. The women competing in this first meet at Hayward were not on scholarship or even recruited athletes, because the AIAW had a rule barring students with athletic scholarships from competing in its championship. The rule had technically been abolished by the AIAW a month earlier because of a lawsuit threat from a Florida junior college, but this ban was not lifted at Hayward. The anti-scholarship rule kept one of the best women's track teams, Tennessee

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Bil Gilbert, *The second sex engages in a first*, Sports Illustrated, 21 May 1973.

State University (TSU), from taking part at Hayward. Tennessee State University contributed thirty Olympians from 1957-73 and gave as many as twelve scholarships during the 1972-73 season alone.⁵

Pantherettes On Top

Competing for Prairie View A&M University in 1974 were Mary Ayers, Charlene Branch, Andrea Bruce, Carol Cummings, Charlene Foster, Elizabeth Lobome, Debra Sapenter, Geraldine Taylor, Mary Wallace, and Shirley Williams.⁶ These young women continued to set records in almost every meet in which they competed. The Pantherettes competed in the Astrodome Relays, Madison Square Garden (AAU indoor meet), Houston Invitational, Wiley Relays, Dallas Baptist Invitational, Texas Southern University, Jackson State University as well as Grambling Relays, Prairie View Relays, Pelican Relays, Drake Relays, Southwest Athletic Conference (SWAC), Gulf AAU Championships, and the AIAW championships.⁷

Coach Jacket and her Pantherettes started the 1974 season just like the 1973 season, winning and setting records. In the Houston Astrodome's National Federation Indoor Meet, the Pantherettes led by senior Debra Sapenter broke their own Astrodome sprint medley record set in 1972 in a time of 1:42.2. Andrea Bruce, the freshman hurdler who was named most outstanding athlete in Jamaica in 1973, set a new Astrodome record in the 60 yard hurdles with a 7.9. This time broke the old record of 8.1 set in

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Pantherland, Prairie View yearbook, 1974.

⁷ *Track and field Schedule 1973-74*, The Prairie View Panther, 21 February 1974, 8.

1969.⁸ Then at the Pelican Relays the Pantherettes continued to break records. Debra Sapenter ran the 220 for the first time ever and won with a 24.1, the best time in the nation. She also ran the nation's top time in the 440, 53.8. In the long jump, freshman Andrea Bruce set a Pelican record with a leap of 19' 5 1/2".⁹

Nineteen-hundred and seventy-four was the first year the Pantherettes competed in the Drake Relays in Des Moines, Iowa. The sprint medley relay team, composed of Charlene Branch, Mary Wallace, Shirley Williams, and Debra Sapenter, set a national record of 1:41.3 on April 27. Earlier in the season the Pantherettes ran 1:40.8, but it could not be counted as a national record because Carol Cummings, the Jamaica native, was on the team.¹⁰ Another first for the Pantherettes was competing in 1974 in the AIAW Track and Field Championships. This was the first year that athletic scholarship athletes were allowed to compete, so this made it an especially important meet. "I had no idea what the AIAW was. There was a white lady named Ms. Copeland who taught at Prairie View, mostly in recreation. So one day she came over to me and said, 'Barbara, are you going to the AIAW Championships?' I didn't know what she was talking about because we went to the AAU and never thought about that," recalled Coach Jacket.¹¹

In 1974, the AIAW Championships were held in Denton, Texas at Texas

⁸ *Pantherettes Set New Astrodome Record*, The Prairie View Panther, 21 February 1974, 8.

⁹ *Track Team Ready For Drake Relays*, The Prairie View Panther, 25 April 1974, 4.

¹⁰ *PV Pantherettes Nat'i Sprint Medley Champs*, The Prairie View Panther, 3 May 1974, 8.

¹¹ Barbara Jacket, interview by author, 20 March 1996.

Woman's University. Coach Jacket had never heard of the AIAW, but she knew the location of Denton, Texas. Coach Jacket took five young women to this meet and they were Carol Cummings, Debra Sapenter, Mary Ayers, Mary Wallace, and Andrea Bruce. Andrea Bruce, a Jamaican Olympian in 1972, finished with three first places and one second place to lead Prairie View to the National Women's Track and Field meet title. This was significant because eighty-two teams had competed during the two-day meet. Bruce won the high jump, 100m hurdles, and the long jump, and she placed second behind teammate Mary Ayers in the 400m hurdles. Sapenter won the 440 in 53.4. Prairie View won all three relays (400m, 1600m, and sprint medley) while setting meet records.¹² Coach Jacket was selected for Honorable Mention for the 1974 Coach of the Year Award presented annually by *Sportswoman*, a national magazine.¹³

After such a successful season in 1974, the Pantherettes knew they would have to work hard in 1975 to equal their past season's glory. Returning for the Pantherettes were Mary Ayers, Geraldine Taylor, Carol Cummings, Shirley Williams, Debra Sapenter, and Andrea Bruce. The new additions were Lillie Guillory, Reda Nuttal, and 1975 All-SWAC sprinter Canadice Glover.¹⁴ During the regular season the Pantherettes competed in the Texas Southern University (TSU) Relays, Prairie View University Relays, Astrobelles Relays, Madison Square Garden Relays, Pelican Relays, Grambling Relays,

¹² *PV Wins Women's National Collegiate Track-Field Meet*, The Prairie View Panther, 2 July 1974, 8.

¹³ *Coach Barbara Jacket Makes Academic News*, The Prairie View Panther, 9 June 1975, 8.

¹⁴ Pantherland, Prairie View yearbook, 1975.

and the Texas Relays.

At the TSU Relays held on March 21-22, the Pantherettes set five meet records, two in individual events and three in the relays. Bruce won the 100m hurdles in 13.8 and Sapenter won the 440-yd in 53.0. The 440-yd relay was run in 45.6 by Williams, Branch, Cummings, and Sapenter; the mile relay was run in 3:43.5 by Glover, Williams, Ayers, and Sapenter; and the sprint medley relay was completed in a time of 1:43 by Bruce, Cummings, Branch, and Williams.¹⁵

The following week the Pantherettes competed in the Prairie View Relays. The Prairie View Relays are the state's second oldest relays, instituted after the Texas Relays. The young women of Prairie View, ranked number one, competed against Alcorn State, Southern University, and Texas Southern University. The Pantherettes won their fifth consecutive Prairie View Relays title and won all three relays. Bruce and Ayers led the way for the Pantherettes. Bruce won the Outstanding Female Award by setting new meet records in the 100m hurdles (14.0) and the high-jump (5-6), and she finished second in the 440 hurdles (62.99). Ayers won the 440 hurdles (61.93) and finished second in the 110m hurdles.¹⁶

In the post season competition, the Pantherettes won the United States Track and Field Federation Meet, but finished a disappointing second to UCLA in the Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW) Track and Field Championships. The Pantherettes ran without Debra Sapenter, now a Prairie View A&M University Instructor,

¹⁵ *PV Relays Statistics*, The Prairie View Panther, 3 April 1975, 12.

¹⁶ *Pantherettes Get PV Relays Title*, The Prairie View Panther, 3 April 1975, 12.

who was competing for the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) team in China.¹⁷ In 1975, 103 schools and 521 individuals qualified to compete in the track and field championships at Eugene, Oregon. The Pantherettes were disqualified in the sprint medley relay because of exchanging the baton outside of the exchange zone, and eventually lost to UCLA by ten points. Also, Prairie View had only six athletes to UCLA's thirty athletes.¹⁸ The depth of UCLA's team did not bother Coach Jacket. "Believe it or not, I always had a saying that, 'I'd rather have 5 thoroughbreds than 30 donkeys. The most I ever had were 5 to 6 quality athletes. Everybody [spectators] would look to see who was running next [for Prairie View] and we were running the same six people¹⁹," said Coach Jacket.

The Pantherettes began the 1976 season at the first annual Southwest Athletic Conference Indoor Meet at Jackson State University in Jackson, Mississippi on January 23-24.²⁰ Competing for Prairie View during this season was Debra Sapenter-Bennett, Beverly Day, Arthurine Gainer, Shirley Williams, Carol Cummings, Andrea Bruce, Mary Ayers, and Mary Williams.²¹ Bruce led the way for Prairie View by scoring forty of the Pantherettes 102 points. She won the high jump (5-8), long jump (18-2 1/2), 60 yard hurdles (8.11), and the 440 yard dash (58.6). Coach Jacket thought Bruce was a true

¹⁷ Robert Boyle, *Busy body at the AAU*, Sports Illustrated, July 7, 1975.

¹⁸ Carol Cummings Kellum, interview by author, 19 March 1996.

¹⁹ Jacket, interview by author, 20 March 1996.

²⁰ *Prairie View Team in SWAC Indoor*, The Prairie View Panthers, 15 January 1976: 8.

²¹ Pantherland, Prairie View Yearbook, 1976.

competitor. "Anytime you compete in four events and win all four like Andrea did, that's a true competitor²²," said Coach Jacket.

The Pantherettes then competed at the Grambling Relays and the Prairie View Relays finishing in first place at both. Then at the Texas Relays in the spring, the Pantherettes showed absolute dominance. The young women won three out of the four relays while setting meet records in two, and placed second in the two mile relay (Figure 2). This was the first year that the two mile relay was in the Texas Relays. Not only did the Pantherettes set the meet records in the sprint medley and the mile relays in Texas, but they were also the best times in the nation.²³

Sprint Medley Relay: 1st (1:40.04) Sapenter-Bennett, Day, Gainer, Williams

Mile Relay: 1st (3:39.47) Sapenter-Bennett, Cummings, Day, Williams

440 relay: 1st (45.6) Bruce, Cummings, Day, Williams

2 mile relay: 2nd (9:10) Sapenter-Bennett, Ayers, Gainer, Williams

Figure 2
Texas Relays Results of 1976

After finishing as runner-up to UCLA at the AIAW Championships the year before, the Prairie View track team knew it would be difficult for them during the 1976

²² *Prairie View Pantherettes Better Than Ever*, The Prairie View Panther, 29 January 1976, 8.

²³ *Pantherettes Shine at Texas Relays*, The Prairie View Panthers, 8 April 1976, 8.

season. The championships were held in Manhattan, Kansas. At the beginning of the meet it was hard to tell how the Pantherettes were going to place because their star athlete, Andrea Bruce, could not compete because of a pulled groin muscle. The rest of team pulled together to finish first, 60 points in front of Seattle Pacific (51) and Iowa State (50). The Pantherettes were represented by Sapenter-Bennett, Day, Gainer, Cummings, Ayers, and (Mary) Williams.²⁴

From 1971 to the end of the 1975-76 season, the Pantherettes won 159 consecutive regular season track meets (not including post season meets).²⁵ With an impressive record like that, it was no surprise to Coach Jacket when Jeff Hollister from NIKE approached her with a special shoe deal for her team. After winning the AIAW Championships in 1976, Mr. Hollister offered the team a free pair of shoes for every two pairs Prairie View purchased. Eventually, NIKE made special uniforms and designed purple and gold shoes for the Pantherettes.²⁶

Not only were the Pantherettes successful in national competition, but they gained recognition for their success in international competition. Four Prairie View track members made the Olympic teams in 1976 at Montreal. Debra Sapenter-Bennett qualified in the 400m and for the mile relay, while freshman Arthurine Gainer represented the United States in the 800m relay. Carol Cummings made the Jamaican

²⁴ *Pantherettes Keep on Winning*, The Prairie View Panther, June 1976, 8.

²⁵ Joe Booker, *PV Honors Coach Barbara Jacket*, The Prairie View Panther, July 1976, 8.

²⁶ Jacket, interview by author, 20 March 1996.

team in the 100m, 200m, 400m relay, and mile relay, and Andrea Bruce qualified in the pentathlon for Jamaica, too.²⁷

Sapenter-Bennett finished eighth in the 400m (51.66) and won the silver medal in the mile relay with a time of 3:22.81. Bruce finished fifteenth in the pentathlon scoring 4,198 points.²⁸ Cummings and Gainer did not make the finals in any of their respective events.

The Prairie View women's track and field team continued their amazing accomplishments between 1974 and 1976. The Pantherettes major victories were the AIAW Championships in 1974 and 1976, the Gulf AAU Championships in 1976, and the USTFF Championships in 1975 and 1976. Coach Jacket was named SWAC coach of the year and was the recipient of the Billie Jean King Award in 1974. She was named assistant coach of the women's AAU team that competed against Russia in 1976.²⁹ Coach Jacket and the Prairie View Pantherettes were beginning to make a name for themselves in the world of intercollegiate track and field.

²⁷ *Four Pantherettes in Olympics*, The Prairie View Panther, July 1976, 8.

²⁸ Barry J. Hugman and Peter Arnold, *The Olympic Games Complete Track and Field Results 1896-1988*, (New York: Facts on File, 1988.)

²⁹ *PV Coach On AAU Staff To Russia*, The Prairie View Panther, February 27, 1976.

CHAPTER 4

1977-80: KEEPING THE WINNING TRADITION ALIVE

Prairie View A&M University women's track and field continued to be a successful program in the 1977 to 1980 era, but the smaller enrollment, limited funds, and fewer incentives for its athletes began to take a toll. Toward the end of the decade Coach Jacket became more selective of the meets in which they competed. This was primarily due to the expense incurred through travel to meets. During the 1979 and 1980 seasons the Pantherettes chose not to compete in the AIAW track and field championships. Coach Jacket expressed the belief that the Track and Field Association-United States of America (TFA-USA) was just as competitive, and that the AIAW meets were too far away for the Pantherettes to travel. There were also more team members to transport now as Prairie View had added shot and discus throwers to their team roster.¹

The 1976-77 team was again faced with the challenge of living up to its established reputation of being a national champion. Prairie View had won the AIAW and the USTFF championships the preceding year, and these were the standards they had come to use in measuring success. Returning for the Pantherettes were Mary Ayers, Beverly Day, Arthurine Gainer, and Shirley Williams, all of whom were from Texas.² The newcomers were Texans Debra Melrose of Austin, Sharon Preston of Houston, and

¹ Barbara Jacket, interview by author, 20 March 1996.

² G.C.P., *Welcome Back---Coach Jacket*, The Prairie View Panther, 15-20 December 1977, 7.

Essie Kelley of Spur, and Oklahoman Patricia "Pat" Jackson of Muskogee.³ After watching the Pantherettes compete, Essie Kelley had decided as a freshman high school student that she wanted to run for Prairie View. She was further convinced of her choice of colleges because of her respect and admiration for Debra Sapenter and Mary Ayers after meeting them at a track meet in Wichita, Kansas. Kelley had scholarship offers from Texas Tech, Oklahoma, and other predominantly white schools, but decided to attend Prairie View in spite of not being offered a scholarship.⁴ The Pantherettes had a difficult schedule ahead of them (Figure 3), but they had the potential for continued success.

The Pantherettes had several less significant meets in the 1976-77 season that helped them prepare for the more important meets such as the National AIAW, USTFF, and the National AAU Championships. The team had victories at Grambling, Texas Southern, and Prairie View relays. Then at the Texas Relays, Dallas native Beverly Day led the Pantherettes to yet another title by being a part of the winning 440-yd and mile relays, and taking a second place finish in the 100m race with a personal best time of 11.40.⁵ Coach Jacket saw Day as a leader because of her concern for her teammates who were not performing well. It was often Day's personal talks to her teammates that seemed to keep them motivated.⁶

³ *Ibid*, 4.

⁴ Essie Kelley Washington, interview by author, 19 March 1996.

⁵ *PV's Beverly Day Thrives On Winning*, The Prairie View Panther, 8-12 April 1977, 7.

⁶ *Ibid*.

DECEMBER	4	Prairie View Winter Relays
	18	Jackson State Indoor
JANUARY	22	SWAC Indoor Championships
	29-30	Northeast L.A. Indoor Track Meet
FEBRUARY	26	Astro Belles Relays
MARCH	4-5	53rd Annual Park & Recreation Meet
	11-12	Worthing Relays & Grambling Relays
	18-19	Texas Southern Relays
	25-26	Prairie View Relays
APRIL	1-2	Texas Relays
	15-16	TAIAW
	22-23	Drake Relays & Pelican Relays
	29-30	State Meet (TWU)
MAY	6-7	Tuskegee Relays
	13-14	S.W.A.C.
	18-21	National AIAW
	20-21	Gulf AAU
	27-28	USTFF
JUNE	9-11	National AAU

Figure 3
Women's Track Schedule
1976-77

On May 18-21 the Pantherettes went to UCLA to defend their AIAW title. However, the opposition was especially strong and the Prairie View women's track and field team finished fourth with 38 points. Because of outstanding performances by athletes such as future Olympian Evelyn Ashford who scored twenty points individually, UCLA finished first with 86 points, California State-Northridge came in second with 73 points, and The University of Tennessee-Knoxville scored 41 points to capture third, just squeezing past Prairie View. Prairie View's mile relay team, consisting of Gainer,

Kelley, Ayers, and Day experienced the most success in the meet and finished first.⁷

A week later at the National AAU meet held at UCLA, junior Mary Ayers established a new American record of 56.1 in the 400m hurdles. She broke the record of teammate Arthurine Gainer that was set the year before in 1976. Ayers came to Prairie View in 1974 from Cleveland, Ohio to run track. Ayers then represented the AAU United States International Team during the summer of 1977 in Italy, Germany, and Russia. She also participated in the World University Games in Sophia, Bulgaria where Coach Jacket served as an assistant coach.⁸

During the 1977-78 season the Pantherettes success continued. Returning team members included Essie Kelley, Sharon Preston, Barbara Blockmon, Debra Melrose, Venita Punch, Sheila Petit, Ethal Jackson, Connie Jefferson, Betty Dewalt, and Dianthia Lemons.⁹ The newcomers were Patrice Roberts of Orange, Shounelle Booker, Angela Dudley, and Paula Waites of Dallas, Janice Dugat of Liberty, and Vickie Belscher of Oceanside, California.¹⁰ The Pantherettes began the spring season with victories at the Ty-Terrell relays, where Kelley won the 800 and 1500 meters, and the Astro Belle relays.¹¹ The team next competed in the Texas Southern University Relays in Houston.

⁷ University of Maryland-College Park Archives

⁸ Angela Greaux, *Mary Ayers Sets National Track Record*, The Prairie View Panther, July 1977, 7.

⁹ Pantherland, *Prairie View yearbook*, 1978: 316-317.

¹⁰ G.C.P., *Welcome Back--Coach Jacket*, The Prairie View Panther, 15-20 December 1977, 4.

¹¹ *Pantherettes Set for Fort Worth Meet*, The Prairie View Panther, 9-14 March 1978, 7.

The sprint medley relay team of Melrose, Roberts, Day, and Kelley finished first, the 440-yd relay team of Roberts, Jackson, Belcher, and Day finished second, and the mile relay team of Jackson, Dudley, Kelley, and Day finished first. Prairie View was judged to place second in the women's division overall at the meet just behind Texas Woman's University (TWU) even though both teams tied in relay placement. The press voted to select TWU as the winners of the women's division because of their 440-relay time. Coach Jacket thought that since it was a tie, Prairie View and TWU should have both received first place honors.¹²

Then on March 31-April 1 of 1978, the Pantherettes had a successful meet at the Prairie View Relays. Leading the way was sophomore Essie Kelley who broke Shirley Williams 800m record with a time of 2:15.69. Kelley also anchored the winning sprint medley relay team with Roberts, Jackson, and Day and, ran a leg on the winning mile relay team with Dudley, Jackson, and Day. In the field events, Martin won high jump and Petit won the long jump. Other first place finishers were Blockmon in the two mile run, Jackson in the 200m, and Day in the 400m.¹³

The Pantherettes were dominant that season in their performances at the Texas Relays. Going into the competition, Prairie View was the favorite in all of the relays. Prairie View held the Texas Relays' women division records in the 440-yd relay (45.94), the sprint medley relay (1:40.5), and the mile relay (3.33.99). In 1978 this superiority of

¹² G.C. Pope, *The Big Track Attack*, The Prairie View Panther, 23-28 March 1978, 7.

¹³ *Pantherettes, TSU, PV Freshmen Win PV Relays*, The Prairie View Panther, 6-11 April 1978, 7.

the Pantherettes was evident as they won their sixth consecutive mile relay trophy with the fastest time for women in the United States that year, 3:39.4. The mile relay team consisted of Dudley, Day, Kelley, and Jackson. Then Prairie View won their seventh consecutive sprint medley relay with one of the fastest times in the nation, 1:38.90. The relay team members were Day, Kelley, Jackson, and Roberts. This was the first season in Prairie View's history that Jacket's athletes began throwing the discus and putting the shot. They experienced success and placed well in both events throughout the season.¹⁴

At the 1978 AIAW Championships in Knoxville, Tennessee, was the last time Prairie View would compete in them. The Pantherettes finished eighth overall with California State-Northridge, UCLA, and California State--Los Angeles finishing respectively in the top three positions among the one hundred-plus schools represented. Prairie View finished second in the 800m medley relay and sixth in the 400m relay. Pat Jackson and Essie Kelley finished third and fourth respectively in the 400m run. The high light of the meet was the Pantherettes' 1600m relay team winning in the time of 3:34.92 which was an AIAW and a Tom Black Track Stadium record.¹⁵

A week later several Pantherettes made strong showings at the AAU Championships at UCLA's Drake Stadium in Los Angeles. Kelley placed second in the 800m with a time of 2:03.01, Pat Jackson finished second with a 51.11 in the 400m, and

¹⁴ George C. Pope, *Have Run, Will Travel, The Prairie View Panther*, 20-21 April 1978, 7.

¹⁵ AIAW 1978 Track and Field Championship Results, AIAW Archives, Box 136.

Melrose finished fourth in the 400m hurdles with a time of 59.17.¹⁶ Later in the summer at the 1978 Buchannan Invitational meet in Toronto, Canada, Kelley ran the 800m in two minutes flat, the fastest time in the world.¹⁷

Returning for Prairie View for the 1978-79 season were Essie Kelley, Pat Jackson, Debra Melrose, Vicki Belscher, Janice Dugat, Pat Roberts, Elona Mahoney, and Connie Jefferson.¹⁸ Newcomers to the team were Lisa Crutch, Janice Davies, Loretta Edwards, Pamela Fowler, Kelsie Giles, Dorothy Johnson, and Brenda Lewis.¹⁹ The 1978-79 season got off to it's usual excellent start. At the end of the indoor track season on February 24, the mile relay team consisting of Melrose, Dudley, Kelley, and Jackson set a world record of 3:34.0 in the mile relay at the 1979 Madison Square Garden Indoor Meet.²⁰

The success of the indoor season continued into the outdoor season for the Pantherettes. At the Texas Relays they won the mile relay for the eighth time while setting a meet record of 3:35.72. They also won and set a record in the sprint medley relay. The women finished second in the 400m relay to Texas Southern University. Some of the other teams competing were Texas Woman's University, the Atoms track

¹⁶ Picture Caption, The Prairie View Panther, June 1978, 7.

¹⁷ *Essie Kelley in Canada*, The Prairie View Panther, 7-12 September 1978, 7.

¹⁸ Pantherland, Prairie View yearbook, 1979: 184.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Pantherettes Set World Indoor Meet*, The Prairie View Panther, 8-13 March 1979: 1.

club, and the University of Texas--El Paso.²¹ Following the Texas Relays, the Pantherettes captured the Southwest Athletic Conference title which they hosted at Prairie View by beating out the excellent Texas Southern University team. Individually, Kelley won the 1500m and the 800m, Jackson placed first in the 400m, Jefferson finished second in the shot put, and Melrose won the 400m hurdles.²²

After fine tuning during the regular season meets, Prairie View was ready for the TFA-USA Championships. The Pantherettes finished first. The mile relay team consisting of Melrose, Jackson, Kelley, and Dudley won in 3:32.78, breaking the American collegiate record that had previously been set by Prairie View in Knoxville, Tennessee on May 27, 1978. The 4x100m team also won. Individually, Melrose won the 400m hurdles and finished second in the 100m hurdles. Jackson won the 400m and placed second in the 200m.²³ During the summer at the Pan American Games, Kelley won the 800m in 2:01.2 to capture the Pan American 800m record and Jackson and Kelley won a gold medal in the 1600m relay.²⁴

The 1979-80 season brought newcomers Easter Gabriel, Woopie Wilson, Brenda Lewis, and Karen Waddell.²⁵ Waddell from Memphis, Tennessee decided to compete for

²¹ *Pantherettes Dominant at Texas Relays*, The Prairie View Panther, 19-24 April 1979, 11.

²² Bennie Brown, *Pantherettes Capture SWAC Title*, The Prairie View Panther, 10-18 May 1979, 11.

²³ *PV Track Stars Win National Honors*, The Prairie View Panther, June 1979, 7.

²⁴ Jacket, interview by author, 20 March 1996.

²⁵ *Pantherland*, Prairie View yearbook, 1981, 167.

Prairie View after meeting Essie Kelley at the Olympic Training Center in Boulder, Colorado.²⁶ During the indoor season, the Pantherettes captured the Prairie View Winter Relays, Houston Baptist Relays, and the SWAC Indoor Championships. Prairie View scored 138 points at the SWAC championships.²⁷ Senior, Essie Kelley won the 800m and 1000m, and anchored the mile relay team. Karen Waddell won the shot put, Chestina Martin won the high jump, and Pat Jackson won the 600m run.²⁸

In the spring of 1980, the Pantherettes won their second straight track and field title at the TFA-USA Outdoor Championships in Wichita, Kansas. The mile relay team finished first with Dudley, Jackson, Melrose, and Kelley running the four different legs. Individually, Kelley won the 800m, Melrose placed first in the 400m hurdles, Jackson won the 400m, and Waddell finished first in the shot put.

In June of 1980, three Pantherettes qualified to compete in the Olympic Trials. Essie Kelley (800m), Debra Melrose (400m hurdles), and Pat Jackson (400m) competed in the trials at Oregon. Kelley finished sixth, losing her first race in 1980 in the finals and Pat Jackson lost in the semifinals. Melrose finished third in the finals, earning a spot on the Olympic team. However, Melrose was unable to compete at the Olympics because of the U.S. boycott of the Moscow Olympics.²⁹

²⁶ Barbara Jacket, interview by author, 1 July 1996.

²⁷ Henry Hawkins, *Women's Track Team Wins SWAC Title*, The Prairie View Panther, 7-12 February 1980, 1.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *PV Track Stars Shine at Olympic Trial in Oregon*, The Prairie View Panther, July 1980, 1.

Prairie View A&M women's track and field team, even though less dominant, was successful between 1977 and 1980. The addition of Karen Waddell and Chestina Martin competing in the shotput and discus gave Coach Jacket the kind of depth she needed on her team. With the implementation of Title IX, scholarships were readily available at most predominantly white schools, and competition became more intense at the AIAW championships. More of the predominantly white schools began track programs and were competing at the AIAW championships. The Pantherettes, not finishing in the top three during 1977 and 1978, may have been instrumental in Jacket's decision not to return to the AIAW championships. Instead, they attended the TFA-USA and AAU championships and were successful. Coach Jacket's decision not to take her team to the AIAW championships in 1979 and 1980 was reported to be for financial reasons. Coach Jacket believed that the TFA-USA and AAU meets were more important than the AIAW championships because they were based on an open policy which allowed club teams with nationally ranked athletes to compete with college teams. Also, since the TFA-USA and AAU meets allowed high school students to compete, this gave Coach Jacket an opportunity to scout these athletes for her own team.

In spite of Prairie View's size, the limited funds available for travel, the athletic facilities, and no additional coaching help, the Pantherettes more than held their own with most colleges in track and field. It does appear, however, that these factors may have accounted for Prairie View failing to be as successful with some of the larger and more financially secure universities in the meets dominated by the large, predominantly white schools during the late 1970's.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this research was to investigate the women's track team at Prairie View A&M University between 1972-1980 as a case study of track and field athletics at a historically black college. Prairie View was selected for the study, not only because of previous works on Tennessee State and Tuskegee women's track and field programs, but because Prairie View's story is worth telling. It is a remarkable account of how Barbara Jacket was able to organize a track and field team, beginning with five women in 1966, and mold the program into a national showcase. From that first season with only three meets, the team was competing in as many as twenty-eight meets a season by the early to mid-1970's. Coach Jacket did this without traveling to recruit, with limited scholarships, and on a restricted budget.

Through the years, in spite of the absence of recruiting, outstanding women athletes came to Prairie View to compete on its track and field team. Coach Barbara Jacket had five Olympians, Debra Sapenter, Carol Cummings, Andrea Bruce, Arthurine Gainer, and Debra Melrose, between 1972 and 1980. Also, in 1978 Prairie View's Essie Kelley had the fastest time in the 800m in the world. Many of the prospective athletes watched Prairie View win national championships, and then decided that they wanted to be a Pantherette. Many of those prospective athletes that attended Prairie View were quality athletes who could have competed successfully at larger schools. Because of outstanding athletes of this caliber and strong support from the college administration and the men's basketball and track coaches, Coach Jacket accomplished outstanding

successes.

Prairie View competed mostly against predominantly and historically black colleges during Coach Jacket's tenure, such as Jackson State and Alcorn State in Mississippi, Grambling State in Louisiana, and Texas Southern University and Southern University in Texas. Prairie View teams competed at meets that also accommodated various track clubs, from across the country that were composed of black and white, young and mature athletes. Examples of superior clubs were the Spikettes from Houston, Texas, and the Tigerbelles from Nashville, Tennessee. At the Texas Relays, Drake Relays, and the Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW) track and field championships, the Pantherettes competed against predominantly white schools as well as African-American institutions. In 1979 and 1980, Prairie View stopped competing in the AIAW championships because of the added expense of an expanded team that included the addition of throwers and jumpers on the team. The stronger opposing competition and the increase of scholarships due to Title IX at the predominantly white institutions may have played a part as well. Many other universities, and especially the larger predominantly white institutions, were increasing the number of athletic scholarships at a rate higher than Prairie View. Not only did scholarships increase at these universities, the facilities were better.

Prairie View also may have lost some good athletes to the University of Texas-Austin, and other well-known universities because of the "prestige" of attending large predominantly white institutions which offered a wide variety of academic programs. Also, with strong recruiting practices of larger universities such as the University of

Texas compared to Prairie View's policy of non-recruitment, it certainly was a factor in the eventual competitive discrepancies between the schools. According to the U.S. News and World Report, in 1978 less than 20% of black college students attended black schools.¹

Prairie View A&M University women's track and field team continued to be successful under the coaching of Barbara Jacket until the 1991 season. Ten years earlier, 1981, Prairie View women's teams began competing in the National Athletic Intercollegiate Association (NAIA). The Prairie View men's track and field team competed in the NAIA prior to 1981, so the women followed suit. The NAIA held championships for men and women in various sports. The NAIA is similar to the NCAA but most of the smaller institutions compete in the NAIA. The Pantherettes continued their success in the NAIA by winning the NAIA Outdoor track and field championships from 1982 to 1990, and winning the NAIA Indoor track and field championships in 1984, 1987, and 1991.²

Because of her success at Prairie View, Coach Jacket was named head coach for the 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games for women's track and field in 1989. In 1990 during the NAIA outdoor championships, Coach Jacket was offered the athletic directorship of the men and the women at Prairie View by the president of the university, and she accepted. Barbara Jacket was the first woman athletic director in the Southwest Athletic

¹ U.S. News and World Report, 20 November 1978, 93. They reported that only 214,000 of the estimated 1,062,000 black college students attended Historically Black Institutions.

² Barbara Jacket, interview by author, 20 March 1996.

director to combine this with full-time teaching duties. She coached one more year while serving in these roles, but the spring of 1991 ended her coaching duties with the Pantherettes.³

In 1995 Barbara Jacket, who received no additional compensation for her coaching or athletic directorship role, was relieved as athletic director following a change in the university administration at Prairie View. She resumed her teaching role as a professor in Health and Human Performance at Prairie View A&M University.⁴ The Pantherettes are coached by former Prairie View athlete and All-American Essie Kelley Washington.

Prairie View A&M women's track and field programs from 1972 to 1980 made a strong impact on women's intercollegiate track and field. By winning the AIAW championships in 1974 with only five athletes who set numerous records, the Pantherettes raised the standard for future track and field teams. These women athletes as led by Barbara Jacket left their imprint on the history of women's sport.

Recommendations for Further Study

Other areas of research concerning historically black institutions in athletics should be examined. There should be a comparative study on women athletes at Prairie View A&M, Tennessee State, and Tuskegee universities. There should be an investigation of those black athletes during the 1970's who chose to attend predominantly white institutions over historically black colleges and universities to determine what

³ Barbara Jacket, telephone interview by author, 1 July 1996.

⁴ *Ibid.*

forces were most persuasive in their decisions. More research is also needed on the early integration of track and field meets, and the effects that both integration and Title IX had on the athletic programs of historically black institutions.

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