

# STAYING ON TRACK

A&T's Jackson perseveres off the field

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

There is a popular chant uttered by North Carolina A&T athletes and fans.

The lyrics go like this: "O, O, O, it's soooo hard to be an Aggie, soooo hard to be an Aggie, it's sooo hard to be an A&T...Aggie."

While others sing it, N.C. A&T senior women's track and field athlete Jennifer Jackson experienced and lived the song out to its full meaning. The difficulty she endured to become an A&T...Aggie will pay off for the future proud alumnus after she received her bachelor's degree in criminal justice on May 10.

"I am extremely proud of Jennifer," said N.C. A&T assistant track and field coach James Daniels. "She challenged herself to do something that was not very easy, especially when she had other options."

During her career at N.C. A&T, Jackson competed in the 60 meters, 200 meters and 1600 relay events during indoor seasons. When she competed during the outdoor seasons, she competed in the 100, 200 and 400 meters and was a part of the 400 and 1600 meter relay teams. But her career as an Aggie lasted only two years.

Jackson started her career at Bowie State. When she competed in the Penn Relays in the spring of 2004, she spotted people in blue and gold uniforms complete with Aggie Pride and team cohesion. She saw the Aggies compete in the 1600 meter relay, an event she would eventually run for the Aggies, and was impressed at how well they competed against some of the bigger schools in the nation. And then there was that great Aggie appearance.

It wasn't as much a definite for the N.C. A&T admissions office and the NCAA. Jackson needed 19 course hours in order to become eligible to run at N.C. A&T. Jackson was left with the choice of attending N.C. A&T, which meant she would lose one year for transferring and another year in order to take the classes needed to become eligible. Or

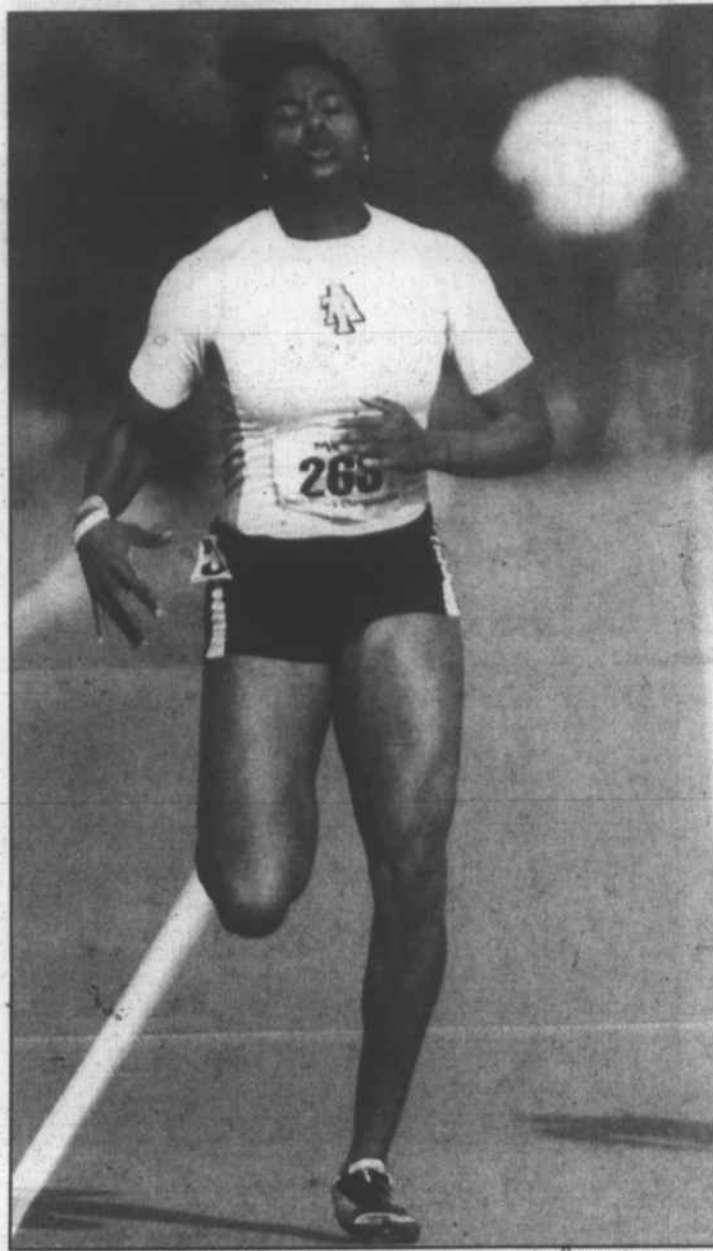


Photo by Charles Watkins

N.C. A&T's Jennifer Jackson will compete for a Regional title this weekend at Florida State University.

Jackson could attend another school with fewer academic standards and compete.

"I do not want to give the impression she was not a good student but her course load did not meet her academic needs," Daniels said. "I worked very closely with Jennifer and her family to map out a plan that she needed to follow to get here. I explained the disadvantage of her coming. I believe I earned Jennifer and her families' trust because they turned down other opportunities."

Jackson wanted the challenge. One look at the women's track and field team and it was evident director of track and field programs Roy "Spaceman" Thompson and Daniels were building a strong foundation with future national qualifiers Loreal Smith and Alexandria Spruiel. The Aggies also had other strong sprinters coming through such as Christina Gray and Carmenta Mitchell.

The most important component for Jackson, however, was that she knew she could attend

any school. She could make C grades there, remain eligible and compete for championships. She also knew from meeting Daniels he would challenge her academically and athletically, thus making her a better person when left Aggieland.

"Coach Daniels reviewed my transcripts and began to explain my academic shortcomings," said Jackson. "After we got past all my tears, coach Daniels made me a promise. If I came to North Carolina A&T he would make sure that I would get all the help I needed to obtain my degree. He was the only coach that I spoke to that was constantly reminding me about my purpose and doing something that many people thought I could not do - get a degree."

Jackson wasn't done shedding tears. She had to take numerous community college classes to obtain her eligibility. There were times when Jackson course load prompted her to call Daniels weeping over whether she could complete the task of becoming eligible. Jackson, who is not a distance runner, had to become one academically in order to reach the finish line of competing at N.C. A&T.

She endured the long race and began competing with the Aggies during the 2007 indoor season. Jackson will not only come away with a degree from N.C. A&T this spring, but during her career she and her 400 meter relay teammates won two consecutive MEAC Outdoor Championships. She is also a two-time NCAA East Regional qualifier and will compete in the East regional May 30-31 at Florida State University.

It might be so hard to be an Aggie...but it's worth it.

"I had been challenged before about my academics," said Jackson. "But this time was different because I knew (coach Daniels) was very serious about not letting me come to A&T and just get by. He expected me to apply myself as if I was in a track meet trying to win first place. It definitely was a life lesson that has made me a stronger person."



File photo

Wake's Steve Justice plays for the Indianapolis Colts.

## Grads

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Forest ranked seventh with an APR of 966.

This past April, the Wake Forest men's basketball team and men's track team received recognition from the NCAA for achieving academic marks that ranked in the top ten percent of Division I teams across the nation. Both Demon Deacon teams posted some of the top multi-year APR scores of all squads in their respective sports. The teams recognized this year represent 11.4 percent of the 6,272 Division I teams. A total of 192 Division I institutions had at least one team on the top APR list.

Wake Forest Student Athlete Services and the Academic Services team work diligently with professors, coaches, families and most importantly students, to help ensure that each individual student-athlete achieves success in the classroom. Academic Services offers academic counseling, an extensive tutoring program, academic monitoring, a monitored study hall, and programs to teach and instill good time management and organizational skills among its student athletes.



File photo

Kevin Marion is presently with the Pittsburgh Steelers.



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