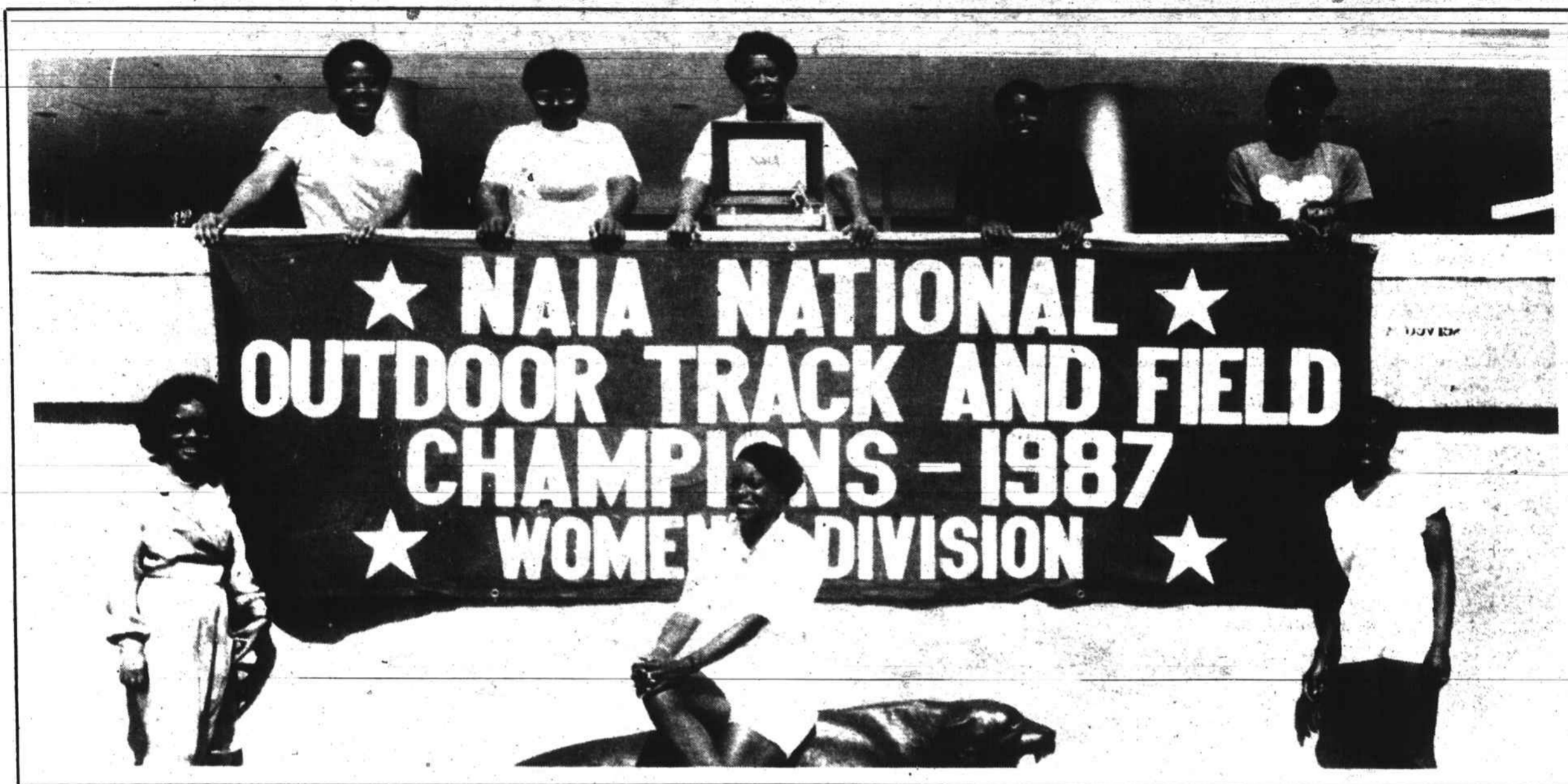


PROFILE



Above, from top left, champion Pantherettes Mia Bonds, Sharon Harrison, Coach Barbara Jacket, Patti Harris, Wanda Clay, and, bottom from left, Debo-

rah Thigpen, sports information director, Jocelyn Tatum and Evanne Williams pose with the visible fruits of their labors on the track.

Coach Barbara Jacket Celebrates

Pantherettes are NAIA champs for six straight years

By RANDY PETTITT
Review Staff Writer

Barbara Jacket can still remember the days when she had to wash cars and sell hot dogs to get her team to a track meet.

But some 20 years and six straight NAIA outdoor championships later, the head women's track coach at Prairie View A&M has become somewhat of a world traveler.

Jacket has come from starting the Prairie View dynasty with five physical education students in the back of her car, to being invited to coach some of the finest track talent in the world.

It took seven years, but after Prairie View's five-member women's track team made an impressive showing in the school's first national track meet in 1972, Jacket's flair for guiding young people caught the attention of her peers.

And a year later, as she strolled out to her mailbox in Prairie View, Texas, Jacket received the biggest surprise of her

coaching career -- an invitation to chaperone the United States women's junior national team during a one-month swing through West Germany, Poland and Russia.

"Getting that invitation is probably the most exciting thing in all my years of coaching," said Jacket, a 1958 graduate of Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. "When your peers give you an honor like that, it's pretty special."

The one-month stay with the U.S. women's team in '73 was just the beginning of bigger and better things to come for Jacket. In 1974 and '76, she was selected as manager of the United States women's track team in dual meets with the Soviet Union. She also served as an assistant at the World University Games in Sophia, Bulgaria, in 1977 and in Bucharest, Romania, in 1981.

Jacket was then selected as a head coach for the first time when she coached the South team to a championship in the 1983 (Olympic) Sports Festival in Colorado.

Two years later, she was awarded the

head coaching job of the U.S. women's team at the World University Games in Kobe, Japan.

But despite the crowning achievements by her peers and a portfolio of world travel, Jacket hasn't forgotten the pleasure of coaching at home -- Prairie View University.

"I get more joy out of helping young people than anything else I do," said Jacket. "That's what I'm all about -- watching my athletes get their degree on time and going out into the world to become successful adults.

"Seeing one of my former students get that job they dreamed of, or hearing they got married and are starting a family. That's the satisfaction I get -- helping young people."

With enough NAIA championship banners to drape a football field, Jacket had had quite a few offers to leave the relatively small (4500 students) Prairie View campus. But to the surprise of some, she has turned them all down.

"I'm not a materialistic person," she

explains, displaying a wide, pleasant smile.

"You might not believe this, but I don't get paid to coach. I'm really a volunteer and never desired to get paid.

"Oh, I've had some money offered to me by the big schools, but that's not what I'm all about."

Although Jacket sends an occasional athlete to the NCAA meets, she is content with the NAIA and other small college national gatherings.

"Some people insist on playing down the NAIA as being just a small college meet. But we are a small college -- one that likes to take on bigger schools occasionally. When you have a Rolls-Royce mind and a Volkswagen budget, you have to be realistic at times.

"But small school or not, I don't think my kids are second to anyone."

Second, in fact, is the lowest the Pantherettes have ever finished in a national meet. Winning track meets are a

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