

# PROFILE

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fact of life on the Prairie View campus and the school has grown accustomed to expect greatness from "Jacket's girls."

Some say it is her ability to get the most out of her athletes despite the odds - like winning the school's first national championship with just five athletes.

Jacket admits that winning the Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women, or AIAW, track and field title in 1974 over UCLA was quite an accomplishment for such a small group.

"We just went up there to compete," recalls Jacket of the school's first of 14 national track titles. "Taking only five girls, we really didn't expect to win the thing at all."

"But UCLA's strength was in distance running, whereas ours was in sprints and relays. Their coach came up to me and said, 'Hey, you know you guys might win this thing,' but I wasn't so easily convinced."

"We won a few events and the crowd started to get hyper and that sort of made us hyper too. The next thing I knew, we were the AIAW national champions."

With the same five athletes, the Lady Pantherettes upset UCLA again the following season by a slim margin.

The next two years they won national titles at the United States Track Federation championships.

In 1979 and '80, the Pantherettes won titles at the TFA/USA nationals.

After a runner-up finish in the inaugural NAIA meet in 1981, Prairie View and Jacket have dominated the small col-

two-day meet, Prairie View clung to a 34-32 lead and was unsure of what was to come.

Jacket, who compare training track and field athletes to preparing horses for the derby, admitted she was hesitant to predict the outcome of the '87 NAIA meet.

"The newspapers asked me and I told them that I don't like to predict," she said. "It's like a horse race, you just don't know. The horse you pick could fall coming out of the gate and be out of it."

It seems Jacket's horses have never failed her in the stretch, though, as Tatum and Williams led a 2-3-7 finish in the 200 meters and Luckett led a 1-2 sweep in the 400 for the victory. The championship string remained intact and Jacket was ready to return home "to play some cards."

The humble Jacket has always been associated with winning. Success dates all the way back to her days at Lincoln High School in the mid-1950s, where she first made her mark as a winner.

She threw the shot put for the Bumblebees and was a junior national champion in the women's baseball throw in 1952.

Upon graduation from Lincoln, she left her hometown of Port Arthur, Texas, and headed to Tuskegee Institute. She then came to Prairie View as an instructor in the physical education department in 1966.

It was in the P.E. classes that the idea of a women's track team emerged.

Jacket fondly remembers the birth of one of the nation's most successful wom-

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*-- Coach Barbara Jacket*

lege track scene with six consecutive outdoor national titles. They won it all in 1984 and this season by adding indoor titles to their credit.

With seniors Lavonda Luckett, Cathy Taylor, Jocelyn Tatum, Evanne Williams and Michelle Neal, Prairie View decimated Waylin Baptist 144-84 this season to keep the string of titles alive at six straight.

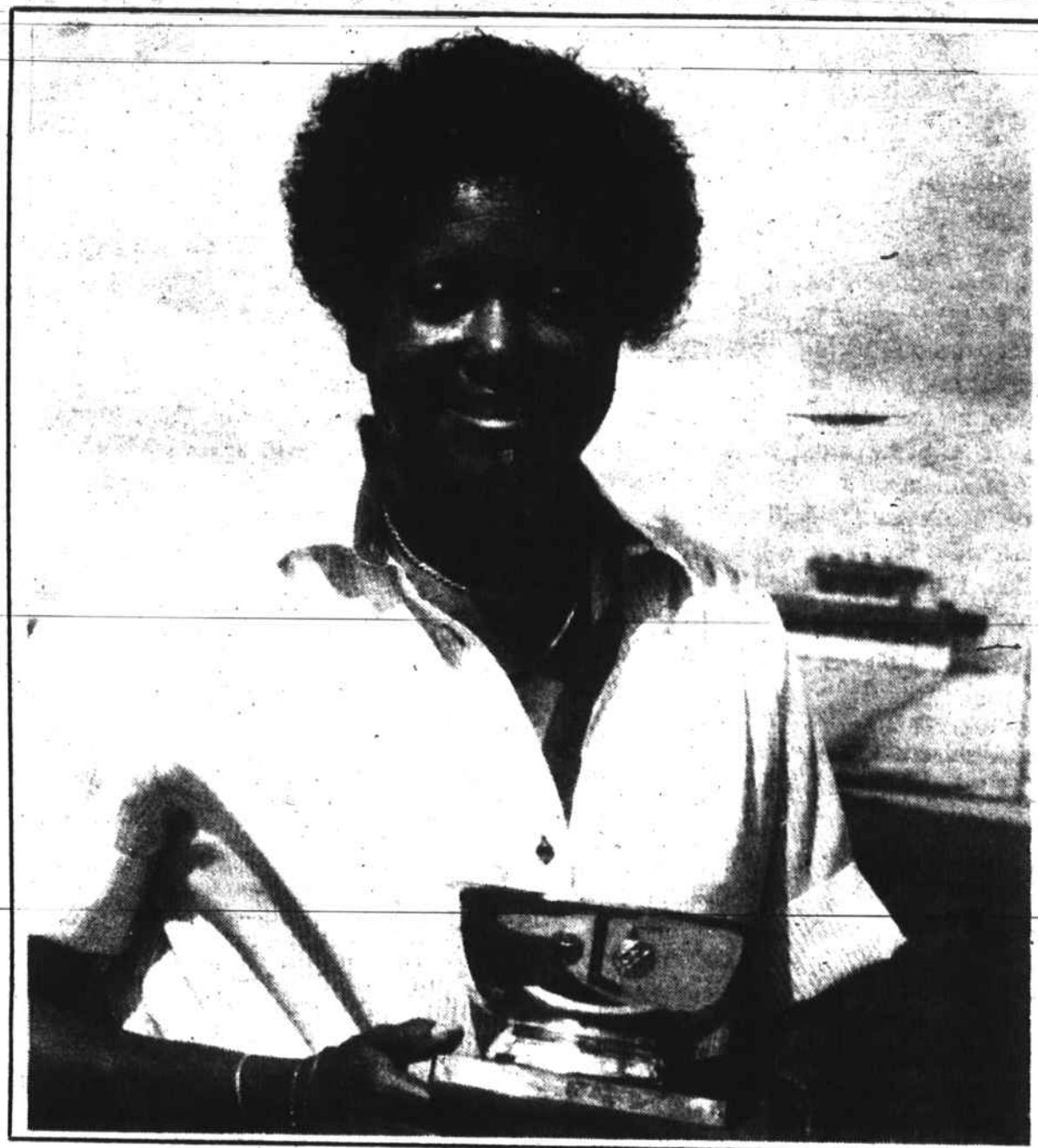
Yet entering the second day of that

en's programs in history.

"We (some female members of the P.E. program) just wanted some kind of team of our own," she recalled. "So we figured track would be the least costly because all we needed was some strong young legs and track spikes."

"We had the legs, and all we needed was uniforms and some travel money."

And quite a few washed cars and bake sales later, the Prairie View wom-



A smiling Coach Barbara Jacket holds her 1987 NAIA Coach of the Year cup.

en's team became as widely known and respected in the track and field circles as the men's team coached by Hoover Wright.

Jacket says the program has helped her to see the world, but more importantly, she has been able to help others see it in an entirely different light -- as an adult.

"I like being around young people. I like seeing them develop from one stage to another. Track is a good way to teach responsibility and discipline. If you don't work, you're going to get beat no matter how good you are."

"When I see freshmen coming in here undeveloped and unknowing and then leaving as mature, educated young ladies -- then I know I've done my job."

Sadly, Jacket has been toying with retiring from coaching track. She says that teaching will remain on her agenda, though.

"When it (coaching) ceases to get me excited, then I'll give it up," she said. "My heart is still with them. I run every race with the kids even if I'm not out

there on the track with them. I coach them hard in practice, but once it's time to race, then it's up to them."

"But even if I quit coaching, I still want to teach. I think I'll coach a while longer -- my heart still thumps every time they're rounding the fourth turn."

For now, Jacket is preparing to go to Rome to oversee the U.S. women's team at the World Outdoor Championships. She's looking forward to the trip.

"I've never been to Rome," said Jacket, who paid a visit to the Olympic Sports Festival last month in Raleigh, N.C. "But I had never been anywhere overseas until I started helping out these U.S. teams."

"I just thank the Lord for blessing me with the ability to achieve what I have."

Prairie View A&M University undoubtedly is thankful to be blessed with her talent as well.

A simple word would suffice in describing Barbara Jacket -- a winner.

Randy Pettitt is sports editor of the Winston-Salem (N.C.) Chronicle.