

Black college baseball didn't produce a lot of eye-opening surprises this past season. Three of the four conference races ended the way league observers felt they would when they made their pre-season predictions.

Jackson State took the SWAC, Florida A&M ruled the MEAC and Norfolk State captured top honors in the CIAA. The SIAC, however, had the surprise victor this year.

Paine College now wears that league's title belt. The Lions responded with a winning effort, which was fueled by their come back from the loser's bracket. They defeated Albany State twice in the double elimination championship finale.

Still, with the exception of Norfolk State, no black college team made an appearance in the post-season playoffs.

In the Division II North Atlantic Regionals, the Spartans made it past the first round, but were then eliminated when they dropped an 8-7 decision to Philadelphia Textiles in 13 innings on the following day. Had NSU won two of the three games vs. Philly Text, they would've earned a trip to the College World Series played in Montgomery, Ala.

Nevertheless, black college baseball provided its share of stellar performances, both team-wise and individually.

For example, Maryland-Eastern Shore's Ira "Dude" Smith led the nation in hitting for the second straight year (.519). Southern University's Frankie Watts was also rated among the top hitters (No. 19 at .421). Stacey Brown of Tennessee State struck fear in the heart of opposing pitchers and catchers as one of the premier base thieves. He ended the year positioned in the No. 9 slot nationally (34 steals in 38 attempts).

The following is a rundown of season highlights for each league champion along with other tidbits concerning other teams and players in those conferences.



The Tigers (33-16-1) were tough because of their pitching. As a unit, JSU's pitching staff ranked among the nation's best. Their 2.69 ERA was No. 2 in Division I. Only the Miami (Fla.) Hurricanes were more proficient in that category (staff ERA of 2.57).

Dwayne Donnell and Michael Lynch proved themselves as prime-time deliverers. Both had 6-1 records on the mound.

Of the team's four most active pitchers (based on innings pitched), Donnell (75 1/3 innings pitched) gave up the fewest hits -- 43, had three saves, and struck out 43 batters.

Lynch allowed the fewest runs -- earned or unearned (21) of the team's four most active hurlers. Of the 21 runs allowed, only 13 were earned, giving him a shining 2.31 ERA for 50 2/3 innings pitched.

But those two weren't the complete story.

Karl Dunson (6-6) was second on the team in innings pitched (74 2/3) next to Don-

nell. His won-loss record is somewhat deceiving, considering that he fanned 69 batters while walking 34. His 2.29 ERA was the best on the team.

There's more however. Theodore Hassan (6-4) and Dan Magee (6-3) proved to be solid contributors throughout the season. Magee demonstrated his mastery over batters as the team's strike-out artist. In 79 innings pitched, he struck out 81 batters, walked 43 and didn't issue one home run all year.

Offensively, the Tigers put pressure on opposing pitchers with a devastating running game. JSU stole 241 bases last season -- an average of 4.8 per contest.

Jim Davenport and Bob Braddy Jr. were the chief bandits. Davenport (No. 8 nationally) finished the year with 43 swipes in 48 attempts. Braddy, the son of Jackson head coach Robert Braddy, recorded 39 steals in 50 attempts.

Jerome Edwards could be the most complete offensive player for JSU. In 45 games this past season, the junior outfielder hit .333, led the team in hits (52) and was second in doubles (11). He also hit four homers and stole 32 bases in 37 attempts.

In the conference tournament, Jackson did things the hard way. They had to battle back from the loser's bracket to whip Grambling twice to win their second straight SWAC title.

Ironically, it was Grambling who put Jackson State in the losers' bracket, handing the defending champs a 7-6 defeat in the opening round of the tourney, which was held at Natchez, Miss.

But in the final game of the championship, JSU broke a 3-3 tie in the top of the sixth inning, scoring three runs to put the game away. Grambling added their final run in the bottom of the seventh as JSU took a 6-4 decision.

Jackson State tied the game in the top of the fifth, when Ron Lockett scored on a sacrifice fly by Melvin Dilworth.

Grambling took the early lead in their half of the first when Carlton Hardy doubled to score Morey Jones. Hardy, a sophomore, enjoyed a productive year at the plate, finishing up with a .415 average (No. 27 in NCAA stats).

But Jackson responded by taking a 2-1 lead in the second. Ricky Bush hit a double that scored Sammy Richardson and Dilworth tripled to bring Bush home.

The G-Men retaliated to go up 3-2 in their half of the fourth. Augustus Brown scored on a wild pitch and David Edwards' sacrifice enabled Jeffrey Gunn to score.

Shannon Wilson was the winning pitcher for JSU, while Greg Rideau suffered the loss for Grambling.

In the first game, Jackson State broke open a tight game with a three-run burst in the eighth inning to win 6-3.

With score tied at 1-1, JSU started their surge when second-baseman Braddy came home on a single by James Edwards. With Edwards and Davenport on base, Richardson slapped a double for two RBIs, giving his team a 4-1 cushion.

GSU rebounded with two runs of their own in their portion of the eighth. Rideau tripled to score Harry Brown and Hardy. Jack-

son State added two runs in the ninth to close out the scoring.



To the victors go the spoils. And that's the way it is for Paine's Lions, the new SIAC champions.

The Lions captured the tournament title by throttling Albany State with back-to-back wins after falling into the loser's bracket earlier in the league playoffs, played at Tuskegee, Ala.

After dropping a 6-1 verdict to the Rams in the first game of the final day of play, PC roared back to capture two straight wins (both by identical 5-3 scores) to settle the issue once and for all.

Pitcher Wayne Averhart was the major catalyst for PC as tournament MVP. He was the winning pitcher in both of the Lions' triumphs that gave them the championship trophy. In game six, Averhart allowed three runs on four hits, with five strike-outs.

Then, with only 25 minutes' rest between games, Averhart took the mound again in the championship finale. He faced 27 batters and limited the Rams to three runs and five hits, while striking out four and walking two.

In the seventh and final game, Averhart got all the help he needed when Terrell England smacked a two-run homer in the fifth inning to give Paine a commanding 4-1 lead. PC added another run in the bottom of sixth to close out their offense for the day.

Albany, in the meantime, launched their comeback bid. They pushed two runs across in their half of the seventh inning. But the Rams' efforts were rendered null and void when Averhart fanned Jim Pegues to end the game with a runner on base.

England's play in the championship final was not a major surprise in this tournament. He was the winning pitcher in Paine's 8-3 win over Tuskegee University, a victory that catapulted the Lions into the championship round vs. Albany State.

PC opened the tournament with a 9-3 win over LeMoyne-Owen College, then fell to the losers' bracket when they lost to the Rams.



This had been an especially exasperating

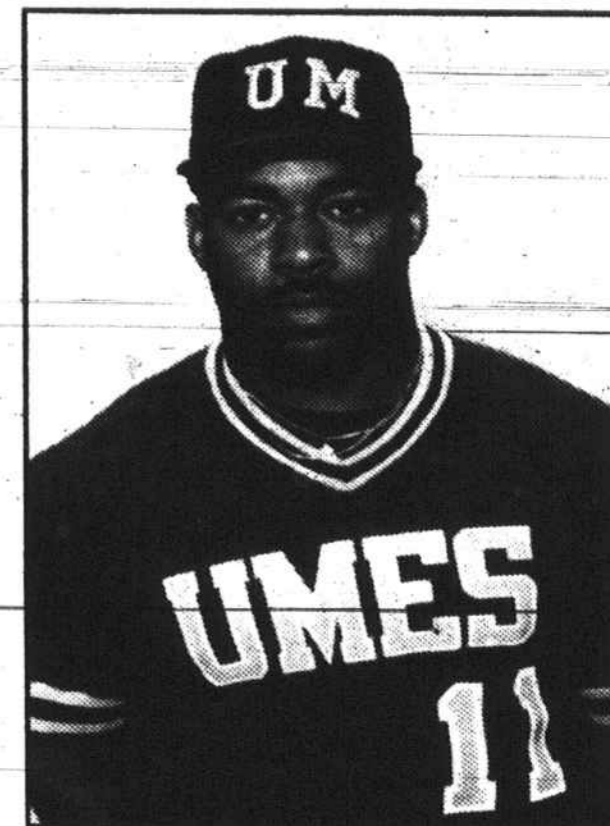


Photo Courtesy of Maryland-Eastern Shore
UMES' Ira Smith led the nation in hitting for the second straight year. "The Dude" ended the season with a .519 average.

season for Florida A&M. But in the end, the young Rattlers did the job when they had to in winning the MEAC title. It was their third in the last four years.

FAMU saved their best for last in the conference tournament, sweeping all four games. They body slammed Maryland-Eastern Shore (8-1), KOed defending champ Delaware State (9-3), then dumped the Howard Bison twice by scores of 10-6, 9-3 in the championship finals.

Coach Robert Lucas' club finished the year at 18-18-1. In A&M's case, their win as many games as you lose slate, mirrored their rollercoaster season.

After some brief success early in the season, they were involved in an eight game losing skid, reversed that by winning seven in a row, but then they dropped seven consecutive games. They pulled to within one game of the .500 mark (14-15-1) with a four game victory string. Still, they entered the tournament at 14-18-1.

Youth was a prime factor contributing to A&M's inconsistency. Half the team was composed of rookies. At one point during the season, as many as six freshmen found themselves thrust into the starting lineup. As a result, much of the leadership role fell into the lap of senior catcher Stacey Pough, who ended the year ranked among the nation's Top 20 hitters with a .419 average. Pough also belted five homers and drove in 32 runs.

Aside from Pough, the Rattlers got a very solid year out of sophomore outfielder Mike Ray, who batted .354. But Ray made it his business to hassle pitchers once he reached base. In 33 games, he stole 31 bases and was caught only three times in the process. Those stats put him in the No. 4 spot among Division I steal leaders.

Pough and Ray's value to the Rattlers was evident in the finals against the Bison. Pough went two for four (one homer, one triple) and had three RBIs. Ray, on the other hand, went two for two with two RBIs. He drew three walks and scored twice himself.

Nevertheless, it's still tough to win with-