

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with William Maurice Bennett

PERSON

Bennett, William M., 1915-
2007

Alternative Names: William Maurice Bennett;

Life Dates: October 15, 1915-June 7, 2007

Place of Birth: Richmond, Virginia, USA

Residence: Chicago, Illinois

Occupations: College Track Coach; College Football
Coach

Biographical Note

Distinguished athlete and coach William Maurice Bennett was born on October 15, 1915 in Richmond, Virginia. His mother worked in a tobacco factory and his father was a barber. His parents separated when he

was a small child and his mother moved to Hampton and remarried. Bennett received his early education in Richmond at the Moore Street school until he moved to Hampton to live with his mother. He earned his high school diploma from I.C. Norcom High School in Portsmouth, Virginia, where he was a stellar track and football athlete. While in high school he set a state record for the 440 that stood for twenty years. Following his high school graduation, Bennett attended Virginia State University on a football scholarship. While at VSU, Bennett won two CCAA track championships, honors in the Penn Relays, three varsity letters in football and was selected to play in the College All-Star game against the Chicago Bears in 1941. Bennett received his bachelor's of science degree in physical education in 1941. That same year he was also drafted into the army and stationed at Ft. Lee, Virginia. He served in the military until 1945, and while a soldier he developed an interest in boxing and was named the lightweight boxing champion. Following his honorable discharge from the army, Bennett earned his masters degree in education from Columbia University in 1946.

Shortly after marrying in 1946, Bennett received a job as a biology teacher and football coach at Phenix High School in Hampton, Virginia. He left Phenix in 1953 when he was offered the head football and track coach position at his alma matter Virginia State.

Bennett coached football and track at Virginia State for over thirty years, a duration in which he coached nearly 50 All-Americans including Wilber "Pony" Wilson. In 1954, under Bennett's leadership, Wilson broke the long jump record and qualified for the Olympic Trials. Bennett also led the VSU Trojans to victory in ten conference championships and two CCAA championships. Bennett was named Coach of the Year in 1962, 1972, 1977, 1979 and 1983. In 1982, Bennett was inducted into the CCAA Hall of Fame.

Bennett passed away on June 6, 2007 at age 91.

Related Entries

I.C. Norcom High School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Virginia State University [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

George Washington Carver Elementary School
[STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

United States Army [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 2004 to 2007]

Phenix High School [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1946 to 1953]

Teacher and Football Coach

Virginia State University [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1953 to 1986]

Head Football and Track Coach

Omega Psi Phi [MEMBEROF]
[from 1940 to ?]

Member

St. Stephen's Episcopal Church [MEMBEROF]
[from 1953 to ?]

Vestry Member

Beaux Twenty Club [MEMBEROF]
[from 1954 to ?]

Member

Benedict Club [MEMBEROF]
[from 1955 to ?]

Member