

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with William Maurice Bennett

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## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	Bennett, William M., 1915-2007
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with William Maurice Bennett,
<b>Dates:</b>	July 22, 2004 and October 13, 2004
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2004
<b>Physical Description:</b>	16 Betacame SP videocassettes (7:44:45).
<b>Abstract:</b>	College track coach and college football coach William Maurice Bennett (1915 - 2007 ) was recognized by the Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association hall of fame for his work as head football and track and field coach at Virginia State University. In his thirty-year career, Bennett coached nearly fifty All-Americans, won ten conference championships and two CIAA championships. Bennett was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 22, 2004 and October 13, 2004, in Ettrick, Virginia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2004_106
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

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 CIAA 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 CIAA championships. Bennett was named Coach of the Year in 1962, 1972, 1977, 1979 and 1983. In 1982, Bennett was inducted into the CIAA Hall of Fame.

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

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with William Maurice Bennett was conducted by Racine Tucker Hamilton on July 22, 2004 and October 13, 2004, in Ettrick, Virginia, and was recorded on 16 Betacame SP videocassettes. College track coach and college football coach William Maurice Bennett (1915 - 2007 ) was recognized by the Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association hall of fame for his work as head football and track and field coach at Virginia State University. In his thirty-year career, Bennett coached nearly fifty All-Americans, won ten conference championships and two CIAA championships.

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# Restrictions

## Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

## Restrictions on Use

All use of materials and use credits must be pre-approved by The HistoryMakers®. Appropriate credit must be given. Copyright is held by The HistoryMakers®.

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## Related Material

Information about the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview, as well as correspondence with the interview subject is stored electronically both on The HistoryMakers® server and in two databases maintained by The HistoryMakers®, though this information is not included in this finding aid.

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## Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

### Persons:

Bennett, William M., 1915-2007

Hamilton, Racine Tucker (Interviewer)

Lane, Edgar Carey (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

## **Organizations:**

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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Virginia State University

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Virginia State University

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## **Occupations:**

College Track Coach

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College Football Coach

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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

SportsMakers

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## **Administrative Information**

### **Custodial History**

Interview footage was recorded by The HistoryMakers®. All rights to the interview have been transferred to The HistoryMakers® by the interview subject through a signed interview release form. Signed interview release forms have been deposited with Jenner & Block, LLP, Chicago.

### **Preferred Citation**

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with William Maurice Bennett, July 22, 2004 and October 13, 2004. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue,

Chicago, Illinois.

## Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 2/5/2020 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

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## Other Finding Aid

A Microsoft Access contact database and a FileMaker Pro tracking database, both maintained by The HistoryMakers®, keep track of the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with William Maurice Bennett, Section A2004\_106\_002\_001, TRT: 0:30:57 2004/10/13

William Maurice Bennett was born on October 15, 1915 in Richmond, Virginia. His mother, Grace Welcher Bennett, was born in Hanover County, Virginia, and moved to Richmond at eighteen to work in a tobacco factory and as a domestic servant. Bennett was raised by his maternal aunt Beetie, due to his mother working long hours. Bennett's stepfather, Arthur Bennett, was from the Caribbean and worked as a cook for officers in the U.S. Navy. As a child, Bennett was fascinated by the police and fire departments due to the sound of the sirens and the vital, exciting responsibilities they had. He grew up in an African American neighborhood on Leigh Street in Richmond, around many schools and stores. Many of his neighbors worked in the tobacco factories. Bennett attended Moore Street School, where he was a troublemaker and took interests in math and biology. His Aunt Beetie was very religious, and Bennett attended Moore Street Missionary Baptist Church, where he was

active in the Baptist Young People's Union.

Video Oral History Interview with William Maurice Bennett, Section A2004\_106\_002\_002, TRT: 0:30:42 2004/10/13

William Maurice Bennett moved to Portsmouth, Virginia with his mother at the age of thirteen, due to his stepfather's job with the U.S. Navy. Bennett attended I.C. Norcom High School in Portsmouth, where he set a state record in the 440-yard dash and played halfback on the football team. His track career was inspired by a neighbor who was his high school coach, Coach Waters. Bennett graduated high school in 1936 and attended Virginia State College in Petersburg, Virginia on a football scholarship. He majored in physical education, played halfback for football coach Harry "Big Jeff" Jefferson and competed in two Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association championships as a sprinter for the track team. In 1941, Bennett graduated college and played in the Chicago Charities College All-Star Game against the Chicago Bears. He was drafted into the U.S. Army later that year, where he was inspired by the success of Joe Louis to train and become a lightweight boxing champion.

Video Oral History Interview with William Maurice Bennett, Section A2004\_106\_002\_003, TRT: 0:31:22 2004/10/13

William Maurice Bennett married his wife in 1946. The same year, he got his first job as a football and track coach, and physical education teacher at the George P. Phenix School, which was Hampton University's laboratory school. In 1953, when his former coach Harry "Big Jeff" Jefferson retired, Bennett was hired to coach football and track at his alma mater, Virginia State College in Petersburg. One of his star athletes was Wilbur "Pony" Wilson, who broke the college's long jump record and competed at the U.S. Olympic trials in 1954. Over multiple decades, Bennett led Virginia State to ten conference championships in football. He remembers the heightened atmosphere surrounding Virginia State's games against its rival, Hampton University. Bennett was influenced by both Jefferson and his high school coach, Coach Waters, in developing his style. He focused diligently on scouting his opponents before games, and was awarded as Coach of the Year in the Central

Intercollegiate Athletic Association five times.

Video Oral History Interview with William Maurice Bennett, Section A2004\_106\_002\_004, TRT: 0:30:12 2004/10/13

William Maurice Bennett describes the attributes and personal qualities that he looks for when determining whether to recruit a potential athlete. Bennett considers the battle between historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and majority white universities in recruiting young athletes, and notes the lack of support given to athletic programs at HBCUs by the State of Virginia. He states his belief that some athletes stand to benefit from attending HBCUs, but others would be better developed at other universities. Bennett considers how the quality of coaching is not simply measured by wins and losses, but by the maturation of athletes within a program. He describes how he would like to be remembered and offers advice for those interested in becoming coaches.

Video Oral History Interview with William Maurice Bennett, Section B2004\_106\_001\_001, TRT: 0:31:10 2004/07/22

Video Oral History Interview with William Maurice Bennett, Section B2004\_106\_001\_001E, TRT: 0:31:10 2004/07/22

Video Oral History Interview with William Maurice Bennett, Section B2004\_106\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:24 2004/07/22

Video Oral History Interview with William Maurice Bennett, Section B2004\_106\_001\_002E, TRT: 0:30:24 2004/07/22

Video Oral History Interview with William Maurice Bennett, Section B2004\_106\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:36 2004/07/22

Video Oral History Interview with William Maurice Bennett, Section B2004\_106\_001\_003E, TRT: 0:29:36 2004/07/22

Video Oral History Interview with William Maurice Bennett, Section B2004\_106\_001\_004, TRT: 0:31:12 2004/07/22

Video Oral History Interview with William Maurice Bennett, Section B2004\_106\_001\_004E, TRT: 0:31:12 2004/07/22

Video Oral History Interview with William Maurice Bennett, Section B2004\_106\_001\_005, TRT: 0:30:17 2004/07/22

Video Oral History Interview with William Maurice Bennett, Section B2004\_106\_001\_005E, TRT: 0:30:17 2004/07/22

Video Oral History Interview with William Maurice Bennett, Section  
B2004\_106\_001\_006, TRT: 0:18:07 2004/07/22

Video Oral History Interview with William Maurice Bennett, Section  
B2004\_106\_001\_006E, TRT: 0:18:07 2004/07/22