TRACK

Black colleges fare well in '86 King Games

By CRAIG T. GREENLEE
Special To The Review

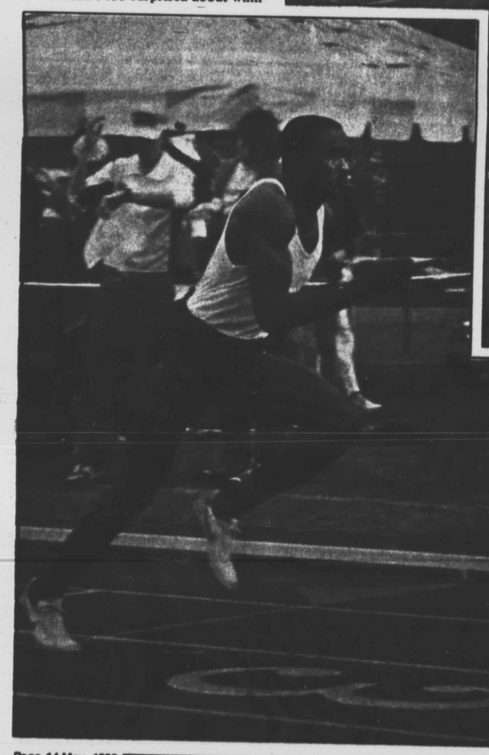
Black-college tracksters more than held their own at the recent Martin Luther King Jr. International Freedom Games, winning seven events in a field that included some of the prime talent in the nation and the world.

In the men's competition, Florida A&M's Reggie Davis claimed victory in the 400-meter intermediate hurdles, taking advantage of Tony Rambo's fall between the ninth and 10th hurdles with a 49.71 clocking. Rambo, ranked among the world's Top 10 last year, found himself locked in a tight duel with Davis as the two came down the final stretch.

Davis is no stranger to rankings, either, having recorded the third-fastest time in the nation in '85 (48.90). But even though Rambo was heavily favored, Davis was confident he could pull off the mild upset.

"I wasn't too surprised about winning," he says, "but I was surprised to draw lane seven. However, I just made the adjustments because I was the rabbit on the occasion.

"At the start, I went out, my cadence wasn't right, and suddenly Rambo caught up with me quickly. So I just paced myself off of his race. Then, as we were coming home, he made an error and I corrected mine and that helped me to come out on top."



Tough Tigers

Above, Adina Valdez anchors the Jackson State 4X400 women's relay team. Below, JSU's Oslen Barr, whose fast finishes keyed the Tiger men in the 800 meters and the 4X400 relay (photos by Craig T. Greenlee).

The Rattler hurdler also competes in the 110-meter highs but said he doesn't favor one race over the other. However, he was quick to add that he'll devote all of his time to the intermediates for the remainder of the outdoor season. Davis also placed third in this year's high hurdles race.

With all of his concentration going to the intermediates, Davis said he plans to launch a major challenge against the best as the NCAA championships approach. "I have to go for the number one man, which is Danny Harris," he said. Harris, of Iowa State, was an Olympic medalist at the '84 games in Los Angeles and is expected to be one of the runners to push Edwin Moses in the next few years. His going against Harris and Henry Amike of Nigeria, he added, should make for some outstanding races. Amike is also a world-class athlete who finished eighth in last year's world rankings and was runner-up in the '85 NCAA championships.

In the 800, spectators were treated to an exciting finish as Jackson State's Oslen Barr accelerated at the 200-meter mark to win in 1:48.36. The win was Barr's third straight at the King Games since the meet moved to Atlanta three years ago.

The middle-distance runner from Guyana is known for his speedy bursts near the end of the race. At the start, he was content to let the frontrunners seize the lead. But when the gun fired for the final lap, he steadily moved up in the pack to set the stage for his racehorse kick. A jubilant Barr crossed the finish line in a classic "I'm number one" pose directed at trackside photographers. Barr also holds the meet record (1:46.42 in '84) and used his final-curve dash to anchor the Jackson State 4x100 relay team to a second-place finish behind Seton Hall.

Black-college women enjoyed a particularly strong day with victories in the open 400, both relays and two field events.

Rochelle Stevens of Morgan State walked away with a first in the metric quarter in 51.90, despite being placed in the slowest heat. Stevens was under control for the entire distance and has shown tremendous improvement over her personal best in '85 (53.31). Alice Jackson, a Grambling alumna who now competes for the Police Athletic League, was second, even though she won her heat, which was presumably the swiftest.

The 4x100 relay was expected to be a race between the University of Georgia and Alabama A&M University, NCAA

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Because Young uses so much strength when she runs, she likely could fare well at 400 meters. Coach Henderson says his prize-winner could make the adjustment with no problems. "People don't know it, but she is a good quarter-miler," her coach says. "We've run her in the quarter and each time she's run 52 seconds or better. We don't run her in the 400 much because she's so good in the 200."

The A&M all-America laughs when asked about tackling the 400 and says she can handle it if she chooses. "It's not too long and I'm not afraid of it," she says. "It's just that I haven't trained for the open quarter. Running a relay split and running the open 400 are different. If I trained for the 400, I would run it to see what I could do in order to build up my speed for the 200."

Young attended the same high school as Olympic gold and silver medalist Chandra Cheeseborough, who is several years her senior. Young looks up to Cheeseborough and believes the day is nearing when she'll pose a serious threat to her homegirl and other elite runners. "By '87, I'll be ready," Young says.

In a twist of fate, Young broke Cheeseborough's meet record for the 200 at the Tigerbelle Invitational in Nashville last month. Young ran a 23.1 to eclipse Cheeseborough's 23.3, set in 1979. Young says she was thrilled to break her record and looks to accomplish more on a national and world scale as she matures.

"I've run against 'Cheese' in several meets, including the '84 Olympic Trials," Young says. "She has really helped me out a lot. When I do run against her, I keep my eyes on her so I can better my time to get closer to her time."

During her first two years, obscurity wrapped around Young like a blanket, but things have changed since then, especially this year. Now, she points out, more people know who she is and her competition often seeks her out at meets, wanting to know if she'll be running in the same races, and if so, if she's in the same heat. "When I was a sophomore, nobody knew me or recognized me until I started peaking out and doing what I do best," she says.

Alabama A&M, much less any other school, almost didn't get the opportunity to refine Young's skills. It took a masterful selling job by Henderson to convince his star-to-be that A&M would be the best place for her to pursue her academic and athletic careers.

Recalls Henderson: "She stayed out of school a year after high school to have a kid, so we told her that it would be best if she went ahead and educated herself. That way, the possibilities for her would be far greater because she would have a marketable skill that would pay off for her in the future."

She initially didn't plan to go to school because of her son (Dyshann Mack, 5), Young says. "I wanted to be with him and be a mother to him," she says, "but then I started having second thoughts and figured that what I can't do for him now, I'll be able to do later after I graduate from college. So I talked it over with my mother and decided to come to A&M."

Young wants to become one of the world's elite dashers by the time 1988 rolls around. Time is on her side, says her coach. "She certainly isn't burned out," Henderson says. "She didn't run that much in high school and we don't burn our runners out. So she has a lot of good years left in her. I'm sure she'll run 11.0 this year, and if she doesn't, she's going to come awfully close."

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Division II national champs and record-holders from last year. But the confrontation never materialized when Gwen Torrence, Georgia's star sprinter, pulled a hamstring while running her leg of the relay. Meanwhile, Morgan State's quartet (Wendy Vereen, Stevens, Ramone Riley and Ethlyn Tate) surprised the field to win in 44.72. The event was the only one swept by black colleges that day, as Alabama A&M finished second and Prairie View was third.

The thrills continued in the 4x400 as Jackson State finally pulled away to win in 3:33.54, setting a new meet record that had been owned by Grambling since 1984.

The race turned into a two-team contest between the Lady Tigers and Bronx International, a New York-based track club composed mostly of Jamaicans. By the start of the third leg, Jackson State had taken control and, when Adina Valdez brought the stick home, teammates Jillian Ford, Dawn Salazar and Marlene Jack shared the ecstasy.

Prairie View captured the two field events. Michelle Neal won the triple jump, bettering her personal mark by ¼ inch with a 40-foot, 3-inch effort. She enjoyed a very productive indoor season and proved that her indoor performances weren't flukes. Women are competing in the triple jump for the first time this year. The American record is 44 feet, 6¼-inches.

Sharon Harrison proved to be the best in the discus with a heave of 145 feet, 4 inches, in what is a new event for her. She also finished second in the shot put.

With the Goodwill Games slated for July and the Pan American Games coming up in '87, it looks as if there will be ample representation of black colleges at national championships and in qualifying meets that will decide who represents America on a world-class level.

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COMMENTARY

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was an outright lie. Anything negative, they find."

They must have found a truckload of negatives for Totten's stock to drop the way it did. One scouting combine rated him the No. 5 quarterback in the draft and projected him as a backup. Others had him in the top 10.

For him to slide completely out of the draft is inexplicable. What are the clubs paying them for if they don't trust their judgment?

Actually, Totten's stock began falling when he appeared in the Blue-Gray All-Star Game in December. He had a bad outing, and people began wondering.

That is interesting, because scouts in the past have said that prospects can only help themselves in all-star games. Poor performances won't cause them to slide.

So why the sudden change in rules?

Maybe it was to fit who was the playing the game.

Aside from racism, the most obvious explanation for Totten's not being drafted would be involvement with drugs. Totten is not the all-American boy next door who is pure as the driven snow, but neither is he a dopehead.

Even if he were, that's no reason not to draft him. Fifty-seven prospects tested positive for drugs during a combine workout in New Orleans. At least 26 of those were drafted, including Southern Cal offensive tackle James FitzPatrick on the first round by the San Diego Chargers.

As an analyst so aptly put it during ESPN's draft telecast, "They're not looking for choirboys. They're looking for people who can play the game."

Totten certainly meets that qualification.

He'll probably get the chance to prove it. Some team will come around looking for cheap labor and wave a free-agent contract in his face. Naturally, he'll sign it because, like every athlete who ever put on a jock strap and shoulder pads, his dream is to play in the NFL.

Immediately after the draft, Totten and agent George Allen Jr. were holed up in Phoenix, Ariz., plotting strategy. He has a couple of options other than the NFL open to him.

He can go with the United States Football League, but that league appears to be living on borrowed time.

Also there's the Canadian Football League. But his style is not suited to the Canadian game, which puts a premium on mobility and throwing on the move.

"I'd tell him to sit still," said Cooley. "He has his degree. He can always work for me. If he doesn't get anything, go to work. That'll last a lot longer than some football players."

Advice here to Willie Horace Totten is to tell the NFL to kiss where the sun don't shine. That's what it told him on Draft Day.

ALUMNI

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thinking for quite a while about someday opening an academy to teach young people the fundamental skills of various sports.

But his daughter, Damita C. Miles, a Howard freshman management student, says, "It's time for daddy to take a break."