

How Athletics Make Millsaps a Stronger Academic Institution

Millsaps College is proud of its deserved reputation for academic excellence. *U.S. News & World Report's America's Best Colleges 2006* has recognized Millsaps as one of the top-tier liberal arts colleges in the nation, a ranking that makes Millsaps the top institution in Mississippi, Louisiana, and Alabama and one of the top five colleges in the South. *Barron's Best Buys in College Education* ranks Millsaps College as just that. Loren Pope's *40 Colleges That Change Lives* has also recognized Millsaps College.

Colleges that do not offer athletic scholarships are often reluctant to give prominence to their athletic programs because of myths that suggest athletics is detrimental to academics. Let's explore three of these commonly accepted myths.

Myth No 1: *Money spent on athletics takes money away from more worthwhile academic needs such as scholarships, endowed chairs, etc.* The Millsaps community takes pride in

a state-of-the-art turf football field and a new dressing room and weight room for football. A lighted baseball field commands a view from one of the highest points in Jackson, and there is a very real possibility that a new grandstand for this field will be built. Millsaps' new tennis courts and fast-pitch softball field are projected to have lights, a concession stand, rest rooms, and a new access road in the near future. Funds for these facilities came primarily from donors, rather than general Millsaps funds. These facilities serve as recruiting agents for the College, thus generating tuition that can support general Millsaps academic needs. The community also pays to use them. These facilities generate funds and scholar-athletes for the College; they do not take away from academic needs.

Myth No. 2: *Colleges prohibited from offering athletic scholarships circumvent such policies by offering athletic scholarships disguised as academic scholarships.* Millsaps College's various academic scholarships are based on clearly defined standards, emphasizing GPA,

SAT, or ACT scores, and letters of recommendation. The administration, the admissions department, and the faculty members of the admissions committee are clearly aware of the NCAA Division III regulations prohibiting athletic scholarships. Millsaps College unequivocally supports both the spirit and letter of these policies. There are athletes who have scholarships, but they are based on clearly defined academic merit. Millsaps College does not provide athletic scholarships in any form. Millsaps does provide scholarships for students who then take the initiative to participate in athletics.

Myth No. 3: *A successful athletic program contributes few academic benefits and little to the College or the athlete's education.* Millsaps athletes in general enjoy a 96 percent graduation rate, a higher graduation rate than the College in general. Millsaps College has won the David M. Halbrook Award, given annually to the college or university in Mississippi with the highest graduation rate, for seven straight years and 17 times in the last 21 years. Brad Chism, B.A. 1982, was



a Rhodes Scholar and a member of the 1980 undefeated football team.

Consider the highly successful baseball program at Millsaps and what it does for the College. Jim Page, B.S.Ed. 1986, is currently in his 15th season as head baseball coach. He has been SCAC Coach of the Year and has won 401 games, with 257 losses and one tie. His teams have been SCAC conference champions seven times in 16 years, while winning 11 Division SCAC championships during that time. His teams have qualified for regional competitions four times in 16 years. These regional competitions are the qualifying round for the NCAA Division III World Series.

The 1996 baseball team finished the season ranked 19th in the nation in NCAA Division III, according to the *American Baseball Association/Baseball America* final poll. This record qualifies Millsaps' baseball program as top tier, paralleling the academic rating of the College. Mike Highfill, B.S. 1998, was named to the ABCA All-American team that year, and he also earned recognition as All SCAC Player of the Year. He was named to the All South Region Team and the All South Region Tournament Team. Teddy Hymel, B.B.A. 1996, was named to the All South Region Team, as was Kirk Kinard, B.S. 1996. Kinard was also a previous SCAC Player of the Year and was signed by the Arizona Diamondbacks. Hymel was the SCAC Pitcher of the Year. Ten players on that team were named to the All SCAC team, while Mike Prejean, B.B.A. 1997, Mike Jefcoat, who attended Millsaps in 1995–96, and Thomas Beau Pollard, B.B.A. 1999, were named to the second team. Peter Austin, B.B.A. 1997, was drafted by the Pittsburgh Pirates.

These successes provide the College with name recognition, thus helping recruit scholar-athletes who wish to join a winning program. Successful sports programs are free

advertising for the College. Many of the donors for Millsaps facilities have been past athletes, and the many facilities enjoyed by the entire Millsaps community flow from their largess, a result of their love of participation in Millsaps athletics.

Millsaps athletics clearly helps the College, but what value did athletics and that team provide to academics?

Three of four seniors on that team are now physicians (Kinard, Chris Lawrence, B.S. 1996, and Robert Dews, B.S. 1996). One of the remaining two seniors is a successful businessman (Hymel) and the other, David Shelton, B.B.A. 1996, is a lawyer. One of the six juniors on that team, George (Tripp) Gillespie III, B.S. 1997, is a physician, and Chris McNeal, B.B.A. 1997, is in pharmaceutical sales in a managerial position. Prejean and Austin are accountants. One of the sophomores, Ben Jeffcoat, B.S. 1998, is a physician, while Kevin Wilson, B.B.A. 1998, is in business. Mike Highfill is a stockbroker for Morgan Stanley. The four freshmen on the team included Lane Walberg, B.B.A. 2000, who is now head of the Jackson YMCA.

These accomplishments suggest a synergism between athletics and scholarship. Colleges often tout their success in gaining access to professional school, and these athletes certainly succeeded in that regard and went on to successful and prestigious professions. Athletics has also served as a catalyst for converting those with little academic interest into scholars. This is typified by Carla Webb, B.S. 1997, SCAC Player of the Year in 1995–96. Webb played on a Lady Majors basketball team that progressed to the regional playoffs two years in a row. "Academics had always come easy to me in high school," Webb said, "but academics were not particularly interesting." Participating in athletics played a major role in her choice to attend Millsaps. This provided the

Journey Accepts Post At Canton Academy



Millsaps College Athletic Director Ron Journey, B.A. 1978, has officially resigned to accept the athletic director/head football coach position at Canton Academy in Canton, Mississippi. Journey has served as the athletic director at Millsaps for 13 years. During his

tenure as director of athletics, the College has made improvements to athletics facilities in excess of \$17 million—most of these enhancements were made possible by fund-raising efforts.

"Millsaps is so fortunate to have the support of many great alums and I will certainly miss them," Journey said. "I will miss Millsaps so much. It was truly a pleasure to work with such a great coaching staff and student athletes who were committed to excellence both academically and athletically."

Millsaps athletics thrived under the direction of Ron Journey. The College captured 15 Southern Collegiate Athletic Conference titles (nine outright, six divisional) and received a record 10 NCAA tournament bids. Journey also served as head football coach for the Majors from 1996 to 1999. In his first year as head coach, Journey went 8-2 and captured the SCAC title.

"Ron Journey had a spectacular run as the athletic director for Millsaps College," said Dr. Frances Lucas, president of the College. "While on his watch, we saw many upgrades in facilities and great wins for athletes on the field and in the classroom. Ron has advanced our athletic program to a new level. Most importantly, Ron will continue to be a loyal Millsaps Major as an active alumnus of the College and an enthusiastic booster of our teams."

Said Brit Katz, vice president and dean of students, "In his senior level administrative role, Ron has successfully guided men's and women's varsity athletics, planned for the expansion of new facilities, enhanced existing facilities, enthusiastically recruited scholar-athletes, supervised our award-winning coaches to numerous conference championships and NCAA tournament appearances, nurtured important donor relationships, and, most importantly, served as educator and mentor to talented youth."

Also during Journey's term, Millsaps was awarded the David M. Halbrook Award 11 times. The award is given to the college or university in Mississippi with the highest student-athlete graduation rate.

—Clint Kimberling

College a chance to motivate Carla toward scholarship, and the College succeeded. She is now Dr. Carla Webb, D.M.D. Millsaps athletics is often a significant factor in nurturing successful academics.

During the past decade and a half, Millsaps baseball has gained substantial recognition for its quality program. It has given the College name recognition locally, regionally, and nationally through the news media. It has attracted a significant number of scholars to Millsaps, and a substantial number of these scholar-athletes have gone on to prestigious professional careers. Baseball is not the only successful sport. The college has many All Conference players and some All-Americans. These can be documented by a stroll through the Maurice H. Hall Activities Center. Many Millsaps players have been elected to the 15th Anniversary SCAC teams, and their names can be accessed on the Internet at www.scac-online.org/.

—Dick Highfill

For Majors Baseball, Great Expectations

The expectations for the 2006 Millsaps Majors baseball team were at an all-time high at press time. In an April poll, the Majors were ranked 14th in the country in their division by the American Baseball Coaches Association.

Preseason praise was heaped upon the team, as well as individual players. Garner Wetzel, a senior from Gulfport, received several preseason honors in *Baseball America*.

Wetzel, who started as shortstop for the Majors last season, was included on the Division III preseason All-American Team. Additionally, Wetzel was tabbed as the preseason candidate for Division III Player of the Year.

Adding to the list of honors from *Baseball America*, Wetzel was also included among the top Major League Baseball prospects. Wetzel is listed as the 28th best draft prospect among all college seniors, all positions, across all NCAA divisions.

Last June, Wetzel was selected in the 10th round by the Colorado Rockies in the Major League Baseball Amateur Draft. After suffering an injury last summer, Wetzel opted for corrective surgery and to play out his senior season at Millsaps.

The Majors were also picked to repeat as SCAC Champions based on voting held by the 10 Southern Collegiate Athletic Conference head coaches. Millsaps received seven of 10 first-place votes, making the Majors the overwhelming favorite to take the SCAC title. This would be Head Coach Jim Page's third conference title in four years.

Page had already reached another coaching milestone in 2006. In the third game of the season, against Mississippi College, Page recorded his 400th career coaching victory. Page is now in his 18th year as the Majors' head coach.

—Clint Kimberling



Millsaps College Sports Hall of Fame

During Homecoming 2005, the Millsaps College Sports Hall of Fame inducted a new class of former standout athletes and coaches. The new members, from left to right, are: William (Billy) Mann, B.S. 1949, Dr. William (Red) Powell, B.S. 1956, former Basketball Coach John Stroud (1990–2003), Shane Langston, B.B.A. 1980, M.B.A. 1982, Susan (Kasperbauer) Mascari, B.A. 1995, and Archie Lamb, B.B.A. 1977, recipient of the Samuel Knox Distinguished Service Award.

—Clint Kimberling