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The Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference (MEAC), a NCAA Division I Conference, is in its 38th year of operation heading into the 2008-2009 academic school year. Housed in the Armada Hoffer Tower at Town Center of Virginia Beach, Virginia, the MEAC is made up of 12 outstanding, historically black institutions across the Atlantic coastline: Bethune-Cookman University, Coppin State University, Delaware State University, Florida A&M University, Hampton University, Howard University, University of Maryland Eastern Shore, Morgan State University, Norfolk State University, North Carolina A&T State University, South Carolina State University and Winston-Salem State University.

HISTORY

In 1969, a bold ad hoc group of innovators long associated with intercollegiate athletics met in Durham, N.C., to discuss the feasibility of organizing a new conference. Dissected from these discussions, a steering and planning committee was formed to fully investigate the idea, present a detailed report with recommendations to interested collegiate institutions, and then construct a workshop to outline proposals.

After adopting a program, seven institutions (Delaware State College, Howard University, University of Maryland Eastern Shore, Morgan State University, North Carolina A&T State University, North Carolina Central University and South Carolina State College) agreed to become the Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference. Its major objective was to establish, organize and supervise an intercollegiate athletic program among a compact group of educational institutions of high academic standards and with a sound philosophy of co-curricular activities.

The conference was confirmed in 1970, kicking off its first season of competition in football in 1971.

In 1978, a milestone was reached when the MEAC selected Kenneth A. Free to be its first full-time commissioner. He had been preceded by three interim (part-time) commissioners: Dr. Leroy Walker (1971-74); who later had the distinction of serving as the President of the United States Olympic Committee, the late Earl Mason (1974-75) and the late Dr. James Young (1975-78).

Kenneth A. Free served the conference for 18 years before stepping down in 1995. In 1996, Charles S. Harris was named commissioner and served in the capacity until April 2002. Longtime MEAC administrator Brenda H. McCoy served two stints as Interim Commissioner, one in 1996 and again in 2002. On September 1, 2002, Dr. Dennis E. Thomas was named the commissioner and has served in the position for six years.

The leagues' first expansion occurred in October 1979 when Bethune-Cookman College and Florida A&M University were voted into the MEAC as new members. Original members Morgan State, North Carolina Central and Maryland Eastern Shore withdrew from the conference at the end of the 1979 fiscal year. Maryland Eastern Shore was readmitted in 1981 and Morgan State returned in 1984. Florida A&M opted to resign in 1984, but was readmitted in 1986. Coppin State College was granted admittance in 1985, becoming the ninth member institution. The MEAC expanded again in the 90's with the inclusion of Hampton University (1995) and Norfolk State University (1997). The final expansion occurred in 2007, with the addition of Winston-Salem State University.

On June 8, 1980, the MEAC was classified as a Division I conference by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). The following month the MEAC received an automatic berth to the NCAA Division I Men's Basketball Championship.

Currently, the league has automatic qualifying bids for NCAA postseason play in baseball (since 1994), men's basketball (since 1981), women's basketball (since 1982), football (since 1996), softball (since 1995), men and women's tennis (since 1998), and volleyball (since 1994).

SPORTS HIGHLIGHTS

The MEAC has enjoyed great athletic success over the years. In 2008, Maryland Eastern Shore

defeated Arkansas State, 4-2 to win the NCAA Women's Bowling National Championship, the first in conference and school history. Lady Hawks' head coach Sharon Brummell became the first female head coach to win a NCAA bowling title.

In men's basketball, Morgan State won the 1974 NCAA College Division II National Championship. The 1981 tournament champion Howard Bison became the first MEAC team to play in the NCAA Division I Basketball Championship. MEAC tournament runners-up North Carolina A&T was invited to play in the National Invitational Tournament (NIT) during the same season.

Coppin State and Hampton also made history in the NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament with first-round victories. The No. 15 seeded Coppin State defeated No. 2 South Carolina in 1997 and No. 15 seeded Hampton defeated No. 2 Iowa State in 2001. Both victories ranked among the Top 10 greatest tournament upsets of all-time by ESPN's SportsCenter.

In women's basketball, South Carolina State won the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW) Division II National Championship in 1979. In 1982, Howard became the first MEAC women's team to participate in the NCAA Division I Basketball Championships. South Carolina State earned the berth in 1983 and became the first MEAC team, men or women, to win a first-round game in the NCAA Division I Basketball Tournament.

Coppin State, winners of back-to-back conference tournaments in 2005 and 2006, earned a berth to the 2007 WNIT. The Lady Eagles defeated Saint Joseph's in the first round to earn their first Division I postseason victory.

In football, prior to the establishment of Division I-AA competition, the MEAC football champion played in the Gold Bowl held in Richmond, Va., which matched them against the champion of the Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association (CIAA). South Carolina State represented the MEAC in 1977 and 1978, winning both outings over Winston-Salem State and Norfolk State respectively.

South Carolina State won MEAC football titles in 1981 and 1982 and reached the second round of the I-AA championships both years.

In addition to NCAA post-season play, MEAC football teams have appeared in NCAA sanctioned bowl-games. The MEAC was also instrumental in constructing the Freedom Bowl All-Star Classic and the Heritage Bowl.

In outdoor track and field, North Carolina Central won the first three MEAC outdoor track and field titles and finished fourth in the 1974 NCAA Division I Outdoor Track and Field Championships. North Carolina Central's Larry Black was a member of the 1972 Olympic 400-meter relay team that won the gold medal and the silver medal in the 200-meter dash.

MEAC women began outdoor track and field conference competition in 1980. Two years later, South Carolina State won the AIAW Division II Outdoor Track and Field National Championship (1982).

The MEAC initiated cross country and indoor track and field in 1981. Tennis and golf returned as MEAC-governed sports in 1981 after a five-year hiatus. Golf was discontinued after the 1982 championships.

In wrestling, Morgan State won 13 of the 24 conference championships. Individual wrestling champions were granted automatic entry into the NCAA championships in 1986. The MEAC discontinued wrestling as a conference-governed championship in 1995.

Baseball (discontinued following the 1977 season) along with women's volleyball were added as MEAC-governed sports in 1983. Women's softball became a MEAC sanctioned sport in 1992.

In 2003, Florida A&M became the first MEAC school to win a volleyball match in the NCAA Championship, with a first-round win over Winthrop. In 2004, the Lady Rattlers became the first HBCU team ranked in the Top 25 American Volleyball Coaches Association (AVCA) national poll.

In softball, Bethune-Cookman earned the league's first-ever at-large bid to the NCAA Softball Championship in 2005. The Lady Wildcats defeated Florida, Central Florida and South Florida in the Florida Regional to become the first MEAC school to win a NCAA Division I Softball Regional. Bethune-Cookman ended the 2005 season with the leagues' first-ever rankings in the final softball polls, reaching No. 18 in the NFCA/USA Today Coaches poll and No. 23 in the USA Softball/ESPN.com Poll.

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