

# CONTEXT, TEXT

## The History of Sports at Jefferson College (Washington, Mississippi), 1870–1964

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Historic Jefferson College

Chartered in 1802, Jefferson College was the oldest educational institution in Mississippi. The college is presently a state historical site located in Washington, six miles east of Natchez. In the *ante bellum* days, the school functioned at both the college and preparatory level. Jefferson College closed in 1863 when the campus was taken over by the invading Federal army. The school reopened in 1866 as a preparatory school. Though retaining the name Jefferson College, the school would never again function as a college. (William T. Blain, *Education in the Old Southwest, A History of Jefferson College* Washington, Ms, 1976, 1 to 133.)

In the four years following the school's reopening, the records are scant as to the activities at the school. However, an 1870 photograph shows a baseball game being played on the college grounds. Sports had arrived at Jefferson College. (Norman Collection, Photographs of Jefferson College, 1870 to 1950. on display at the Museum of Historic Jefferson College.)

By 1893, the school had evolved into a military school. Sports became an important part of the school, as evidenced by the construction of a gymnasium in 1894. (Blain, *Jefferson College*, 129.)

By 1900, the school advertised in a Natchez newspaper as Jefferson Military College for students between the ages of fourteen and nineteen. (*The Natchez Democrat*, August 3, 1900, Natchez, Ms.)

Despite the young ages of the students, *The Jeffersonian*, the school's newspaper, proudly gave accounts of the baseball team playing well against teams such as Louisiana State University (LSU), the University of Texas, the University of Mississippi, and Tulane University. (*The Jeffersonian*, July 1900, Washington, Ms.)

The late Dr. Brinsfield King, a member of the 1907 baseball team, related a story about how his team beat the LSU baseball team, in a three game series, two games out of three. Doing this despite the fact that King's team had only nine players, and King had to pitch in two of the games. The two games he pitched were the ones won by Jefferson Military College. (James Barnett and Anne Gray's interview with Dr. Brinsfield King, February 3, 1982. On file at Historic Jefferson College (HJC).)

This playing of college teams also applied to the basketball, football, and tennis teams. However, there is little evidence of how the school did in these sports at college level.

According to Norman G. Stevens who graduated from the school in 1921, the school was no longer playing regular games against college level opponents. However, the football team scrimmaged against LSU in the spring of 1921. Stevens impressed the coaches of LSU and he was awarded a scholarship to play football at the University. Stevens is now a member of the LSU Football Hall of Fame. (Personal communication from Norman G. Stevens, October, 1984.)

A photograph taken in the mid-1920's shows the uniforms of the various sports offered at the school at the time. These sports included swimming, baseball, basketball, football, tennis, and golf. (Norman's Photograph Collection, Historic Jefferson College.)

Boxing was also a part of the sports curriculum at Jefferson Military College. (Carol Shivers' interview with Richard Price, Sam Price, Jr., and Lionel Price. (Brothers who attended the school in the 1940's.) June 12, 1982 (HJC).)

The 1961 *Shipmate*; the school's annual, shows that the school also had a summer bowling team. (*Shipmate*, 1960-1961, Jefferson Military College, Washington, Ms.)

A large number of Latin American students attended the school during the twentieth century. According to Kenneth Deemer, who attended the school from 1958 to 1963, they added much to the success of the school in sports. They also introduced soccer as an intramural sport. (Personal Communication from Kenneth Deemer, March 4, 1989.)

Debts of over \$50,000, and a deficiency in the next fall term's enrollment. forced the school to close in May of 1964. (Blain, *Jefferson College*, 131, 132.) However, before Jefferson College closed it had gained a unique place in the history of organized sports in Mississippi.