

Tuskegee University Athletic Hall of Fame



Cleveland 'Clev' Abbott

Coach & Athletic Administrator

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CLEVELAND LEIGH ABBOTT- was born in Yanktown, South Dakota. He was one of seven children born to his parents, Mollie Brown and Elbert B. Abbott.

He was graduated from ~~the~~ Watertown High School and South Dakota State College at Brookings, South Dakota, from which he received the Bachelor of Science degree in 1916. He did graduate work at Kansas State Agricultural College, Manhattan, Kansas and Harvard University.

As an athlete, Mr. Abbott had an enviable record. He won sixteen letters while in high school and fourteen letters in college. He was captain of the South Dakota State College basketball team, anchor man on the relay team, all-state center for four consecutive years, and one year was selected as all-Northwestern center. While representing South Dakota State College at the Drake Relays, Des Moines, Iowa, he met Miss Jessie Scott, who later became his wife.

He began work at Tuskegee Institute in the fall of 1916 as an agricultural chemist and assistant athletic coach, having been assured of employment by Dr. Booker T. Washington a year before his graduation.

In 1917, Mr. Abbott entered the Officers Training Camp at Ft. Des Moines, Iowa. Upon completion of the course, he was assigned as Commanding Officer of Company A at Camp Dodge, Iowa. He also performed the duties of regimental athletic officer. He later served with the American Expeditionary Forces in France as Intelligence Officer, 366th Infantry of the

Tuskegee University Athletic Hall of Fame

92nd Division. At the close of World War I, he joined the faculty of Kansas Vocational School, Topeka, Kansas, where he served as coach and Commandant of Cadets.

Upon the invitation of Dr. Robert R. Moton, then President of Tuskegee Institute, Mr. Abbott returned to Tuskegee to become Director of the Department of Physical Education and Athletics and Head Coach, positions which he filled with distinction up to the time of his death.

Abbott pioneered intersectional football. His robust Golden Tigers after winning several Southern and National Championships were the first Negro teams with national stature that would attract crowds in Chicago, Washington, D. C., Philadelphia, New York City, Houston, Dallas and Los Angeles.

The South's first barnstorming basketball teams came off the campus of Tuskegee with Abbott, roaming into the Midwest, East and Southwest.

Tennis among Black youth got its roots on the Tuskegee Institute Campus and the first school-owned golf course built by a Negro college was constructed under Abbott's direction.

His girl's team won National AAU indoor and outdoor championship in track and full consistently from 1937 through 1950. His tennis teams produced national champions wherever they competed.

One must not forget the Olympic male and female Champions that were produced by Cleve L. Abbott, the construction of a physical plant that was equalled by none in the Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Conference, nor the faculty and program of research and study that he built to produce outstanding teachers, coaches, recreation workers, and health educators.

Awards and citations by peers, South Dakota State University, Tuskegee Institute, and professional organizations have been presented to Abbott in recognition of his greatness as a coach and teacher.

What is more important is that Abbott got on the governing bodies of the athletic organizations which made policy decisions. He was put on committees where many principles of fair play

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toward the Negro Athletes were fashioned. His was the love voice that got into the inner councils of the AAU, NCAA, and the U. S. Olympic Committee and he achieved it by putting the Tuskegee athletes to test on U. S. Competitive fronts.

By giving the Negro competitive dignity in football, basketball, tennis, track and field, golf, swimming, and baseball, and assuring skillful coaching, the achievements that we see today on the competitive field, the unlocking of the chains which held the Negro in sports, he was truly a Man of the Century, a man with great vision.