

# Tuskegee University Athletic Hall of Fame

## Millard Wooten

Class of 1927

Football

### Memorials Which Endure

Honoring the outstanding men and women who nourished the Institute's goals and objectives and defended its principles throughout their lifetime, we are aware that while such honors are sometimes encouched in memoirs, in books, and etched on metal plaques, they can, at other times, be warm and informal. Let us assume, then, that the spirit of those we memorialize tonight are here with us, that their families and loved ones share with the alumni throughout the country a day of reminiscence on an unpayable public debt for generations to come.

### Some of Tuskegee's All-Time Athletic Greats

1. Mr. Edward H. Adams - Class of 1930: football, basketball, track, baseball
2. Mr. Marvin Fretwell - Class of 1941: track
3. Mr. Frank Jackson - Class of 1934: tennis
4. Mr. Willis Morris - Class of 1950: basketball, football, track
5. Mrs. Christine Evans Petty - Class of 1933: tennis, basketball, swimming, track
6. Mr. Willis Peeks - Class of 1912: basketball, baseball, football
7. Mr. Benjamin Stevenson - Class of 1931: football, track
8. Mr. Elliot Vanzant - Class of 1930: basketball, football, track
9. Mr. Fred Thomas - Class of 1947: track
10. Mr. Millard Wooten - Class of 1927: football

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*from the  
grassroots*

by  
manning marable  
Institute Professor



## *1926 TI Tigers are remembered*

Spénd an afternoon outside and you might rediscover a bit of your youth. This is the golden time of the year, the precious weeks that we called "Indian summer" when I was growing up. These are the best weeks for hot apple cider, for drives in the countryside with the windows down, and for touch football games.

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Never mind that as seasons go, Tuskegee's football teams, both high school and the Institute, are not doing quite as well as in past years. Never mind the television concentration on the World Series. "Indian Summer," the last warm days before the oncoming of autumn, is meant for the game of football.

Fifty years ago, the football played at Tuskegee Institute was nothing short of remarkable. The 1920s brought big time collegiate football to campus, against the wishes of the more conservative, rigid academicians. "Wasn't this too frivolous, in the wake of the World War and the terror of the Ku Klux Klan attacks against Negroes?" some people undoubtedly asked. "Wasn't Tuskegee designed for serious vocational study?"

Perhaps, but the times themselves warranted the coming of football. Segregation isolated black teams from playing against local white gridiron squads; the development of Tuskegee's football teams occurred simultaneously with the acceleration of academic rather than industrial educational programs.

Throughout the decade, Tuskegee's young football team ranked as the best black college squad in the country. Under Coach Cleve L. Abbott, the Tiger mentor, Tuskegee lost only two games between 1921 to 1927, through sixty contests in all. On warm, Indian summer afternoons, the entire campus would be deserted. Thousands of cheering faculty, alumni and anxious students packed into the stands to root for their "terrible Tigers" when they were playing against Fisk, Morehouse, Howard or any of one dozen other segregated black collegiate institutions. Homecomings, during the twenties were grand and glorious occasions, and according to the 1927 yearbook, the entire student body and the college exhibited "a gaiety in color and an exhibition of spirit."

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The best team during those years was the Tuskegee Institute squad of 1926. The team won eight conference and two nonconference games, and was declared the "undisputed champion of the South for the third consecutive year."

Each game offered Tuskegee fans something new and different. The Tigers' opening game against Knoxville College was a rugged affair, a defensive battle won by a single touchdown by Tuskegee. On October 9, the "Jazz Birds" of Florida A&M were defeated by the embarrassing score of 73 to 6. Clark University fell the following week, 20-6, as "the steady clawing and scratching of the Tigers" proved superior to Clark's strong defensive line.

At Homecoming, the Tigers of Morehouse fell to Tuskegee's Tigers for the fourth time in four years, 28-6. Tuskegee's star player of the game, Millard "Red" Wooten, scored three of Tuskegee's touchdowns on running plays. Wooten, a senior from Kelley, Louisiana, was a consistently strong fullback throughout the season.

Tuskegee's remaining games were rough contests, all narrowly decided by outstanding individual players. Lincoln University was defeated by a 20-16 score. Facing the Hornets of the State Normal School of Montgomery on November 6, the Tigers were locked in a tense defensive battle. Benjamin F. Stevenson, called "Shifty" by his teammates, intercepted a State Normal pass and returned the ball 55 yards downfield for a touchdown. Late in the fourth quarter, with the score knotted 7-7, Wooten scored a touchdown behind excellent offensive blocking, and Stevenson kicked the extra point, for a 14-7 victory.

Fisk, Southern and Atlanta University all went down to defeat before Tuskegee. A tough Talladega team faced Tuskegee on November 20, and throughout most of the game the Tigers were behind. But again the strong offensive line, led by second semester junior Aston C. Kitchen, opened holes in the Talladega defense, allowing "Sweets" Stanley Sweeting and "Shifty" Stevenson to score. In the toughest game of the year, Tuskegee narrowly won by 28-27.

It's true that football players may not play out of the old Notre Dame "box formation" anymore. Leather helmets are a thing of the past. But going to a college or high school game makes those past glories almost come alive again. By recovering and remembering something of the past, perhaps we appreciate more what we have today.