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## The Bison Booters Battling in the Howard Spirit

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## SPECIAL REPORT

Irving Williams dribbles past a Philadelphia-Textile defender.



Howard University battles Indiana University for the NCAA soccer championship.



By Basil K. Bryan

The scoreboard clock at Indiana University's Bill Armstrong Stadium was telling the dreadful story. The end was ominous! "Five . . . four . . . three . . . two . . . one," shouted the Indiana crowd in unison. Even before the clock had ticked to zero, the Indiana players were congratulating each other in a pile of frenzy at mid-field. Indiana had just defeated Howard, 1-0, to win the 1988 NCAA soccer crown. Fittingly, Indiana players, coaches, and thousands of supporters dressed in red were celebrating their victory.

At the other end of the field, Howard players, coaches and supporters were transfixed in silence. Team members fought back tears brought about not so much by the fact that they had lost the game, but moreso, by *how* they lost. Howard students, parents, and the many brave Bison supporters who travelled to Indiana University's Bloomington campus, could find nothing in these telling moments to release them from their amazement. Freshman journalism student, Michele Ross, from Dayton, Ohio, could not resist the tears flowing down her cheek. In the stand, Bison supporters stood motionless. At this precious moment in time, they could not yet accept the fact that the curtain was drawn, bringing to a close the dramatic season that was 1988.

Thirty minutes after the presentation ceremony, Howard supporters, including this writer, piled into two chartered buses for the long trip back to Washington. But leaving the stadium, we held our heads high. Congratulations were coming from many admirers of Howard soccer and, after all, we felt proud of our school and our team. To place second in a competition that brought together the finest college soccer teams in the United States, losing on a call that was described by *The Washington Post* reporter, Michael Wilbon, as "a ridiculous penalty kick to a team playing on its home

# The Bison Booters

*Battling in the Howard Spirit*



Anthony Laird takes shot at Philadelphia-Textile goal.

field," was nothing to be ashamed of.

### Soccer at Howard

Although soccer was introduced into the United States by the English colonists who settled here, it did not come to Howard University until 1928, when it was introduced as a varsity sport by John Burr. Even then, it was merely a nice diversion from studies, engaged in by a few foreign students who had nothing better to do. The Depression years and World War II brought an end to any advance that was made at Howard.

The game was reintroduced to Howard by coach Ted Chambers in 1945. Chambers, then a young coach in the athletic department, was energetically trying to involve all students in some sort of athletic endeavor. He noticed that no matter how hard he tried, outside of track, he was unable to interest the foreign students in a sport. Chambers spoke to a few of the foreign students on campus to see what was the problem. Although they had "great athletic build," they were not interested in American football. But he noticed that some foreign students would engage in pick-up soccer games from time to time. Could this be the answer he was searching for? After discussions with Jamaican student Basil Keane, a member of Howard's track team, Chambers decided to organize a soccer team.

The new team was largely student-organized and dominated by foreign students. However, much to the surprise of many, several American students became proficient in the game. One outstanding American player was Ernest Wilson, who years later was to become director of the Foreign Students Office at Howard.

The major problem at the outset was getting competition. After all, this was America in the 1940s. Apart from Howard, the only Black colleges fielding soccer teams were Hampton and Lincoln, each school, like Howard, having a number of players from Africa and the Caribbean. To fill out the schedule, games were organized against local clubs and the British Embassy team.

By 1952, Howard's soccer team was making waves. Many honors came to the Bison soccer program. Peter Heze-

kiah, from Trinidad, became Howard's first All-American in 1956-57.

In 1958, Howard placed two players on the All-American team, McDonald Gibbs (Trinidad) and Winston Cook (Jamaica). The soccer team was listed in the National Soccer Rating for the first time in 1958, placing 4th in the country. In 1960, Howard competed in the first annual National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) soccer tournament, placing third.

Chambers' dreams finally bore fruit. Still fielding a team comprised largely of foreign students, Howard won the NAIA championships in 1961, defeating Newark College of Engineering 3-2 in the final match.

By 1962, Chambers believed that Howard was ready for bigger challenges in soccer. For the first time, the Howard team played under NCAA regulations. Later in the year, Howard (7-1-0), qualified for the NCAA tournament but lost 9-1 to Michigan State.

In 1963, Howard won (7-2-0) and in 1964 (7-3-1). By 1965, Chambers gave way to George Williams, who was followed by Sidney Hall (1966-68).

Chambers returned as coach in 1969. But time was taking its toll. After 25 years of almost single-handedly promoting soccer at Howard, Chambers recognized the impact that the game was having on campus. He felt that he could no longer keep up with the now-rigorous schedule. Howard soccer had long passed a few games with local teams and a few Black institutions. Moreover, soccer was becoming a popular sport at many American college campuses. Each team wanted not only to compete, but to win. And St. Louis University, propelled mainly by homebred American players, had become the dominant name in college soccer.

At Howard, coach Chambers, fueled by the desire to keep Howard at the top of collegiate soccer, made a brilliant tactical move. That was 1970. He looked around for help, and help came in the person of Lincoln Phillips, a native of Trinidad, who quickly developed the Bison into a splendid "soccer machine," with players such as Keith Aquí, Alvin Henderson, and Ian Bain, all soccer All-Americans. Phillips was to prove a hard taskmaster. Not only were the players to be rigorously con-

ditioned for the game; to play soccer at Howard they also had to show success in the classroom.

Recruiting was easy. Ever since it first opened its doors in 1867, Howard University has continued to live up to its noble reputation by providing a place where Black Americans and other peoples of color could participate freely in a wholesome university experience. In the words of University President James E. Cheek, Howard classrooms are "battlegrounds for the serious who seek out this place to confront ignorance with knowledge, where truth grapples hand-in-hand with falsehood, where understanding comes face to face with confusion."



Many talented students from Africa and the Caribbean were already on campus. That they came to Howard to pursue an education was only natural. Never

known for any tradition in sports (even in soccer, despite its abundance of foreign students), Howard was however a household name in these countries. In many African and Caribbean countries, the Howard name is synonymous with academic excellence. To have a Howard degree is a mark of achievement, especially underlined by the success enjoyed by Howard graduates in national life in these countries. So the flow of talented foreign players to Howard continued.

By 1971, Howard finally answered Chambers' dream of an NCAA championship. By this time, St. Louis became the team to beat. That year, at Miami's Orange Bowl, Howard made history, becoming the first predominantly Black school to win a Division I NCAA championship. After defeating Harvard in a tense and closely-fought semi-final game, Howard defeated perennial and many-times champion St. Louis in the final, by a score of 3-2. However, the victory on the field was lost off the field when the NCAA disqualified Howard on ineligibility charges.

## The Issue

Howard, as expected, went to court. At issue was the NCAA charge with respect to players they considered ineligible. What it came down to was a matter of different interpretations. Ever since it began to accept foreign students, Howard has relied on the interpretations of the United States Office of Education (now the Department of Education) in determining the academic level of incoming foreign students. The NCAA charged that Howard, in accepting foreign students from "college," ought not to accept them as "freshmen," but as transfers, thus limiting their eligibility in NCAA competitions. However, familiarity with the educational system in many foreign countries attests to the fact that Trinidadian students from, say, "St. Mary's College," or Jamaican students from "Cornwall College," are merely high school students and thus not eligible to be recognized as college transferees. But unfamiliarity with the fact that these "colleges" are really high schools did not stop the NCAA. It determined that Howard was using players who were not attending college for the first time. Despite the abundance of evidence that was presented, the NCAA prevailed, vacated the title, and thus denied Howard a championship earned on the field.

In his recent book, *The History of Athletics and Physical Education at Howard University*, Chambers recalls this sad situation:

"After months of investigation, a never-before-rule, limiting the number of years a foreign student could play on an American team, was applied. Consequently, the NCAA stripped Howard of its crown (deciding not to name a champion at all) . . . The rule proved very unpopular with many of the colleges throughout the country, so the NCAA ruled Howard ineligible because one player did not take the Scholastic Aptitude Test."

Coach Phillips, however, was more pointed. He bitterly explained that "some people couldn't handle a black team of foreigners winning. There were some jealous people who couldn't stand our success."

It is worthy to note that exactly 10 years after winning the NAIA title, Howard had won the NCAA, not only

becoming the first Black school to win an NCAA championship, but also the first school in U.S. collegiate soccer to win *both* the NAIA and the NCAA.

Howard was determined to prove that the 1971 victory was no fluke and that the denial of the title was an injustice. The soccer team continued to dominate on the field, making the NCAA playoffs in 1974 with a 19-0 record.

Arriving at St. Louis' Busch Stadium for the final four, the team wished for nothing more than a rematch with St. Louis. What was more, if Howard was to win the title it would have to beat St. Louis in St. Louis. With a team dominated by freshmen, and including four American players, Howard defeated St. Louis, 2-1, after four overtimes. But this time the title could not be denied as university officials were meticulous in looking at all the interpretations and angles that could ever be unearthed.

Much like UCLA's success in college basketball and St. Louis' earlier dominance in college soccer, and buoyed by successes over the past several years, Howard demanded a title every year. As in other endeavors, winning after losing is accepted with joy and glory. However, winning after years of winning is never easy. After all, Howard was now the team to beat in college soccer. Recruiting was never a problem, with the team's successes on the field, plus the continued flow of foreign students propelled by the high academic reputation of the university. But by this time other schools had intensified their search for students in Africa and the Caribbean. Though Howard continued to succeed on the field, the inevitable problems began to set in. Phillips also decided that it was time to move on. Keith Tucker, his young assistant, took over as coach in 1981. He was to find that the road Phillips had travelled was a difficult one to follow. Phillips' record over the 10-year period was awesome: 116 wins, 20 losses, 11 ties.

Between 1981 and 1987, Tucker's record was unimpressive, 52-38-19, decent perhaps, yet not up to Howard's usual excellence. He was to find out that though the university might have been content to wait on his devel-

opment, his hardest critics were former players and the alumni. His inexperience showed but he continued to build, placing one block at a time in order to put his house together.

With a record of 5 wins, 8 losses and 4 ties, 1987 proved a terrible year. At many schools, a 5-8-4 record might be accepted as worthy; at Howard, so accustomed to victory and intoxicated by the sweet successes of the 1970s, that was dismal. Time was certainly not on Tucker's side.

## The Road to Indiana

The 1988 season stands out in dramatic contrast to 1987. Tucker had been insisting since 1987 that his team's 5-8-4 record was not a true reflection of the team's talents. In 1987 the team was beset by injuries and was never able to field its best players together.

At the beginning of the 1988 season, Tucker promised that if his team stayed healthy, Howard would have a successful season. The unranked Bison opened the season with a 1-0 victory over the University of Maryland. That victory over then 18th ranked Maryland was the first of eight straight successes which gave the team its best start since 1977. The 8-0 stretch was highlighted by important victories over perennially tough Alderson Broaddus and William and Mary by scores of 1-0 and 2-1, respectively.

After winning the Brooklyn College Soccer Classic by beating nationally-ranked Brooklyn College in a penalty shoot-out, the squad continued with victories over West Virginia, Virginia Commonwealth and Penn State, all on the road.

For the Ted Chambers Cup, the Bison defeated the University of District of Columbia, 5-1. Next to fall were Rider College, Georgetown University and the University of Richmond.

By virtue of its 16-0-1 record and seventh-place national ranking in the Intercollegiate Soccer Association of America poll, Howard was awarded a bye in the first round of the playoffs. In a second round game, a tough Philadelphia Textile team was defeated 2-1, in a nine round shoot-out after two overtime periods. The Bison next surprised the collegiate soccer world by

defeating top ranked Virginia, 3-2, coming back from a 2-0 deficit after only 20 minutes in the game, and inspired by the brilliant save of a Virginia penalty kick by freshman goalkeeper, Shaka Hislop. The importance of Hislop's save needs to be noted; had Virginia scored on the penalty, it would have been leading 3-0.

After the victory over Virginia, Howard was back in the final four for the first time since 1975.

### Building Blocks

Putting together the 1988 team was not quite different from the other glory years, but this time there was a very significant difference—the coming of age of American players, five of whom became starters.

In 1973, Irving Williams, a medical doctor, went to Tanzania for a stint at a government hospital. The Williams family stayed in Tanzania for two years. Williams' sons, Irving, then six, and Michael, five, were thus introduced to the new game of soccer. Returning to the United States, Williams became attached to Howard University Hospital. Sons Irving and Michael continued the new sport they had picked up in Tanzania, fine-tuning their skills at Rockville's Woodward High School under Dave Scaggs. (Both brothers became stalwart defensive blocks on the 1988 Bison team).

Introducing the team at a send-off pep rally in Burr Gymnasium before departing for Indiana, team co-captain Irving Williams remarked of Samana Zulu: "He comes to us from Zambia via Bethesda." What happened was that at the age of five, young Zulu came to Washington when his father took up an assignment with the International Monetary Fund. Zulu thus learned his soccer in the high school system in Maryland. Says Zulu: "I was attracted to Howard because of its fine academic reputation." Zulu became the starting striker on the 1988 team.

Darrell Brathwaite was born in Washington, D.C. He learned his soccer under the tutelage of his Trinidadian father, who for a short time played semi-professional soccer in Kentucky. Developing his skills in high school in New York, Brathwaite became one of the three starting midfielders. Re-

cruiting him was not a problem. Brathwaite came to Howard because his American mother, a Howard alumna, had her way as mothers usually do.

Starting fullback Chris Conti honed his skills playing high school soccer in Montgomery County, Maryland. His reason for coming to Howard resonates throughout the team. It was Howard's fine academic reputation, more than its soccer, that was the impetus.

There are several other American players on the squad, coming from such places as Dayton, Ohio; Columbia, Maryland; and Hampton, Virginia. Other countries represented on the 25-member squad are Trinidad (7), Jamaica (4), Nigeria (2), and Botswana (1). Howard's 1988 aggregation was truly an international one.

Waida Akanni (Nigeria) and Peter Isaacs (Jamaica), both starting forwards, have been referred to as the best strike combination in college soccer in America. They provide the fireworks on the team. Akanni (16 goals, 7 assists) came to Howard on a recommendation from a fellow Nigerian student at Howard. Though only a junior, Akanni might not be returning for his final year as he plans to graduate early and is also contemplating several professional soccer offers in Europe. He passed up representing Nigeria at the 1988 Olympics as this would interrupt his studies, plus the fact that the Howard season would have already been in progress.

Isaacs, also a junior, (12 goals, 7 assists), described as the fastest college player in America, was pushed to Howard by his mother who, though not a Howard graduate, insisted that her son come to Howard "in order to receive a fine education." The Howard name was a familiar one in the Isaacs' household as an uncle had also served as a professor at the university.

Chris Thomas (Jamaica), Monday Kanu (Nigeria), and Sheldon Jones (Trinidad) comprised the rest of the Bison starting lineup.

The exciting play of the Howard Bison has earned praises from all corners. Commenting on the difficulties faced in the promotion of soccer in America, Michael Wilbon, writing in *The Washington Post*, noted that "if

more American teams played the way Howard University plays, soccer in the United States wouldn't be such a bore after all."

### The Twelfth Man

After the remarkable come-from-behind victory over Virginia at Virginia's Scott Stadium, Coach Tucker paid the supreme compliment to the Bison supporters. He noted that, even in the face of defeat and elimination, the Howard supporters never gave up. Seeing the never-say-die mood of the Bison contingent in the stands, Tucker said that the players on the field were motivated to press on as the crowd gave them what seemed as another player on the field. Especially among the Caribbean students, soccer loyalty at Howard runs high.

Much of the credit for the mood of the crowd must go to engineering student Gerard Legall. A junior from Trinidad, Legall, armed with his "talking" drum, challenges the team on. He is "Mr. Cheerleader" and the Bison crowd look to him for choreography. That two buses were arranged to take Bison supporters to Indiana was due in no small part to Legall's workaholic attitude. Immediately after the defeat of Virginia when the invitation to the final four was secured, Legall was running all over the campus mobilizing pledges to charter the buses. Financial support was secured from, among others, the Office of the Vice-President for Student Affairs, various departments and a number of student organizations. All week, in the boiler room that is the office of the Caribbean Students Association, students were busily churning out fliers in a non-stop production drumming up support for the soccer team.

The two chartered buses were advertised to leave Cramton Auditorium at 8 p.m. sharp, the evening of December 2. As many Caribbean students would be on the trip, Legall reminded them that 8 p.m. meant American time, not Caribbean time. Nonetheless, the buses did not arrive until shortly after 9 p.m. The hour long wait was especially difficult because of the cold weather. However, the mood was quite festive. Freshman Omar Rowe provided reggae music from his gigantic "Soundblaster."

while senior Cheryl-Ann Turner provided entertainment with some especially rhythmic and pulsating dancing.

At 9:30 p.m. we started out on a 12-hour all-night journey. To pass the time, some students studied or pretended at it; some embarked on last-minute revision of term papers and assignments, while others slept. By 3 a.m. everyone on our bus was asleep except for two brave souls. Professor Wolsey Semple was by then reading his third novel by Graham Greene, while I continued to grade papers, getting them out of the way before the return to campus and the expected deluge of final exams.

Four stops and an energizing early morning breakfast recharged us for the march into Bill Armstrong Stadium at the campus of Indiana University.

It was an impressive Howard University support contingent that entered the stadium at noon. The volume of non-stop noise we made belied our relatively small number, especially when compared to the massive Indiana cheering section. But, size apart, the Howard contingent was the center of attention. Howard's energetic cheerleaders, nicely assembled by senior business student Yvonne Anderson, led the way with our soccer charge, HOWARD U IS NUMBER 1 AND DON'T YOU FORGET IT! Gerard Legall, drum in beat, led the singing of the Bison fight song, the words of which resonated all over the stadium:

Run them down, Howard we go run them down  
Run them down, Howard we go run them down  
Don't care what the people say  
Play Howard play  
With ability and agility  
We're gonna string up the goalie.

In the first semi-final game, Howard defeated South Carolina, 2-0. Once more, the speed, finesse, and talent of the team impressed all. Indiana defeated Portland, 1-0, in the other semi-final game.

Sunday, December 4, had finally arrived. A crowd of more than 5,000 filled up the stadium one hour before game time. Thirty-five minutes into the game, a penalty call was made against Howard, to the surprise of

many. But even then the mood of the Howard crowd was very high. After all, we had Shaka, the Bison spectacular freshman as goal keeper. We reasoned that, just as he had done in Virginia and on several other occasions, Shaka would save the penalty kick. But this one last time, however, Shaka could not deliver.

That one disastrous penalty call, ending with a score, decided the game. The Bison had lost but not defeated. Steven Goff, writing in *The Washington Post*, correctly reported that the Howard team was "tripped up" on that penalty kick, "awarded on a controversial call in the first half." Lincoln Phillips remarked that the call was "disgraceful." Professor Semple, who has been watching international soccer for more than 30 years, was overwhelmed by disbelief. "It's a pity," he said, "that a major championship game as this should have been decided on such a terrible call."

After the game, the Howard players and supporters stood in silent disbelief. Some valiantly held back tears. Others wept openly. The end had finally come!

In spite of everything, 1988 was one very magical year. The team returned to campus amid a wave of publicity and honor. After many setbacks, noticeably that of the 1987 football team that was left out of the NCAA playoffs despite a superior record, a sense of pride had settled on campus. At a special recognition for the soccer team in the Blackburn Center, the director of the center, Roberta McLeod, summed it up nicely: "The soccer team has brought the campus together and it's a nice feeling to have people come back and root for Howard University." "The soccer team of 1988," she said, "was carrying on the momentum that the football team started." Presentations were also made to the team by the Howard University Student Association and the Caribbean Students Association.

There's a nice sign that still beckons in the Blackburn Center. It speaks to the soccer team in an eloquent and simple way: "YOU'RE NO. 1 TO H.U." □

*The writer is an assistant professor in the Department of Social Sciences at Howard University.*

## HOWARD SOCCER HIGHLIGHTS



- 1961 Won NAIA championships, the first national title won by a Black school.
- 1962 Made first NCAA tournament appearance, losing 9-1 to Michigan State.
- 1970 First of five consecutive NCAA final four appearances. Lost 4-3 to UCLA in semi-final. Ted Chambers resigned as coach with 123-36-11 record.
- 1971 Ended 15-0 season by winning first NCAA championship, a 3-2 victory over St. Louis. However, school later was stripped of title by NCAA. Lincoln Phillips' first year at school.
- 1972 Lost 2-1 in overtime to St. Louis in semi-final round.
- 1974 Finished 19-0 season by defeating St. Louis, 2-1, in four overtimes to win NCAA championship.
- 1975 Lost 3-1 in semi-final round to Southern Illinois-Edwardsville. Lost third-place consolation game to Brown, 2-0.
- 1980 Lincoln Phillips' last year at Howard. Overall record: 116-20-11
- 1981 Finished 7-5-2 in Keith Tucker's first year at Howard.
- 1985 Finished with 6-7-2 record, breaking a string of 29 consecutive winning seasons.
- 1988 Lost NCAA championship game to Indiana, 1-0, ending a 25-game unbeaten streak.







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