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Sports

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Non-scholarship programs successful at AC, Jewell

by JEFF FINCHER

Austin College became a rebel in 1954 when the Kangaroos decided to do away with athletic scholarships and institute the only non-scholarship program in Texas.

This Saturday the 'Roos meet William Jewell, a non-scholarship school from Liberty, Mo., in the NAIA Division II semifinals game at 1 p.m. in Calder Stadium.

Far from a loner now, Austin College was one of the founders in the only non-scholarship athletic conference in the five-state area in 1976 with McMurry College, Sul Ross State University, Tarleton State University, Trinity University and Lubbock Christian College. The 'Roos have since earned two trips to the NAIA playoffs, including their present bid for a first-ever national championship, with a healthy, thriving program.

"The idea of a non-scholarship conference has been the key to our success," said Austin College athletic director Bob Mason. "It has given us some natural rivalries that we didn't have before and it is a lot easier to get exposure when you're in a conference."

Although recruiting athletes was sometimes difficult in the years when they were the only school talking non-scholarship to Texas athletes, they still managed to keep the idea going.

"Through the years what we've sold is our academic program," Mason said of the private liberal arts college.



AC attracts a rare combination of student-athletes to its campus who come there for a recognized academic environment plus an established athletic program. "In the early years it was difficult for people to understand that we were a non-scholarship school — to convey the whole idea. When we talked to people they always expected us to come back at the end and say 'this is what you're really going to get,'" said Mason.

AC has managed to maintain their high academic standards and keep up winning athletics although they are the first to admit they are not right for everyone. Their reputation for fielding quality football and basketball teams in recent years has attracted plenty of willing athletes.

"They have to understand what kind of athlete we're looking for. We don't want to encourage anyone to do anything where they might fail," he said.

Cardinals' head football coach Vic Lawrence enjoys the atmosphere that pervades his non-scholarship program at William Jewell, preferring it to the big money world of major college football.

"I've been at both scholarship and non-scholarship and it's been my experience that what happens there (scholarship) is you don't get the quality of person, although you might get the quality athlete. In philosophy we (AC and William Jewell) are very similar."

Lawrence is in his first

year with the Cardinals and spent last year as tight end coach for Texas Tech.

Of the eight teams who were selected to the NAIA Division II playoffs, only two — Panhandle State and Dickinson College — awarded football scholarships, said NAIA executive director Wally Schwartz.

Both were defeated in first round action.

As a result of AC's athletic success the Kangaroos continue to attract the type students who respond to the program.

"There's no question that athletes want to play in a quality program where they can win. Anytime you have a successful program there is a great spill over effect on the other sports. It helps all of them," Mason said.

Named to the first team All-America squad earlier this week, AC quarterback Larry Shillings thinks things couldn't have worked out better for the senior.

"I was a little burned out on football after high school and Austin College gave me the chance that I wouldn't have got anywhere else."

William Jewell welcome Friday

A rally welcoming Austin College's NAIA playoff opponent — the William Jewell Cardinals — is scheduled for 11:30 a.m. Friday at the Rodeway Inn on Highway 75 North.

The public is invited to the rally, which is sponsored by the Greater Sherman Area Chamber of Commerce.

A brief ceremony will include welcome messages from State Rep. Bob Bush, Mayor Jack Kennedy, Chamber President Bill Lawrence and Austin College President Dr. Harry Smith.

The members of the William Jewell football team will be given hospitality packets.

Tickets for Friday night's NAIA playoff banquet, co-sponsored by the Sherman Chamber of Commerce and the Visitors and Convention Bureau, honoring Austin College and William Jewell, will be sold through noon Friday.

They are available for \$6 at AC's office.