

History of NIRSA National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association



**A Tribute to
NIRSA's Founder
Dr. William N. Wasson**



The roots of the NIA and NIRSA are deep and very important in creating the organization we all invest in. The past gives way to the present and leads to the new horizons of our recreational profession.

Dr. William N. Wasson

“Bill,” as his friends called him, was more than just the founder of our Association. He was a role model who raised the level of respect for our profession.



William Nathaniel Wasson was born in 1915 in Chattanooga, Tennessee and raised in Louisville, Kentucky. He received his Bachelor's in Biology at the University of Louisville Municipal College in 1937. He received his first Master's in Biology at Atlanta University in 1940. He later received his Master's and Doctorate in Physical Education at the University of Michigan in 1949 and 1954, respectively.

1937

Wasson received a Bachelor of Science degree in biology. While in college he played football, basketball and ran track.

1946

While pursuing a Master's in Physical Education, Wasson took a class from Dr. Mitchell, "The Father of Intramurals."

1946

After completing his second Master's Degree he taught in the Biology Department at Dillard University (Louisiana) and set up an intramural sports program on campus.

1948

Bill Wasson made an application to the Carnegie Foundation for a \$500 grant. His desire was to study the intramural sports programs in southern Black Colleges. The proposal was approved.

William Wasson did not let his cultural background, the color of his skin or anything else hinder him from reaching his fullest potential or helping others to reach theirs.



When he graduated with his Master's, Wasson moved to Dillard University in New Orleans, Louisiana, to teach biology, but he continued his interest in sports. He was an assistant coach for both football and basketball, was the head track coach, and developed an intramural program for Dillard students. As his interest in this activity grew, he applied for and received a grant from the Carnegie Foundation in 1948 to tour Black Colleges throughout the country to study their student intramural programs.



February 22-23, 1950
Inaugural meeting of the National Intramural Association (NIA) to share the findings of Wasson's study and to exchange ideas to improve programs.

1953
Ross E. Townes publishes the Association's first newsletter.

1962
The NIA had at least one member from every state as well as the District of Columbia and Canada. Wasson published a laboratory manual titled *Anatomy and Kinesiology*.

1969
The Association hired Paul H. Gunsten as Executive Secretary to handle the administrative details of the organization. Bill Wasson received the NIRSAs Honor Award.

Once he had collected the data and written A Comparative Study of Intramural Programs in Black Colleges, he sent the document to all of the participating colleges that he had visited. It was during this time that he developed the idea of having a national organization that would serve as a reference, a resource, and meeting of the minds of men and women interested in developing intramural programs. This ultimately led to the meeting of 22 male and female intramural directors from 11 Historically Black Colleges and Universities at Dillard University on February 22, 1950. It was at this meeting that the National Intramural Association (NIA), later known as NIRSA, was created. Dr. Wasson has since become known as "The Founder of the Association"... a vibrant Association leading a whole new generation of recreational sports and higher education professionals into the future. We look forward to celebrating our 60th year in 2009.

Dr. Wasson left a rich legacy of service and involvement. He served as President of the NIA for the first five years, received the NIRSA Honor Award in 1969, and published numerous articles on intramural and recreational sports. He served as a consultant for the establishment of a National Intramural Association of Canada.



1975

The NIA Membership voted to change the name to the National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association (NIRSA).

1986

Will Holsberry's title was changed from Executive Secretary to Executive Director and the National Office became a full-time operation.

1987

NIRSA saw its first woman President, Mary Daniels, and the first School of Recreational Sports Management.

1992

The NIRSA Foundation, a not-for-profit organization that raises money for scholarships, research, and professional development, was established.

1999

The for-profit NIRSA Services Corporation (NSC) was formed to support the Vision and Mission of NIRSA through enterprise.



While in Detroit, William Wasson was a member of the Varsity Club, an incorporated order of former varsity intercollegiate athletic award winners that gave financial aid to athletes. They established the Varsity Club Fund to support such organizations as the Boy Scouts, YMCA, and Public School League, by promoting amateur indoor track and field competitions in Detroit.



While pursuing a Master's in Physical Education at the University of Michigan in 1946, William Wasson took a class from Dr. Mitchell, "The Father of Intramurals." That one event was the keystone for what would follow.



NIA Founding Members

Dillard University

Annette Akins
Armstead Pierre
William Wasson

Bethune-Cookman College, now known as Bethune-Cookman University

Roosevelt Grattic
Rudolph Mathews

Texas State University, now known as Texas Southern University

Dimples Lee
Juanita Pierce
Viggo Wallace

Xavier University, now known as Xavier University of Louisiana

James Hawkins
Victor Kerr
Alfred Priestly
Hiram Workman

George James
Alvin Brown
Allen Weatherford
Horace Moody
Grant Gray
Cleve Abbot
Ross E. Townes

Albany State College, now known as Albany State University
Arkansas A&M, now known as University of Arkansas Pine Bluff
North Carolina College, now known as North Carolina Central University
Southern University
Tillotson College, now known as Huston-Tillotson University
Tuskegee Institute, now known as Tuskegee University
Wiley College



Not shown: Morris X. F. Jeff (New Orleans Recreation Department), Jim Hall (*Louisiana Weekly*), and Reverend Norman A. Holmes.



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