



# "Coach" Willie Lee Tate



**"Coach" Willie Lee Tate**, "Man for All Seasons" was the 11<sup>th</sup> of fourteen children born to Mr. Jay Lee and Mrs. Elnora Anderson Tate. He was educated in Arkadelphia Public Schools and was a 1962 graduate of Peake High School. He was a natural athlete and excelled as a student and showed tremendous enthusiasm and excellence in basketball, football, and track. He earned his Bachelor of Science degree at AM&N College in 1968, now University of Arkansas, Pine Bluff, AR and his Master of Science degree in Physical Education from Henderson State University, Arkadelphia, AR. At AM&N College, Willie had a stellar career as an athlete in running track, playing baseball, football and he served as the team captain. In 1966, he represented AM&N College Golden Lions playing Guard position for the Ebony College Scoreboard - All American Football Team. He also earned Southwestern Athletic Conference honors in both football and baseball. Willie received offers to go professional in football and baseball. He also played semi-pro baseball and served as the pitcher on an All-White team at that time, pitching no-hitters and hitting countless homeruns.

His first coaching job in 1968 was at Yeager High School and later Hope High School. After integration he served as defensive coordinator and head track coach. It was there that he was rightfully proclaimed "Coach Tate." He coached in Hope, AR until 1973 before moving on to Arkadelphia to serve as football coach at L.M. Goza Junior High School with the legendary Coach John Outlaw. Coach Tate moved to spent 15 years as head track coach and defensive coordinator at Arkadelphia High School. He helped the Badgers win nine district football championships, as well as Class AAA State championships in 1979 and 1987. He also coached three 7AAA championship track teams and finished second in the Class AAA Meet eight different times. He was named Track Coach of the Year on more than one occasion. Coach Tate was inducted into the Hope Athletic Hall of Fame, and in 1988 was selected to serve as part of the coaching staff for the Arkansas High School West All-Star Football Squad. Coach Tate left Arkadelphia School District with a total of 23 years combined coaching experience. In 1990, Coach Willie Tate made history as the first Black head track coach of Henderson State University.

Coach Tate had many hobbies, but his fondest pastime was golf. In July 2011, Courtyard Gardens honored Coach Tate by spear heading the 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Willie Tate Golf Classic to benefit the Alzheimer's Association to support research for Alzheimer's disease and other dementias. This event is held annually at the Degray State Park, Arkadelphia, AR and all proceeds are donated to the Alzheimer's Association. Two awards are given annually in his honor: The Willie Tate Heart of the Badger Most Esteemed and Prestigious Award, sponsored by the Arkadelphia High School Football Team, and The Willie Tate Meritorious Humanitarian Award, Hall of Honor at Henderson State University.

In spite of his many accomplishments Willie always felt that his greatest achievement was in marrying his wife Annie Nelson. Together, they shared a beautiful devotion of 44 years with one another that radiated like a brilliant and beautiful light for others to emulate. Coach Tate represented the essence of what sports meant to his students, his community and the world. He used his God-given talents to devote himself to serve others and to inspire all with whom he worked. Our world is much richer, because we were blessed to have Coach Willie Lee Tate in our lives.