

# 1955 Wake Forest Demon Deacons, "National Champions"

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By BILL HASS

The Atlantic Coast Conference has been recognized for many years as one of the finest college baseball leagues in the country. Several teams are always highly ranked and usually seven or more make it into the playoffs. This past week, two ACC teams qualified for the 2015 College World Series – Virginia and Miami. They are in search of the something that has eluded the ACC since 1955 – a national championship. Miami, it must be noted, has won four national baseball titles, but none since it joined the ACC.

The team that won the 1955 championship would probably surprise you. It was Wake Forest, then located in the North Carolina town of the same name. Who was on that team and how was it able to pull off this feat?

The following is an excerpt from the book "Nothing Finer: North Carolina's Sports History and the People Who Made It."

1955 NCAA National Champions - Wake Forest Demon Deacons



**SPORTS**  
SECTION 3 — TWELVE PAGES

**GREENSBORO DAILY NEWS**

**SPORTS**  
FRIDAY, JUNE 17, 1955

## Wake Forest Captures NCAA Baseball Championship

### "A Strong Right Arm and Iron Nerve"

In 1960, Billy Barnes was a halfback for the Philadelphia Eagles, who beat the Green Bay Packers 17-13 to win the NFL championship.



Wake Forest head coach Taylor Sanford is hoisted up on the shoulders of his players following the Deacs' 7-6 win over Western Michigan in the 1955 NCAA Baseball Championship game.

Barnes – he doesn't have a preference if you call him Billy or Bill or even Billy Ray – was approached after the game by an interviewer who suggested this must be the greatest thrill of his athletic career.

"It's not even close," Barnes remembers answering. "I told the guy that winning the NCAA baseball championship in 1955 was the best thing that ever happened to me."

(Sixty) years later, it remains that way.

That championship was a last college hurrah for the small town of Wake Forest, located just north of Raleigh. A year later the school moved lock, textbooks and equipment to Winston-Salem.

In 1955 Wake Forest College consisted of about 1,200 students, "counting the seminary and law school," according to Barnes. But it had assembled a 19-member baseball team with numerous talented players.

## 1955 Wake Forest Demon Deacons "National Champions" [2 of 5]:

Catcher Linwood Holt hit .352 and made All-America. Pitcher Lowell "Lefty" Davis won 10 games, a school record that was tied twice but not broken until 1998. Frank McRae, who Barnes said "hit the ball as hard as anybody", drove in 34 runs. Luther McKeel scored 37 runs and Tommy Cole hit seven home runs.

**Taylor Sanford**



A 1929 graduate of the University of Richmond, Wake Forest head coach Taylor Sanford is named National Coach of the Year in 1955 after directing the Deacons to a 29-7 record and the school's first-ever national title in any sport. Stallings, who directed Wake Forest to an 86-40 record in five years as its head coach (1951-55), fashions a .320 career batting average in 13 minor league seasons (1934-46) with 1,420 hits, including 139 home runs.

Those totals may seem modest today, but teams played far fewer games then. Wake took a 19-5 overall record into the NCAA playoffs and finished 29-7.

"We hustled 100 percent at all times," Barnes said, "on every play and every pitch, whether we were on the field or in the dugout."

Coaching the team was Taylor Sanford, who provided a consistent, low-key, let-them-play style.

"I commend him for his approach," said Jack McGinley, a pitcher who would emerge as Wake's hero in the playoffs. "He guided us as opposed to dictating. We knew what we had to do."

That season was only the for second for baseball in the newly-formed ACC and there was no conference tournament. The Deacons finished first in the standings with an 11-3 record, but they were assured of nothing else. The NCAA playoffs were by invitation then, and Wake had been impressive enough to receive one.

Assigned to District 3, the Deacons began their journey by going on the road to take two of three games from West Virginia. From there they rode a train to Florida to play a tough opponent in Rollins.

"Nobody knew us down there," Barnes said. "They were cocky, but we whipped them pretty good."

The scores were 4-0 and 6-2, earning Wake Forest one of the eight spots in the College World Series in Omaha. It was a new world for the Deacons. McGinley recalls teammate Harold Moore, the shortstop, exclaiming, "we're going to Omaha!" To which outfielder Tommy Cole replied, "where the heck is Omaha?"

To get there, the team had to fly. Although the Deacons were a confident bunch, this gave them some trepidation. It was the first airplane ride for almost everyone.

"We weren't afraid of nothing," Barnes said. "But I wasn't sure I wanted to get on that plane."

The plane arrived safely, but without a key player. Lefty Davis, who was also a star basketball player, had let his grades slip and was required to go to summer school to retain his hoops eligibility. He stayed behind while his baseball teammates carried on.

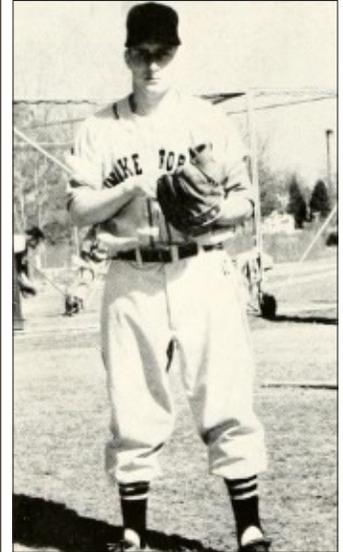
"We had no pressure on us whatsoever," outfielder George Miller told the Ashboro Courier-Tribune in 2013. "No one knew Wake Forest from anyone."

Without his ace, Sanford turned to McGinley, a sophomore right-hander from southern New Jersey. He was drawn to Wake Forest, in part, by the region's warm weather. Using a fastball, curve and changeup, he had gone 3-2 during the regular season, then posted wins over West Virginia and Rollins in the playoffs.

McGinley started the Deacons' opening game in Omaha, against Colgate. It turned into a classic pitchers' duel, a four-hitter by McGinley and two-hitter by Colgate's Lawrence Bossidy. But the Deacons squeezed out a run for a 1-0 win. An odd aspect to the game was a delay of 78 minutes because of a hailstorm. The weather turned cold, which worked well for the pitcher from New Jersey.

"I just put on a jacket (during the delay) and went from there," McGinley said. "It was funny to see hail on the field. I think the baseball gods were liking a cold-weather pitcher."

**Billy Barnes**



The team's starting third baseman, Billy Barnes, goes 6-for-23 (.260) with three doubles, one triple and eight RBIs in the six games. Barnes, the first player in the ACC to rush for more than a 1,000 yards in a single season, plays nine years in the NFL, earning Pro Bowl honors in 1957, 1958 and 1959.

### Wake Forest 1, Colgate 0 Friday, June 10

WAKE FOREST					COLGATE						
	ab	r	h	o	a		ab	r	h	o	a
Moore,ss	4	0	0	1	5	Johnson,ss	2	0	0	3	1
McKeel,cf	4	0	1	4	0	Nardulli,cf	4	0	1	4	0
Holt,c	3	0	1	5	0	Dr'sema,lb	4	0	1	7	0
Cole,rf	3	0	0	1	0	Car'gelo,lf	4	0	1	1	0
McRae,lf	4	0	0	0	0	Martin,3b	3	0	0	1	1
Barnes,3b	3	0	0	1	3	Gariy'tis,rf	3	0	0	1	0
Bryant,2b	3	0	0	2	2	Aceti,c	3	0	0	7	1
Wagner,lb	2	1	0	1	3	Kraus,2b	2	0	0	3	5
McGinley,p	2	0	0	0	3	Bossidy,p	3	0	1	0	2
<b>Totals</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>Totals</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>10</b>

Wake Forest ..... 000 000 010-1  
Colgate ..... 000 000 000-0

E—Dursema, Aceti, RBI—McKeel, SB—Dursema, S—Johnson, McGinley, DP—Johnson, Kraus, Dursema; Barnes, Bryant, Waggoner, LOB—Wake Forest 6, Colgate 4, BB—McGinley 2, Bossidy 5, SO—McGinley 4, Bossidy 7, R-ER—Bossidy 1-1, U—Gore, Doyle, Wykoski and Horton, T—1:56.

1955 Wake Forest Demon Deacons "National Champions" [3 of 5]:

Wake Forest 10, Colorado State 0  
Sunday, June 12

COLORADO STATE					WAKE FOREST				
	ab	r	h	o a		ab	r	h	o a
Holen.cf	4	0	0	3 0	Moore.ss	4	3	2	1 3
M'tinez.2b	4	0	1	4 2	McKeel.cf	3	4	2	3 0
Kordula.rf	2	0	0	0 0	Holt.c	2	1	1	1 0 0
Petersen.lf	4	0	1	2 1	Cole.rf	3	1	1	1 1 0
Lucas.lb	4	0	0	7 0	B'zagni.lb	0	0	0	2 0
Coates.ss	3	0	0	2 2	McRae.lf	4	0	0	1 0 0
Wright.3b	2	0	0	0 0	Barnes.3b	5	0	3	2 1
Hill.c	3	0	1	6 1	Bryant.2b	3	0	0	3 2
Gill.p	3	0	1	0 4	W'goner.lb	3	0	1	4 0
					aMiller.rf	1	0	0	1 0
					Davis.p	4	1	1	0 1

Totals 29 0 4 24 10 Totals 32 10 12 27 7  
aGrounded out for Waggoner in 7th.

Colorado State ..... 000 000 000—0  
Wake Forest ..... 420 000 13x—10

E—Wright 3. Gill 2. Holt. Barnes. RBI—Barnes 3. Waggoner. Holt 2. Cole. McKeel. 2B—Barnes. McKeel. 3B—McRae. SE—McKeel. S—Holt 2. SF—Holt. Cole. DP—Coates. Martinez and Lucas; Moore. Bryant and Waggoner; Bryant and Waggoner. LOB—Colorado State 7. Wake Forest 9. BB—Gill 6. Davis 5. SO—Gill 7. Davis 10. R-ER—Gill 10-8. Davis 0-0. HBP—By Gill (McKeel). PB—Hill 2. U—Gore. Doyle. Hergert. Hametz. T—2:18.

"At the time, we had no idea we weren't supposed to play," Barnes said. "We might have played anyway."

In the third round, the Deacons absorbed a 9-0 thumping by Western Michigan, but still advanced to the semifinals. The teams played again and Wake pulled out a 10-7 victory, with McGinley starting and winning. It was Western's first loss, but the Broncos still advanced to the championship game because they were the last team in the tournament to lose.

Wake had to win once more and John Stokoe pitched a gem in a 2-0 win over Oklahoma A&M (now Oklahoma State), the third shutout of the tournament by the Deacons' staff. So Wake faced Western Michigan yet again, this time with the championship at stake.

Wake's second game was scheduled for Saturday against Colorado State College (now the University of Northern Colorado). Since there were no summer school classes on the weekend, Wake's administrators allowed Davis fly to Omaha to pitch the second game.

Rain delayed the game a day and on Sunday Davis pitched a shutout as the Deacons won 10-0 in his only College World Series appearance. He flew home, unaware of a controversy.

Being a devout Baptist school, Wake Forest did not play athletic events on Sundays. After the game, school president Dr. Harold Tribble was quoted that if he had known the game was going to be on Sunday, he wouldn't have let his team play. It probably wouldn't have mattered.

Wake Forest Is Criticized  
for Sunday Play in Omaha

Durham, N. C. (AP)—The Durham Sun said Monday that the Wake Forest College baseball team is receiving wide criticism for playing a game on Sunday.

Wake Forest is a Baptist-supported school.

The Deacons, now competing in the College World Series at Omaha, defeated Colorado State, 10-0, Sunday night.

The paper said Dr. Harold Tribble, president of Wake Forest College, was contacted in Winston-Salem Monday, where he has been attending the graduation exercises of Bowman Gray School of Medicine of Wake Forest College and he declared:

"If I had known about this Sunday game I would never have given my permission for it to be played."

It's against the principles of the Baptist school for its students to engage in competitive athletics on the Sabbath. Baptist leaders were quoted by the Sun.

The Rev. Dennis Hockaday, pastor of the First Baptist Church in Durham, dispatched a telegram to Dr. Tribble saying that "forfeit of the game is preferable to forfeit of the principles of Christianity."

He also suggested that members of the congregation send telegrams of protest to Dr. Tribble. Many of them did.

Western Michigan 9, Wake Forest 0  
Monday, June 13

Western Michigan					Wake Forest				
	ab	r	h	o a		ab	r	h	o a
Lajoie cf	4	2	0	0	Moore ss	4	0	4	1
David ss	2	1	4	1	McKeel cf	2	0	0	1
Johnson rf	5	2	1	0	Miller rf	4	1	1	1
Nagel lf	4	0	1	0	Holt c	4	0	7	1
Krings 2b	4	2	1	5	Koontz c	0	0	2	0
Czyz 3b	5	2	3	0	McRae lf	3	0	2	0
Frank 1b	4	0	8	1	Barnes 3b	4	0	0	1
LeNeave c	2	1	8	0	Bryant 2b	3	0	4	3
J. Smith p	2	1	0	2	W'goner lb	3	0	4	2
Sposito p	2	1	1	0	Bonzagni lb	1	0	3	0
					Fichter p	0	0	0	2
					Stokoe p	2	2	0	2
					Adams p	0	0	0	0
					eliorn	1	0	0	0

Totals 34 12 27 91 Totals 31 3 27 14  
eFiled out for Adams in ninth.

Western Michigan ..... 116 100 000—9  
Wake Forest ..... 000 000 000—0

R—Lajoie 3. David. Nagel. Krings 2. Czyz. LeNeave. E—David. Nagel. Krings 2. LeNeave. Barnes. Bryant. Adams. RBI—Johnson 2. Krings 3. Czyz. LeNeave 2. Jim Smith. 2B—LeNeave. David. HR—Krings 6. David 3. Jack Smith. DP—David-Krings-Jack Smith. Bryant-Moore. Left—Western Michigan 7. Wake Forest 9. BB—Fichter 2. Stokoe 3. Smith 5. SO—Fichter 2. Stokoe 5. Smith 3. Sposito 5. Adams 2. HO—Fichter. 6 in 2 1/3; Stokoe, 6 in 4 2/3; Adams, 0 in 2; Smith, 1 in 4 2/3; Sposito, 2 in 4 1/3. R-ER—Fichter 7-2. Stokoe 2-2. Adams 0-0. W—Sposito. L—Fichter. U—Doyle. Harbour. Hergert. Hametz. T—2:45. A—4:36.

Wake Forest 10, Western Michigan 7  
Tuesday, June 14

W. MICHIGAN					WAKE FOREST				
	ab	r	h	o a		ab	r	h	o a
Lajoie.cf	4	1	1	0 1	Moore.ss	2	0	1	1
David.ss	3	0	1	1 1	McKeel.cf	5	1	3	0
Johnson.rf	3	1	1	0	Miller.rf	5	1	1	1
Nagel.lf	4	0	1	0	Holt.c	4	2	4	0
Krings.2b	4	1	2	1	McRae.lf	2	2	0	2
Czyz.3b	3	1	1	3	Barnes.3b	4	1	2	3
Smith.lb	1	1	0	1	Bryant.2b	4	1	3	6
Berran.lb	1	0	0	1	Walsh.lb	4	1	2	0
LeNeave.c	3	0	1	5	McGinley.p	4	1	1	0
Adams.n.c	2	1	1	0	Adams.p	0	0	0	0
Eggers.p	1	0	0	0	Walsh.p	0	0	0	1
Frechette.p	0	0	0	0					
Finnrock.p	2	2	1	1					
BoConell	1	0	0	0					

Totals 32 7 9 24 10 Totals 34 10 12 27 11  
aHit grand slam home run for Le Neave in 8th.

bPopped up for Finnrock.

Western Michigan ..... 000 010 050—7  
Wake Forest ..... 007 010 20x—10

RBI—Johnson 2. Nagel. Messner 4. McKeel. Miller. Barnes 3. Bryant 4. Holt. HR—Messner. 3B—Barnes. 2B—Bryant 3. SB—McKeel. Barnes 2. Miller. Bryant. Waggoner. Holt 5. David. Smith. Moore. DP—Barnes. Bryant. Waggoner. BB—Eggers 2. Walsh 2. McGinley 10. Adams 1. Frechette 1. Finnrock 4. SO—Walsh 1. Eggers 1. Finnrock 3. McGinley 3. HO—Eggers 4 in 2 1/3. Frechette 2 in 0. McGinley 7 in 7. Adams 2 in 0. Walsh 0 in 3. Finnrock 6 in 5 2/3. LOB—Western Michigan 13. Wake Forest 8. Wild pitch—McGinley. Walsh. WP—McGinley. LP—Eggers. U—Rice. Hergert. Harbour and Hametz. T—3:00. A—2:82.

Wake Forest 2, Oklahoma A&M 0  
Wednesday, June 15

WAKE FOREST					OKLA. A&M				
	ab	r	h	o a		ab	r	h	o a
Moore.ss	3	0	0	3 3	Bobb.c	4	0	0	4 0
McKeel.cf	3	0	0	1 0	Bennett.lf	2	0	1	0 0
Miller.rf	4	0	1	0	Woolard.2b	4	0	0	2 6
Holt.c	3	1	1	9 0	Finegan.lb	3	0	0	8 1
McRae.lf	3	0	0	0	Patrick.c	4	0	0	1 1
Barnes.3b	4	1	1	2 3	Hemp'ey.rf	4	0	2	0 0
Bryant.2b	4	0	1	4 1	Duval.3b	3	0	1	1 2
Wagg'r.lb	4	0	0	7 3	Bacon.ss	4	0	0	0 2
Stokoe.p	3	0	0	0 2	Garrett.p	3	0	0	1 1
					aWright	1	0	0	0 0

Totals 31 2 3 27 12 Totals 32 0 4 27 13  
aGround out for Garrett in 9.

Wake Forest ..... 001 001 000—2  
Oklahoma A&M ..... 000 000 000—0

E—Moore 2. Bryant. Woolard. Duval. Bacon. Garrett. RBI—Barnes. Stokoe. SB—Bennett. Hemperly. S—Duval. McRae. DP—Bacon to Woolard to Finegan. BB—Stokoe 4; off Garrett 6. SO—Stokoe 9; by Garrett 10. LB—Wake Forest 9. Oklahoma A&M 10. U—Rice. Doyle. Harbam and Gomez. T—2:12. A—2:85.

## 1955 Wake Forest Demon Deacons "National Champions" [4 of 5]:



Wake Forest's lefty John Stokoe is congratulated by teammates following his four-hit, 2-0 shutout of Oklahoma A&M that moves the Deacs into the championship game of the College World Series.

With the pitching staff strained, Sanford turned to Bill Walsh as the starter. Wake jumped to a 3-0 lead but Western rallied and knocked out Walsh, with Buck Fichter relieving. In the fourth inning, with Fichter in trouble and his team down 4-3, Sanford called on McGinley, who had pitched just two days before and was used to three days of rest.

"Are you sure?" McGinley responded when told to warm up. He threw only six or seven pitches before the bullpen phone rang and he was summoned to the mound, his arm stiff and sore. Sanford asked Tommy Cole, sitting out the game with an injury, how McGinley looked warming up.

"I don't know," Cole replied. "He hasn't gotten one over the plate yet."

It was a messy situation, with the bases loaded and

two outs. McGinley coaxed the first hitter he faced into a ground ball, but it got past shortstop Harold Moore for an error. Two runs scored to make it 6-3. McGinley prevented further damage by striking out the next batter.

The Deacons pecked their way back into the game, tying it 6-6. In the bottom of the eighth inning, center fielder Luther McKeel walked and moved to third base on two passed balls. The next two hitters struck out, but Linwood Holt singled up the middle to score McKeel.

By this point, McGinley was pitching purely on grit.

"I had to forget my arm was killing me," he said. "The trainer was rubbing something called 'Atomic Balm,' a hot substance, on my elbow. I was thinking 'I've got to hold them here because this is a chance we can't pass up.'"

McGinley remembers retiring the side in order in the top of the ninth to preserve the 7-6 win. The last ball was hit sharply to third baseman Barnes, who moved to his left and stabbed it.

"I think my teammates thought I was going to run the ball to first base," Barnes said with a laugh. "But I threw him out."

Among those who waited anxiously was McGinley.

"The ball got there quick," he said, "and (Barnes) popped his glove a couple of times. I was thinking, 'go on and throw it!'"

After that, McGinley recalls tossing his glove in the air and disappearing under a pile of teammates. He

### Wake Forest 7, Western Michigan 6 Thursday, June 16

WAKE FOREST					W. MICHIGAN								
	a	b	r	h	o	a		a	b	r	h	o	a
Moore,ss	6	0	1	2	3	Lajoie,cf	4	2	2	3	0	4	
McKeel,cf	2	3	0	6	0	David,ss	4	1	1	2	4		
Miller,rf	5	1	1	0	0	Johnson,rf	5	2	3	0	0		
Holt,c	4	1	3	6	0	Nagel,lf	4	1	1	1	0		
McRae,lf	5	2	5	2	0	Berick,lf	1	0	0	0	0		
Barnes,3b	3	0	0	2	2	Krings,2b	3	0	0	4	5		
Bryant,2b	4	0	2	4	1	Czyz,3b	3	0	0	2			
Wagner,lb	3	0	0	3	2	Smith,lb	2	0	0	6	0		
Bonga,lb	0	0	0	2	0	Messner,c	4	0	0	10	1		
Walsh,p	1	0	0	0	1	Graham,p	1	0	0	1	0		
Fichter,p	1	0	0	0	0	Schwartz,p	3	0	0	1	0		
McGinley,p	3	0	0	0	0	Co'Connell	1	0	0	0	0		
aCole	1	0	0	0	0	dBerryman	1	0	0	0	0		

Totals 38 7 12 27 9 Totals 36 6 8 27 13  
 aStruck out for Waggoner in 7th.  
 bFlied out for Nagel in 8th.  
 cStruck for Czyz in 9th.  
 dGrounded out for Smith in 9th.

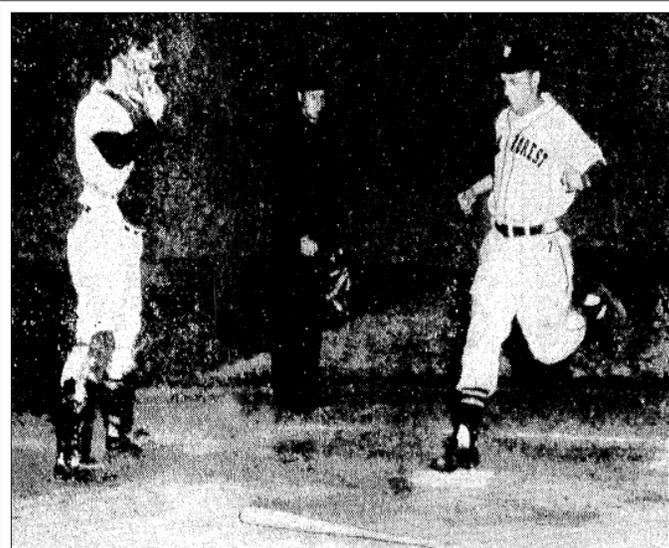
Wake Forest ..... 012 030 010-7  
 West Michigan ..... 003 300 000-6

E—Moore, Bryant, Czyz. RBI—Holt, McRae 3, Barnes, Bryant, Waggoner, Johnson 2, Nagel, Czyz. 2b—McRae, Lajoie, Bryant. SB — David, Johnson, Waggoner. S—Smith, Holt, Barnes. LOB —Wake Forest 12, Western Michigan 10. BB—Graham 2, Schwartzkoff 4, Walsh 4, Fichter 2. SO—Graham 1, Schwartzkoff 9, Walsh 2, McGinley 4. HO—Graham 3 in 2 (faced 2 men in third), Schwartzkoff 9 in 7, Walsh 4 in 2<sup>3</sup>, Fichter 1 in 1, McGinley 3 in 5<sup>1</sup>. R-ER—Graham 3-3, Schwartzkoff 4-4; Walsh 3-3, Fichter 3-0, McGinley 0-0. PB—Messner 2. WP —McGinley. LP — Schwartzkoff. U—Doyle, Harbour, Hametz, Hergert. T—2:45. A—2042.

### Jack McGinley



The pitching star of the 1955 College World Series, Jack McGinley, wins three games, including a 5 1/3 scoreless innings stint in the title game, with a 1.27 ERA. The sophomore right-hander allows only 14 hits in 21 1/3 innings in CWS play. Despite his 3-0 record, MVP honors go to lefty Tom Borland, who has two wins and a save for national semifinalist Oklahoma A&M.



Wake Forest's Luther McKeel scores the winning run on a single by Linwood Holt in the top of the eighth inning in the Deacs' 7-6 win over Western Michigan in the 1955 NCAA Baseball Championship game.

## 1955 Wake Forest Demon Deacons "National Champions" [5 of 5]:

had pitched 5 1/3 innings of relief in the championship game, winning his third game of the Series and fifth of the play-offs. After the error, he allowed no runs and three hits with four strikeouts. Frank McRae had five hits in the game and McKeel scored three runs.

Here's the game lead by Robert Phipps, covering for the *Omaha World-Herald*:

"Jack McGinley's strong right arm and iron nerve carried Wake Forest to the championship of the College World Series Thursday night before 2,042 (fans)."

The Deacons flew home and were treated to a banquet and parade. It never registered on anyone that this was the first national championship for any team in any sport in North Carolina.

"I don't think we realized what we had done until some years later," McGinley said.

In 2000, the team was presented championship rings by the school for its accomplishment, which still represents a special place in ACC lore. Although the league has become one of the country's strongest in baseball, that 1955 title remains the only one it has won.

Bill Hass covered sports for the Greensboro News & Record from January, 1969, until his retirement in March, 2006. His chapter in "Nothing Finer" covers North Carolina's collegiate national champions. Wake Forest's 1955 baseball team won the first national championship in any sport by any school in the state of North Carolina.

