



Emotions run the gamut for former coach Ted Jackson Sr. at the Dallas High School football reunion held May 27 at Irem Temple Country Club.

DHS gridders gather, remember

Program at Irem Temple highlights coaching career of Ted Jackson Sr.

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Although the coaching style of Ted Jackson Sr. has been called many things, one word that came to mind on May 27 was "consistent."

How else could one explain hundreds of ex-footballers aged 20, 30 and 40 agreed Jackson was a strong leader, and the lessons he taught stayed with them long after they left the field?

At a Dallas High School football reunion honoring Jackson's 27-year career at Irem Temple Country Club, nearly 400 people, comprised of former players, coaches, sports journalists, family and friends, some of whom traveled from Florida, California, Virginia and elsewhere, came to support the coach.

Jackson's position as the Dallas High School head football coach was opened to the public due to unsatisfactory performance review in late 2011, and after a hearing on the matter, the board opted to hire Shavertown resident Bob Zaruta to fill the position.

But the hundreds of former football players at the reunion gave Jackson a different review.

"If I had to explain why Ted was such a great coach, I could write a novel," said 33-year-old Lenny Dorrance, of Dallas.

Dorrance was a defensive end for the Mountaineers during the 1995-97 seasons under Jackson.

"It was just the preparation - he taught you how to be a better person," said Dorrance. "He taught you to be better by striving for what you want and doing it."

Dorrance said walking through the pavilion and seeing his former football teammates brought back a whirlwind of memories.

"It's like a flashback to my football years," he said. "I can smell the grass and dirt and pads. It's a definite flashback."

The outskirts of the Irem pavilion were lined with memorabilia spanning the coach's career.

"I think my wife has every year documented," Jackson said as he greeted guests. "Some of these people I haven't seen in 20 or 30 years."

Some of the former players in attendance knew Jackson before they were even able to catch a football.

Kevin Yurko, 30, of Dallas, said he was a water boy for the team long before he became a quarterback in the 1997-99 seasons.

"I've known the Jacksons since I was 5 years old," he said. "They're very good family friends. My older brother played and I was a water boy. I grew up around it."

He said it wasn't until he became a player himself that he realized the importance of Jackson's lessons.

"The impact was lasting well beyond football," said Yurko. "He taught us about working hard, like getting up for work, and not giving up."

Forty-eight-year-old James Roccograndi, of Dallas Township, had two sons play under Jackson's lead - 17-year-old Kristopher and 18-year-old James.

He said his family attended the reunion because the coach was "a very positive influence" and "a great role model" for his children.

"I think he steered them into the right direction," said Roccograndi. "He taught the kids that it's up to you. The kids mold themselves. It's not mommy and daddy complaining to the officials. You have to talk to the officials yourself. He grooms them for the realities in life."

Pat O'Neill, 35, of Alexandria, Va., played for Jackson during the 1992-94 seasons - sandwiched in between that time period was the year the Mountaineers won a state championship title in 1993.

He said it's been about a year since he had last seen friend Matt Gingo, 31, of Tampa Fla., but he was happy to catch up with him and other fellow players at the reunion.

"We're all pretty close," said O'Neill. "In my wedding party, five out of the six guys were ex-

football players. And the sixth guy was my dad."

O'Neill compared the Mountaineer football team to a sort of fraternity - everyone tries to keep in touch, and loyalty is very important.

"It was a select group, like the Marines," he said. "I think we were in boot camp like the Marines."

O'Neill said Jackson taught him about the value of hard work and he now gravitates towards people who share the same values.

Gingo said Jackson kept the boys in line, and the team was typically quick to listen to its coach more than anyone else.

"I think we didn't get into trouble because we were more afraid of him than our parents or the police," he said.

Dorrance felt the same when he was a young football player - and still does.

"(Jackson) still intimidates me," he said.

The state's all-time winningest high school football coach, George Curry, 68, of Berwick, wasn't afraid when he faced Jackson on the field, but he certainly was "concerned."

"A team is a reflection of the coach, and that was certainly evi-



Ted Jackson, Sr., center, listens to a speech as his son Matt, left, and his wife, Sandy, look on.

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Brett Wanek, right, and F.J. Costantino, both of Dallas, look over newspaper clippings of Dallas football under former coach Ted Jackson.



Dallas 1997 graduate Jeff Beisel, of Shavertown, left, and 2004 graduate Ryan Mark, of Conshohocken, look over Dallas football memorabilia.



Corey Cherup, a member of the 1993 state champion Dallas football team, praises his former coach, Ted Jackson Sr.



Gerry Mihalick, of Dallas, right who played under former coach Ted Jackson during Jackson's first season, looks over Dallas football memorabilia with Linda Wengen, of Shavertown.

dent at Dallas," said Curry, former Lake-Lehman, Berwick and Wyoming Valley West head coach. "He developed a culture at Dallas and made the kids into winners. I was never fearful, but when you faced Ted Jackson, you'd better be ready."

Nick Lombard, of Shavertown, and Cody Plesnar, of Dallas, said Jackson made them better leaders, and taught them discipline.

Plesnar, 20, was taken aback by all the people who came out to support his former coach.

"You get perspective - it's amaz-

ing how many guys he's affected throughout the years," he said. Jackson did not say whether he will coach again but alluded to the fact that the sport is in his blood.

"Pretty soon I'll be getting itchy again," he said.