

## Special Tribute to Dr. James Harold Smith

To: My Fellow Alums of the B.L. Moor High School Reunion 2009

The memories I have of school days at Moor as a football player have been very inspiring and beneficial in many life experiences, educationally, physically, and professionally. As I reminisce about various games and coaching strategies, I recall the work ethics and great care given to the players' entrusted to Mr. Davis and Mr. Smith. I am both grateful and proud of the values they instilled in me to become a better person and team player; but more importantly a good citizen to my community.

It's a real honor to be a part of the appreciation ceremony shown to our former Football Coaches the late Charles Davis, and particularly to honor Dr. James Harold Smith who was our Physical Education Teacher and Coach of our high school football team. As a professional, strong leader, and instructor, I am grateful for the many opportunities I had to work with Dr. Smith and most importantly be recruited by Him, when I became a student at Moor to be a part of the "Mighty Eagles Squad."

I began as a sophomore at Moor High. I enjoyed watching football and knew the game, but never considered playing. As time progressed and my curiosity grew, I started to watch the Eagles practice. As I watched the practice sessions, I became more determined not to play than anything else. It seemed as though they were trying to kill each other. Otherwise, the game seemed too quick and violent for me!

During my first year of attendance, Mr. Smith challenged me to try out for the team. It is my belief that he used every tactic in the book. He sized me up physically and mentally. Years later, I found out he and my father conspired to get me to play. At the end of that season, the team lost all of its starters with the exception of three. The team was in dire need of players with heart, skill sets, ability to learn quickly, and especially size.

That summer I matured physically and mentally (especially with me having been sheltered by both parents) and my curiosity for playing football grew. Mr. Smith and my father ratcheted more pressure to coerce me into playing. With no luck with their tactics, my father finally had a talk with me, "asking me to give it a try?" I finally acquiesced and was at practice for the upcoming year.

I was scared; yet determined to hang in there and not quit, however, my resolve was seriously tested, and I almost quit when my friend Charles Michael suffered a career ending knee injury during one of the practice sessions. The hardest part of playing turned out to be wind sprints and running that hill Jerry Rice frequently refer to. As the session progressed, I became stronger as my body adjusted to strenuous exercise.

Mr. Davis was the Head coach, but they worked together hand in hand. Mr. Davis worked with the offense, and Mr. Smith worked with the defense. I wasn't necessarily a BIG guy, yet I was larger than most other players. Consequently I was selected to play offensive and defensive tackle. In prior years, the school didn't have a large talent pool to choose from, thus, the better and larger players, except for the quarterback and running backs, had to play both offense and defense. I was pushed far beyond what I thought I was capable of doing. After relinquishing my fears of getting hurt, I began to enjoy being on the team with the initial intention of only making second string merely to avoid school and travel with the team.

After the hard practicing and getting use to the contact, my plans changed. I decided to pursue first string regardless of how hard the requirements. Both Mr. Davis and Mr. Smith made me summon

everything I had within me and more, however, they never abused any of us. The hardest part turned out to be the practices and sprint drills. I discovered through their leadership, and coaching, I was competitive and stubborn, but lacked that mean streak needed to make it to the next level.

Mr. Smith would joke you when needed, scold you if necessary, and praise you when you did excellent. The latter wasn't often because he didn't want us to be content. Contrary to today's techniques, fighting, taunting, and cursing wasn't allowed, but they got their points across.

Many of our players did not have transportation; however, Mr. Smith and Mr. Davis would see to it that they had transportation to and from practice.

One of Mr. Smith's favorite statements was "if you work right you work light, but if you work wrong you work long". It wasn't long before you understood the true meaning of this phrase.

My first season on the team was a learning experience, and a losing season. We weren't nearly as good as I thought we were. Towards the latter part of the season we finally won our first game and the next two out of three subsequent games. The team started to gel, to understand play assignments, and became just plain disgusted with losing. I later learned that the Eagles weren't accustomed to losing. As a motivational tool, Mr. Davis and Mr. Smith often reminded us of the Eagles' proud history.

My first game was a disaster. I was accustomed to playing in my practice equipment. These were pants and jerseys that didn't fit properly, but it was all the school could afford. The entire team was very proud when our actual game equipment was issued. As I recall my helmet was a bit too large, but the rest of the uniform fit well, especially compared to the practice equipment. I distinctly remember my pants fit so well that I didn't think I needed to wear a belt during the game. Consequently during the first play of the game I got hit rather hard\*\*I literally saw stars. The hit flipped me up into the air, but some how I landed on my feet with my pants down to my ankles. I spent the remainder of the first half holding up my pants with one hand and dodging direct hits. I could not wait for half time to get my belt.

The next year the team did much better. We lost only one game, the division championship to Amanda Elzy of Greenwood. It felt good to win but we were still not allowed to become complacent. I remember we beat one team 73-0. I am not exactly sure of the team's name, but think it was Thomas Town. Nevertheless, the score makes me evoke another one of Mr. Smith's favorite sayings. "That's the way to beat them. When you beat them like that, you take all of the doubt out of their minds. They will remember the whipping next year when we play them."

After high school in 1982, I had a motor cycle accident that left me permanently paralyzed. Immediately afterwards, I underwent four months of hospitalization, physical and occupational therapy, and four years of depression. The lessons I learned playing football were instrumental in my recovery. Football provided me the blue print to work hard and give it more than I thought I was capable of giving. There were several times I wanted to give up. I promise to this day, I still hear Mr. Smith's voice saying get up, dust it off, let's go, and run it out.

Mr. Smith, Coach Smith, Dr. Smith (man of many hats) I thank you for the lessons you and Mr. Davis instilled in me. Not only were they instrumental in my physical recovery; they were instrumental in every aspect of my life.

Charles Wicks  
Class of 1974