

Estacado's Keeling, Wallace to be inducted into Hall of Honor

Posted: June 15, 2016

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Jimmie Keeling didn't get the Coronado football job when the school opened in 1966, but the young coach must have made a good impression on Pete Ragus. That fall, the Lubbock ISD athletic director sent a letter to Keeling, outlining his need for a coach at another new school, Estacado.

Would he be interested?

"I actually wrote a note on the same letter that he sent me," Keeling said this week. "We were in the middle of football season. You know how busy you get. I just put 'Absolutely, yes,' and mailed it back to him."

That brief interaction turned out to be fortunate for both parties.

Keeling's Estacado team won the Class 3A state championship in 1968, going 14-0 in its first year of varsity competition. On Saturday, Keeling and Kenneth Wallace, the quarterback of that landmark team, will be inducted into the Lubbock ISD Athletic Hall of Honor as part of a 10-member class.

The 1968 Matadors already were inducted as a team in 2013.

"For me, that was wonderful," Wallace said. "That was the highlight for me, and to be inducted myself and with my football coach, that's just sort of over the top."

Keeling and Wallace both used the '68 season as a springboard to noteworthy careers: Keeling won 354 games as a high school and college coach, and Wallace went on to star as a Texas Tech defensive back.

Keeling was 75 when he retired in 2010 after 21 seasons at Hardin-Simmons. He was 33 in the fall of '68.

"Yeah, I was young and that was an exciting time," he said. "The whole time I was at Estacado, it was just a great group of kids, kids that became totally committed to trying to excel and do something special.

"I never saw a group of kids ever work any harder than those guys did to try to achieve. The way they got along with each other and all those things was really amazing. It was something to behold, really."

That's saying something, considering Keeling went 196-91-11 as a high school coach and 172-53 with 11 playoff teams in 21 seasons at Hardin-Simmons.

Wallace was a DB on the successful Jim Carlen era Red Raiders, then became a high school coach. Since 2001, he's worked in the Galena Park ISD, first as a principal and now as a deputy superintendent. During that time, Galena Park North Shore has won five state championships — two each in football and track and field and one in basketball.

"I think every state championship, for whoever's involved, is important," Wallace said. "I love the five I've been part of here in this school district, but the ring I wear every day and the one I have on right now is the ring from Estacado High School. That's the championship ring I wear. That's special to me. I had something to actually do with it as a player."

The 1968 Matadors outscored opponents 559-32. Wallace had help from all-state running backs James Mosley and Larry Miller and all-state linebacker Fred White.

Wallace said the Mats played the game with a passion, fueled by immediate feedback. One source of immediate feedback was the scoreboard. The other source was classmates, family and community. The Mats were the talk of the barbershop, and a topic of conversation at church.

“We liked that feeling,” Wallace said, “and we weren’t going to let anything change that.”

Estacado was under construction in the spring of 1967, set to open in the fall, when Ragus hired Keeling away from Elgin. Keeling spent his mornings that spring semester teaching P.E. at Lubbock High. (“I remember we were teaching square dancing,” he said.) Afternoons, he had an athletic period at Alderson Junior High with the future Matadors — some from the junior highs, some from Dunbar, some from Lubbock High.

Construction on the football program didn’t take long: Estacado laid the foundation for its state-title run by going 9-1 against a junior varsity schedule in 1967.

In 1968, the Mats used a ladder, an incomplete ladder, as a visual guide to the top. Each week, coaches placed a rung — a literal wooden board — above the locker room door with the name of that Friday’s opponent.

“There was a little ceremony we did after the game when we’d get back to the dressing room,” Keeling said. “We’d put the rung on the ladder. It was fun to watch it grow step by step.”

Every week, the Matadors succeeded in putting another rung in their ladder on the wall. They beat Refugio 14-0 — their 10th shutout in 14 games — for the state title at Amon Carter Stadium in Fort Worth.

“It’s been close to 50 years,” Wallace said, “and guess what: We’re still talking about it, aren’t we? I know I try to look back, and that was one of the best things that’s happened in my life.”

The Hall of Honor inductions are scheduled for 6:30 p.m. Saturday at the Memorial Civic Center. Tickets are \$40. For more information, contact Denise Mattson at (806) 544-6957.