

Longtime HSU Football Coach Keeling Retires

Jimmie Keeling went 172-53 at Hardin-Simmons and won seven ASC titles. ABILENE, Texas — Jimmie Keeling has announced his retirement as the head football coach at Hardin-Simmons University.

“I love Hardin-Simmons and I love Cowboy football, it was a super 21 years.” said Keeling. “It was time to let someone else do this. I am grateful that Dr. (Jesse) Fletcher and Dr. (Merln) Morrow took the chance and gave me the opportunity. I am indebted to all of the coaches and players that have come through here.”

Keeling, who was hired to bring football back to Hardin-Simmons, posted a career record of 172-53 at Hardin-Simmons. He leaves the school as the all-time leader in wins. He was sixth nationally among Division III active head coaches in wins.

“Hardin-Simmons University will always be grateful for what Jimmie Keeling has done for this university,” HSU Director of Athletics John Neese said. “Besides leading a highly successful program, he has been a phenomenal role model to thousands of student-athletes throughout his 21 years here. He has been a mentor to all of our coaches throughout two decades and he is loved by many at HSU and in our community. While we are saddened by his retirement, we are happy in the knowledge that he will be able to spend more time with his family, which is something he has always made a top priority.”

In his career, he led the Cowboys to the national playoffs – either NAIA or NCAA Division III – 11 times in his 21 seasons as the HSU coach. His teams won TIAA titles in 1993, 1994 and 1995 and American Southwest Conference titles in 1996, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2003 and 2004.

At HSU, he built a program from the ground up. He was hired in December of 1989 and he fielded a team in the fall of 1990 that would go 3-7. From there the team improved and by 1992 the team won its first Texas Intercollegiate Athletic Association title and went to the NAIA playoffs.

The very next year the team again won the TIAA and advanced to the NAIA playoffs. The team went to the NAIA playoffs in 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995 and 1996.

Keeling served the school as athletic director from 1995 to 1997 and helped oversee the transition to the American Southwest Conference and Division III athletics.

HSU had early success in Division III. The 1998 team barely missed what was a 16-team field. Many consider that team to be the best at HSU during his tenure. The next season HSU advanced to the NCAA Division III playoffs for the first time and went three rounds deep.

The 2000 team earned a first round bye and advanced to the Division III Semifinals. It was one of two teams at HSU under Keeling (1993 NAIA and 2000 NCAA Division III) that advanced to the semifinals.

HSU would go back to the Division III playoffs in 2001, 2004, 2006 and 2008 but lost in the first round each time. He was named the TIAA or ASC Coach of the Year on six different occasions.

Through the 2009 season, he coached 62 All-Americans, 26 Academic All-Americans, 252 All-Conference and 319 academic all-conference players at HSU. His teams had 19 straight winning seasons, which ranks No. 12 nationally in all divisions and fourth in Division III.

When you add in his 196-91-11 record as a high school coach he completed his career with a record of 368-144-11.

"We are grateful for your service to this university and you run out of superlatives to explain what he has meant to this university," HSU President Dr. Lanny Hall said in the news conference. "We are grateful for all he has done in the lives of the students he has touched in his 21 years.

Jesse Burleson has been named the interim coach and a national search for Keeling's replacement will be conducted.

"We will be active in our pursuit of the next person to continue the legacy of Cowboy football," said Neese. "We will go thru the process as we have done with our other coaching positions and attempt to find the best person that will build on the success that Coach Keeling has enjoyed."

-Courtesy Hardin-Simmons University Sports Information Department

Former Player and Coach Quotes

"Every day I use some of the lessons he taught us. He was such a positive influence on not only me but every one that ever played for him. He is a very special person and he will be missed."

Link Harris

All-American Defensive Lineman

"He was a mentor to me not only as a player, but as a coach as well. He has really influenced me as a coach. He had such genuine care for his players. He still calls me all the time to check in on me. He means everything to me and everything I am as a coach is because of him."

Kirk Rogers

All-Time Leading Receiver

"He was a role model for me. The way he handles his coaches and his players is something that I can appreciate now that I am a coach. One day when I am a head coach I will take a lot from him, the way he treats everyone with respect and how he treats everyone fairly. If I can coach half as long and have half the success as Coach Keeling it will be a successful career."

Will Wagner

All-American Defensive Back

"Coach Keeling has had a significant impact on my life. There is not a day that goes by that I don't remember something he taught me. He leaves an incredible legacy of successes on the football field, but his most important contributions can be seen in the countless lives he has touched."

Jordan Neal

Former Quarterback

"In a profession where success is so often determined by the games you win, I feel blessed that I played for a coach that believed that success was measured by winning but also by the impact you have on your players life. I continue to be amazed at the number of former players that I come across (including a player from Elgin – 1966) that want to discuss the impact that coach Keeling has had on their lives. What a legacy! Thanks Coach Keeling."

Mike Daggs

All-American Receiver

"For the last five years, Coach Keeling has been the most influential person in my life. I have the utmost respect for Coach Keeling and everything he stands for. He develops his players into men of strong faith, character and integrity. He will always have a special place in my heart and I deeply appreciate everything that he has done in my life."

Justin Feaster

HSU Quarterback

"I have had a very enjoyable 22 years with coach Keeling. I learned a lot about football. I learned a lot about life. I learned a lot about faith. I am blessed by getting to coach with him. We worked hard to build this program."

Alan Wartes

HSU Offensive Coordinator (for all 21 seasons under Keeling)

Keeling By The Numbers

172-53 Record at Hardin-Simmons

Five NAIA Playoff Appearances (1992, 1993, 1994, 1995 1996)

Six NCAA Division III Playoff Appearances (1999, 2000, 2001, 2004, 2006, 2008)

Texas Intercollegiate titles – 1993, 1994, 1995

American Southwest Conference Titles – 1996, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2003 and 2004

19 straight winning seasons

62 All-Americans

26 Academic All-Americans

252 All-Conference players

319 Academic All-Conference Players

196-91-11 Record as a High School Coach

368-144-11 as a head coach at high school and college levels