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### **Westminster's Fusco A Small College Titan Induction Caps Outstanding Coaching Career**

**By Scott Koskoski**

In the movie "Remember the Titans," a group of small-town, courageous football players takes its small school and small town on an unforgettable ride through an unbeaten season.

With all due respect to that recent box-office hit, there's a much more impressive Titan that gridiron fans will now always remember: former Westminster College Head Coach Joe Fusco.

One of the winningest coaches in small college football history, Fusco is one of seven individuals selected for induction into the Class of 2001 of the College Football Hall of Fame. The 2001 induction class will be enshrined in South Bend, Ind., Aug. 10-11. Fusco will be inducted into the Divisional (non-NCAA Division I) Class.

The boys from "Remember the Titans" may have delivered one perfect season, but this immortal Titan coach brought home three (1977, 1988, 1989), plus a fourth while serving as offensive coordinator in 1970. In 19 years as head coach, Fusco led his Westminster Titans to the school's seventh through tenth undefeated regular seasons in the storied history of WC football and a 154-34-3 slate. He retired from coaching after the 1990 season and served as the school's athletic director until stepping down after the 1999-2000 academic year.

"Coach Fusco's record epitomizes maximum success by a football coach," said Robert Casciola, president of the College Football Hall of Fame. "His .814 winning percentage over 19 years at Westminster ranks him among the best that have ever coached the game."

"Joe is just a great teacher, a great communicator," added Fusco's successor, Gene Nicholson, who led the Titans for seven years and a pretty good teacher and communicator in his own right. "He was always prepared for any situation, which translated into success on the field. He's a great model of the Westminster football tradition."

Fusco becomes the third person associated with Westminster football to be enshrined into the Hall. His predecessor, Dr. Harold Burry, was inducted into the inaugural divisional class as a coach in 1996. Former Titan lineman Larry Pugh was inducted two years later. The school's media guide proudly proclaims that WC is the winningest college football program in history, at any level, mostly due to its enormous success in many decades at the NAIA level.

Fusco played a huge part in achieving the Titan glory. He joined Burry's staff as offensive line coach in 1968 and served as a Titans' assistant for four years as Westminster went 30-5-1. In 1970, WC claimed its first NAIA Division II national championship.

Fusco then began one of the most dominant head coaching runs in college football history. From 1972-1990, his career included nine NAIA post-season berths and 15 Top 20 finishes. His four national titles left an unmatched legacy of success.

Fusco deflects most of the credit for the team's success to another historical figure in Titan history.

"I was fortunate to have an outstanding role model in Dr. Burry," Fusco said. "That's where the real Westminster winning tradition started, with him. He taught me a lot, and I think I'm where I'm at today because of him."

Fusco has done quite well on his own. There is that 27-game winning streak from 1988-1989 that, at the time, was the longest unbeaten stretch of any college team at any level.

"Yeah, that was a great run," Fusco said with pride. "Plus, in 1990 we lost our first game and then ran the table before we lost in the national championship game (17-7 at Peru State), so I kind of ended on a high note."

Fusco's career goes back to New Wilmington High, where he was head coach from 1960-66. Named Lawrence County Coach of the Year three times, he guided New Wilmington to a 50-12-1 stretch, then crossed Interstate 79 to Grove City High in 1967 and a 5-2-2 ledger.

"I've wanted to be a coach ever since the ninth grade," Fusco said. "Lots of kids don't know what they

want to do with their lives, but I just knew coaching was right for me. I became a coach right out of college (Westminster '60) and worked my way from the bottom up."

Fusco said the greatest piece of advice he ever received came from Burry.

"Dr. Burry told me that the less you ask people to do, the less they will do," recalled Fusco. "I've always asked a lot of my players, and I've had some pretty good ones along the way."

One of those players was so touched by Fusco that he decided to get into coaching himself -- current Westminster head man Jerry Schmitt, who toiled for his mentor from 1978-81.

"Coach Fusco had a certain way of getting the most out of his players," said Schmitt. "He was organized, always prepared for what could happen on the field. Coach gave me advice from the day I walked on campus as a freshman, and I still use that advice every day."