

Coach Seals retires, but his legacy will live on through the many lives that he's touched

Written by Yolande Lezine

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Former Madison High School Football Coach Ray Seals has officially called it a career by announcing his retirement after 46 years in the Houston Independent School District.

For the past two years, Coach Seals has agonized over the decision to walk away from the game, but it was mostly his desire to help mentor his players.

At the HISD National Signing Day program back in February, Coach Seals hinted around to me that he was probably going to leave. It was at that time that based on what he had privately shared with me that this was going to be it! He will be missed tremendously by all, because if you ever got the chance to know him, he always took time to impart something into your life.

He was the first high school coach who granted me an interview when I first started writing professionally. He was coaching at Sam Houston High School back then. We became friends and stayed in touch over the years. Then our paths crossed again at Madison High School, where I spent 4 years as the Journalism/Yearbook/ and Newspaper Teacher/Advisor.

At his request he turned over the Media/Public Relations task of handling the influx of media both local and national that were getting ready to hit the campus to recruit Vince Young. We had a great year and came one game short of going to the State Championship to face Reggie McNeal and the Lufkin Panthers. But we ran into Austin Westlake at the Astrodome.

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As always Coach Seals and the players were gracious in defeat. We had 11 players receive Division I scholarships that year and we held our own press conference at the school.

Coach Seals has coached for 46 years in HISD including 23 years as the head football coach. He has compiled a 212-96 record with 21 playoff appearances and was named the HISD Coach of the Year ten times, the 2008 NFL High School Coach of the Year and the inaugural Don Shula NFL Coach of the Year.

Former Madison players Moran Norris of the San Francisco 49ers and Vince Young of the Tennessee Titans nominated Seals for the NFL Coach of the Year Award. Coach Seals received a \$10,000 grant for the football program, a \$5,000 cash award and a trip to the Super Bowl XLIII in Tampa, Florida. Now at age 67, he has called it quits and will embark on a new chapter in his life.

"I really have mixed emotions," Coach Ray Seals said. "You spend almost two-thirds of your life doing something, and then all of a sudden, you let it go. It's not a celebration for me."

Seals' tenure in HISD started in 1972, when he was hired as an assistant at Sam Houston. After some seasoning at Sterling, Milby and Madison, he received his first head coaching job in 1983 at Milby before taking over the Marlins in 1988.

The Prairie View A&M graduate has been inducted into several Halls of Honor, including ones from the Texas High School Coaches Association, the Greater Houston Football Coaches Association and HISD. He will be hard to replace, for his heart has always been with his kids.

The accolades are fine, but more important was his presence off the field, where he helped his players in their personal lives. He made a point to spend time with each player in his office throughout the season. The closed-door sessions allowed them to talk freely with Seals about life, how they were doing at home, and how their grades were. He strived to make all of them better people. He told them that they can't be defeated just because something bad happens to you.

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And unfortunately for Coach Seals, he had that experience first hand when he lost his wife Jamesetta and his parents within the span of a year in 1998-99. It was the toughest year of his life, but he bounced back and continued to build winning teams.

“Coaching is a God-given profession; I really do believe that,” Seals stated. “It isn’t just about X’s and O’s. Winning is important, but it’s not the most important thing. Kids play better when they know you care, and I care about them as people.”

Coach Ray Seals legacy will live on through the many lives of those players, co-workers, and various people he touched. His daughters are planning a retirement celebration for him next month. There will never be another Ray Seals in HISD, but we will be forever grateful for all that he’s done in touching the lives of others!

By Yolande Y. Lezine
Sports Editor