By JASON EPP

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Smith was more than just a fantastic football coach, although his credentials while at Turpin were quite impressive. Smith won three state titles at the panhandle school in 1963, 1972, and 1973, and compiled a 108-34-2 record.

He was also the first person inducted into the Oklahoma Eight-Man Football Hall of Fame, and is listed as the founder of the 8-man game and playoff system in the state.

Friday, Sept. 27, was homecoming in Turpin, and the night chosen to honor the 50th anniversary of Turpin's first state title team from 1963. And most of the memories were of their late, beloved coach.

"It's hard not to remember the players, but probably more than anything I remember Coach James O. Smith," a senior halfback on Turpin's 1963 state championship team Dennis Loepp said. "He made a big impact on us, and part of that has to do with not being successful his first year when we were sophomores. He worked us pretty hard, and we ended up going to the state game when I was a junior. Then won it when we were seniors."

Smith's influence was felt that title game in 1963 with Turpin trailing Jet 24-14 at the half.

"He gave us a pretty good lecture at half," right end on the 1963 team Dan Duerson said laughing. "We responded and took care of business in the second half."

Turpin outscored Jet 14-0 in the second half, and an interception by Ed Strickland ended a late Jet drive and sealed the victory for Turpin to claim their first title, 28-24.

The neatest thing was towards the end of the game," Loepp said. "One of the referees put the ball down and walked back to our huddle and said 'Boys you don't have to come out of the huddle. The game is over.' That was a great feeling."

"I didn't have a dream that we'd win state even though that was our goal," Duerson said. "Freedom was good and so was Tyrone that year."

Tyrone had been Turpin's toughest opponent during that time. The Bobcats won the 1960 title, but Turpin overwhelmed them in 1963, 56-0 to take the Panhandle Conference title.

Smith's impact did not end at the edge of the grass of the football field. His impact lives 50 years later in the thoughts of his former players.

"I think of him a lot when times get tough in our day-to-day life," Loepp said. "He instilled in us the drive to give our best at all times. We absorbed his effort into ours to do as well as we could."

One story that surfaced was that of helping a young man who was not a football player. This

young man had left a harsh home situation but had nothing but the clothes on his back. It was Coach Smith who made sure he had everything he needed.

The James O. Smith Memorial college scholarship is still given each year to Turpin football player who is outstanding in the classroom and community.

As a former Naval officer, Smith was a tough coach, and many players recounted that it was not enough to win, you had to give your best regardless of the opponent. On multiple occasions Smith had his team running sprints after games if he was not satisfied with their effort, and he did it whether they played at home or away.

There was also the time, after several injuries, Keyes was left without enough players to finish the game. Smith grabbed two of his better players and sent them play for their opponent to finish the game. He told them they were to give everything they had or they would be in trouble.

Fifteen of the 27 players were able to make it back for the reunion, as well as Smith's assistant coach Tommy Bowling. Coach Smith's wife Dovie and their son Russ also came.

"This was my favorite place to live," Dovie Smith said. "We just loved it here."

For the Smith's son Russ, who was just a toddler when his father retired from coaching, the event was a way to learn more about the father he lost when he was just 15.

"I heard so many stories about my dad that I had never heard," Russ Smith said. "Dad didn't coach after he left Turpin, and I was four at the time so I don't have any memories of my own from that time. But to hear the kind of impact he had on so many men, not just on the field but how to lead their lives was great. I have also come to realize Turpin Community can't be matched; it has strong traditional values and people."

For all who came the event was a way to remember a great time and a great man.

"I'd like to return to that era," Duerson said. "I'd like to go back and do it again. Coach Smith was really tough, but that's my greatest memory was just playing for him. He had an impact on my life."

"The experience of winning the way we did just goes on forever," Loepp said.