

Coach Mark Houston – Athletic Coaching Inductee Football, Wrestling, and Baseball Coach

Coach Houston, described by former players as “an old school blue collar man” that always insisted on dedication and hard work from his players, Coach Houston continues to be admired and respected by his former players to this day. As the varsity wrestling coach at Holton High School, Coach Houston pushed his players to always do their best, while striving for them to place and medal at every tournament that they wrestled in. Coach Houston insisted that his athletes stay until the last match was wrestled, whether they won or lost the match, because it was important to know what it looked like to be a champion. Most importantly, through stories shared by former wrestlers, Coach Houston understood the lasting impact that he would have on the lives of the young student – athletes that he would coach. It has been shared that Coach Houston would periodically stop practice to share special moments with his team that were meant to help his players connect wrestling to lifelong lessons of hard work, dedication, and determination to be one’s best self. Coach Houston often took the time to get to know his players on a personal level, as he understood that having knowledge of a student – athlete’s interests made it easier to motivate his players. During Coach Houston’s time as the varsity wrestling coach in Holton, several players were state qualifiers, and by 1991, Coach Houston had led his wrestling team to three consecutive district championships, a feat that had never been accomplished in school history.

As the varsity football coach at Holton High School, Coach Houston used these same strategies of relationship development, while still insisting upon discipline, respect, and hard work from his players. Coach Houston led Holton Football to the first playoff appearance in history of the football program, and he did so through developing a program that always made his players feel as if they were “special” and the “best players” on the field, as quoted by a former player of Coach Houston’s. A former player would go on to state that although Coach Houston often had his “tough guy guard up, deep down inside, his love for the Holton Red Devils runs deep,” as memories of Coach Houston have brought great joy to many of the student – athletes that he had the pleasure of coaching and mentoring. Coach Houston led the 1988 football team into the playoffs for the first time in school history, finishing the regular season with an 8-1 record, and a first place finish in the conference, before losing to a tough Pewamo-Westphalia team by the score of 26 – 20. Of his team’s outstanding performance on the season, Coach Houston was quoted as saying, “It has taken four years of hard work by coaches and kids, and it has taken the attitude to do the extra things and the little things to be a champion.”

This philosophy of Coach Houston’s had a profound impact on all athletic programs at Holton High School well beyond the years that he coached and taught Small Engines, Metal Shop, and Auto Shop classes in the Industrial Arts Department. Former colleague, coach, and administrator, Ken Haggart would go on to share that “Nobody had a greater impact on Holton athletics during the time that he was at Holton than Coach Houston.” Haggart would also share that he positively influenced all other coaches within the district during the time that Coach Houston was in Holton, and that a significant number of students graduated from Holton High School because Coach Houston simply refused to allow students to fail. Described by some as “tough,” Coach Houston cared deeply about his players, his students, their families, and the colleagues that he worked alongside to positively impact the players that Coach Houston coached and taught. For Coach Houston’s commitment to excellence, and a strong desire to develop champions not only in the athletic programs that he led, but in the lives of each and every one of the student – athletes that he coached, the Holton Athletic Hall of Fame is honored to induct Coach Mark Houston.

