

# Football coach shaped by Jesus

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Jeff Dixon, a retired educator and football coach, credits his Christian faith with shaping his approach to coaching and mentoring young athletes.

Dixon, who coached for 39 years at several Texas high schools, said his relationship with Jesus transformed coaching from a competitive pursuit into a ministry focused on guiding students toward personal growth and faith.

A 1987 graduate of Howard Payne University, Dixon said his Christian faith deepened during his college years and continued to grow through relationships with other coaches who were bold about their beliefs.

“I wanted to be an impact on the community, not just for wins and losses, but I wanted to impact a community for his kingdom,” Dixon said.

Now serving as a deacon and youth minister at First Baptist Church in Alvarado, Dixon said he continues to pray the Lord will use him to impact the community and the kingdom.

## Reflecting on his time on the field

Dixon reflected on his time on the field, including mentoring Anansi Flaherty, who later gave his life to Christ while incarcerated.

Flaherty, a backup fullback on Katy High School’s 2000 state championship team who later made headlines in a tragic case after killing his mother, gave his life to Christ in prison and was baptized Dec. 19, 2024.

“When you invest in people and you know they’re in trouble, it’s heartbreaking,” Dixon said. “When you’re in the coaching world and you

have a position with a group of kids, they're yours. You build a relationship with them. And he was one of mine."

"I got into coaching because I love the sport," Dixon said. "There's way more to teaching and coaching than the competitive arena. I saw a side of it with adolescence that I never really recognized before—young boys who didn't have a dad or parenting."

## **Mentoring from leaders**

Just as those young boys needed mentoring, Dixon said he received mentoring from Christian men throughout his career, including coaches and administrators who modeled bold leadership.

Dixon said watching those men live out their faith in the public arena made him bolder about sharing his own faith.

He also highlighted his involvement in Bible-based programs such as Coaches Outreach, a ministry providing studies tailored to the lives of coaches and their spouses.

"We go through a 12-week Bible study. It happens to be a Coaches Outreach Bible study. We're talking about Jesus and we're talking about the gospel," Dixon said.

Through these experiences, Dixon said he fostered long-term relationships with players, guiding them in both sports and faith.

"When it comes to a coach's impact, you're going to do one of two things: You're going to impact them for the kingdom or you're not," Dixon said.

"What a platform, as a Christian coach, to be an influencer of thousands of people who directly come in contact with you. That's a major call."

Dixon said he quickly realized coaching was more than a profession.

“It’s a calling. It’s not a job,” he said. “You can’t tackle coaching with that kind of mentality.”

Though he began coaching out of a love for competition, he said within a year he understood something bigger was at stake.

“What matters is how many you have impacted for his kingdom,” Dixon said. “The Christ impact is eternal. If I’ve been able to direct those I coach toward a personal relationship with the Savior of the world, then praise God.”

Dixon said a single coach over a 20-year career may come into contact with thousands of students and their families.

“What a platform to represent Jesus,” he said.