



Life by the Verdict of the Scoreboard

By Suzanne Wilcox English

Any coach knows the feeling: When you glance up at the scoreboard, the verdict on your coaching is glowing at you, for everyone to see.

Dr. James D. Houdeshell — who took his Findlay men’s basketball teams to three national championship tournaments — judges not only his coaching, but his life, by the verdict of the scoreboard.

In coaching, “every time you turn, there’s a verdict of some sort,” and for Houdeshell, athletics established a process for achieving success that has since guided him in achieving goals in a number of other important areas, including educational administration.

Education is what brought Houdeshell to Findlay. He grew up on the family farm in nearby Rawson and came to then-Findlay College right after high school in 1949, drawn by the college’s affordability and the fact that he could compete in athletics.

His favorite find at Findlay? His wife, Mira Frost Houdeshell ’78, of course, who was understanding about the demands of his coaching job and continuing education — and also encouraged him to consider returning to his alma mater.

After graduating from Findlay College in 1953, Houdeshell worked as a teacher and coach at area schools and coached the junior varsity basketball team at Findlay College under renowned athletic director Don Renninger '40.

Houdeshell had accepted a position to coach high school football in Allen County, and in early August 1955, was preparing for preseason when it was unexpectedly announced that Renninger had resigned. His wife encouraged him to go talk to then-president C.T. Fox about the position.

Realizing his youth and not really expecting he would be given the job, Houdeshell went to talk to Dr. Fox, who after a week offered him the position, pending successful

release from his contract. It was just being in the "right place at the right time," he says, acknowledging that when he came in, Renninger was clearing out things and asked him, "Are you ready for this, Jim?" and he responded, "Well, we'll see."

He came back to Findlay as head football, basketball and baseball coach, winning conference championships in baseball, track and field and men's basketball, which he took to the national tournament three times — and never left.

After he completed his doctorate, having worked evenings, weekends and summers with a one-semester sabbatical, Houdeshell began to expand his work in educational administration. He had been the prime mover in

development of a major in health and physical education, and had served as director of health, physical education and recreation since 1955. In 1968, he chaired the planning committee for construction of Croy Physical Education Center.

A major accomplishment was directing the teacher education program in gaining simultaneous accreditation from both the National Committee for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and state accreditation — one of only 17 schools to do so nationwide. Houdeshell described it as "a long, tough ordeal," adding that he couldn't have asked for better assistance. "I was able to work with a lot of wonderful faculty members over the years."

The Houdeshell Scoreboard

Faculty/Administrative Positions at Findlay

Special Assistant to the President and Development Officer – since Jan. 1, 1999

Dean of the College of Professional Studies – 1994-98

Dean of University College – 1992-94

Assistant Dean for Administrative Affairs 1986-92

Chair of the Division of Teacher Education – 1986-92

Chair of the Division of Health, Physical Education and Recreation – 1955-84

Director of Health, Physical Education and Recreation – 1985-92

Dean of Students – 1958-59

Professor of Health and Education – 1955-98

Honors & Awards

Findlay College Athletic Hall of Fame – 1975

Findlay College Distinguished Alumnus – 1978

NAIA Coaches National Hall of Fame – 1980

Hoosier-Buckeye Collegiate Conference Coach of the Year – 1985

Hancock County Sports Hall of Fame – 1987

The University of Findlay Distinguished Associate (with wife, Mira) – 1996

President's Distinguished Service Medal – 2001

NAIA Charles Morris Award as Athletic Administrator of the Year – 2002

Croy Gymnasium court named the James and Mira Houdeshell Court – 2002

National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics (NACDA) Hall of Fame – 2006



Served as faculty marshal for 44 years, leading commencement processions and carrying the mace.

Dr. James D. '53 and Mira M. (Frost) '78 Houdeshell Scholarship Endowment Fund established in their honor by family and friends - 2002

UF Activities

Chaired the steering committee that organized the University's 125th anniversary celebration, 2006-07

Organized joint class gift committees for 50-year and graduating classes in 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008, resulting in gifts of the bell tower, clocks, outdoor furniture for study area, derrick fountain, electronic sign and archives



He also chaired the committee to develop graduate studies in education in 1990, and led the committee that saw the Master of Arts in Education approved by the Ohio Board of Regents and North Central Association in 1991-92, with the first classes offered in summer 1992.

With 54 consecutive years at UF under his belt, Houdeshell is now challenging the late, legendary Myrtle Deming '19, whose record 57 years of service to Findlay between 1917-74 include her work as a student employee, for the title of longest-serving employee at UF.

He is sincerely grateful for the opportunities he's enjoyed at Findlay. "I firmly believe there's one of two ways that people operate: You

either work up the ladder within an organization, or you move from place to place. After I completed my doctorate, I had opportunities here, and I decided I would work my way up the ladder here. So I committed to doing everything I can — here."

When asked about favorite memories, Houdeshell doesn't turn to his list of honors. "My wife — my wife and family," he points out, including his parents, who were farmers. "I will not forget their work ethic."

Houdeshell admits he had one goal he didn't achieve: The presidency of Findlay College. He was a candidate twice, and others were hired. He has no regrets; he worked with each president in turn. "Each president brought with him

his own style. I learned to work with them to make things happen," he says.

Despite numerous successful campaigns — in athletics, educational programs, building and fund raising — Houdeshell does not count them among his greatest accomplishments. While he holds himself accountable to that internal scoreboard, relationships are what he has found most rewarding. "My proudest moments are those I've shared with student-athletes," he says. "One of the things that's always been important to me is my relationships with the students — the opportunity to work with students and to maintain contact, friendships with them through the years."

Coaching Positions at Findlay

Athletic Director – 1955-60; 1971-86 (20 years); resigned in 1960 to develop a major in health and physical education

Head Coach of Men's Basketball – 430-312 record for 30 years – 1955-1985, retired after the 1984-85 season; took Oilers to three NAIA national championship tournaments; earned several conference and district championships

Football Coach – head coach – 1955-59 (five seasons); assistant coach 1961-65 (five seasons)

Baseball Head Coach – 1956-59 (four seasons), conference champions, two years



Track and Field Head Coach – 1961-64 (four seasons), conference champions, four years

Cross Country Head Coach – 1968, conference champions

Athletics Association Participation Commissioner, American Midwest Conference (AMC) of the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA), 1996-present

Commissioner, Mid-States Football Association 1993-present

Houdeshell is the only person who has served as president of the NAIA Athletic Directors Association, NAIA Basketball Coaches Association and NAIA National Board.

Education

Findlay College – 1953, B.S., mathematics, general science

Master's degree in education – BGSU – 1957; **Master of Education, physical education with minor in school administration**

Indiana University, Bloomington, Ind., Doctor of Physical Education – 1968; physical education with minor in measurement and evaluation

Family

Wife – Mira Frost Houdeshell '78, son, Jamie '86, grandchildren Ethan and Zoë

