

Steve Walker
Mesa City Sports
Hall of Fame
2018



By Jason P. Skoda

There was a time when Steve Walker and his teammates were recognizable around town.

“I remember going into restaurants and older gentlemen would come up and say, ‘Aren’t you No. 34?’” Walker said of his Red Mountain football playing days. “Some were snow birds that would come watch football, some were longtime Mesa people. It didn’t matter. The whole area rallied around Red Mountain and everything we were accomplishing.”

The Mountain Lions captivated Northeast Mesa in 2000 by beating Mountain View for the first time in school history during the regular season since the Brown Rd. rivalry started in 1988 and went on to win the first of two straight state championships.

At the center of the rise to prominence were two men - Coach Jim Jones and two-way star Steve Walker.

Jones is already in the Mesa City Hall of Fame and Walker takes his rightful place on Nov. 19 along with seven other inductees at Red Mountain High.

“It means everything to me,” Walker said. “I was born and raised in Mesa. The idea of joining your mentors and being part of the Hall of Fame one day is something you dream about. That fact that it is happening makes it seem like everything is coming full circle.

“Now that I am coaching, I want my players to see me like I saw Coach Jones and Coach (Dan) Dunn. I wanted to do everything I could to make them proud. The honor of joining the Hall is incredible and hopefully my players will strive to do something like that.”

The players at San Tan Charter where Walker was recently named head coach for the 2019 season will have an awful high standard to meet if they are going to match their new mentor.

Walker was the best two-way player in the state in 2000 when he led the Mountain Lions to the 5A state title as the pounding fullback in the Wing-T and the disruptive linebacker

“He was pound-for-pound the toughest kid in our program and our team leader,” Jones said. “He led by example with his attitude and got everyone to walk on the straight and narrow.”

Walker finished with 1,610 yards and 23 touchdowns, both of which were school records at the time. He also had 110 tackles to be a true force on both sides of the ball.

“At the regional meeting all the coaches were asking if he should be on our offense or defense,” Jones said. “I told them they faced him, so they should decide. They ended up putting him on both offense and defense. He was that good.”

It led to Walker being named the Class 5A Offensive and Defensive Player of the Year after earning All-State first team on both sides of the ball. He earned All-American status from the National High School Coaches Association.

“it was a magical year for all of us,” Walker said. “I did my part. We didn’t have a big roster. A lot of guys played both ways and we were tired, but we did it for each other. You used to play in the area you were from and we all grew up together and I think that is what made us successful.”

The state championship game was a win over another Mesa rival as the Mountain Lions beat Westwood 20-10 for the school’s first championship.

“It was excitement and relief at the same time,” Walker said of the final moments of the game. “Everyone knows how much it takes to get there. It was an amazing feeling. It the relief came from getting Jim Jones his first state title as a coach. It meant to get the old dogs on the coaching staff a state title.

“No one will ever be able to take that away from us. It’s a special feeling.”

Walker went to Scottsdale Community College and signed with Southern Utah, but when a coaching change occurred his changed his mind. He eventually ended up at South Dakota but blew out his shoulder.

Walker, who is engaged and has a daughter from a previous marriage, was on the Red Mountain coaching staff for a few years but headed to San Tan Charter as assistant and is now the head coach.

“It’s a great opportunity,” he said. “We are working our way toward the AIA (from the Charter league). I can’t wait to truly get started and hopefully create an environment like we had at Red Mountain. I basically had (former Arizona State coach Frank) Kush as a head coach. He coached you hard but loved you at the same time. It’s exactly the way I want to run my program.”