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## UA12/2/1/2 Feix Still Part of Big Red Tradition

Travis Mayo

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## Former Coach a Father Figure, Mentor to Current Hilltoppers

The light creeps through the windows of the garage door, rays shining onto a piece of history hanging on the wall. The plaid houndstooth that Jimmy Feix wore stands out from the white wall of his garage, a constant reminder of what he accomplished on the Hill.



It's an era that the former Western football coach loves to remember and will never forget. For the past 50 years, Feix has been a piece of Western. It's been his life.

"We always used to say that our faith, our family and our football were our three priorities," Feix said, hats visible in the background. "But, unfortunately, football came in first at lot of times."

His second family has always worn red. Feix first came to Western in 1948, as a high school senior looking for the next place to go. Then he played as Western's quarterback, earning All-American honors in 1952.

After a professional career with the New York Giants cut short by injury and a four-year stint in the military, Feix came back to the Hill, first as an assistant in 1957, then as head coach. That's when the hat tradition began, along with something called winning. Feix coached from 1968 to 1983 and won a school record 106 games. His teams reached the NCAA Division II championship game in 1973 and 1985, falling short both times.

After Feix stepped down as coach, he became athletics director in 1986, and later served as Director of Alumni Affairs. He now sits on the Hilltopper Athletic Foundation board of directors.

Feix's impact on Western is obvious. It's obvious not only to those who walk in to Smith Stadium and see "Jimmy Feix Field" written on the scoreboard, but also to those who now sit where Feix once did. "To me, he's the essence of the program," Western coach Jack Harbaugh said. "Every day that I wake up, a little motto I have for myself is that I want to work as hard as I can that day to justify all he's meant to this program."

Harbaugh loves it when former players of Feix stroll into the football office and talk about the influence the coach in the hat had on them. The impact of not only what kind of coach Feix was, but what kind of person he remains.

"He's the perfect example for any human being, especially for Western Kentucky University people," athletics director Lewis Mills said. "He lives it in every way that you would want a person to live a life. He's a living example of everything that you would like in a father figure, in a family person, in anyone."

In a season when Western celebrates the "Glory Days" of Feix's era, the coach's modesty is evident. He speaks of the way he was treated by those who hired and worked above him, and says he just just [sic] stretched out a tradition that had already started when he came to Western.

Feix also still coaches as a spectator. He and his wife often strategize while watching sports on television, and Feix often plays the role with his grandchildren. He coached the San Diego Padres and Atlanta Braves from his den during baseball's National League Championship series.

The old coach also wanders to the Hill every now and then. Feix goes to practice every week and talks with senior quarterback Willie Taggart, one quarterback to another. He walks into Potter Hall and remembers when it used to be a men's dormitory, and thinks about where his room used to be.

But things haven't changed that much.

"I really get a thrill out of walking around and among the young people that are there now," Feix said, grinning. "When I go, I try to think of how I felt when I visited the campus in 1948.

"I get that same feeling, that they're going through the same things I did 40 and 50 years ago."

If anyone sees a man walking around campus, wearing a plaid hat, there's no reason to wonder who it is. That's Jimmy Feix, living the only life he's known for half a century. He's just spending a little time with his family.

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These and other sources are available in the Harrison-Baird Reading Room at the Kentucky Building.