



Charlie White



#4 Cletis Gordon

No Shortcuts: Jackson State

Building athletes with brains, brawn and character is job one at this Southern college

Building athletes with brains, brawn and character is job one at this Southern college. For any student-athlete thinking about attending a college in Mississippi, one school that definitely should be on the list is Jackson State. The campus was founded in 1877 and is located in the city of Jackson, the geographical, political, industrial and cultural center of what has been nicknamed "The Hospitality State." More to the point, the school has a tradition of producing outstanding athletes, many who have gone on to play professional sports.

Despite competition from Division I football programs such as Mississippi State and Mississippi, Jackson State has seen 20 of its football players go on to play in the NFL in the past 15 years, including Walter Payton, and it has won or shared 15 SWAC conference titles. But the Tigers' success is not limited to football.

Jackson State's women's basketball has won four regular season championships and six postseason tournament crowns, and its men's basketball team earned four regular season titles and nine postseason tournament crowns. The men's tennis team has six conference titles, and the women's team has one. The men's golf team has won 14 conference titles and the women's team has seven, while

the track team has captured 35 conference championships. Such accomplishments have earned the Tigers a reputation for consistently producing quality athletes.

A testament to the Tigers' commitment to athletic excellence is their 15,000-square-foot weightroom, completed in 2003. That same year the school hired its first full-time head strength and conditioning coach, Ken Coggins.

Coggins, a graduate of Mississippi State University with a degree in fitness management and exercise physiology, has coached at Belhaven College (1999-2003), Missouri University (1995-99), University of Arkansas-Little Rock (1990-95), Memphis (1988-90)

School of Business

Photos courtesy
Jackson State



Toniece Williams



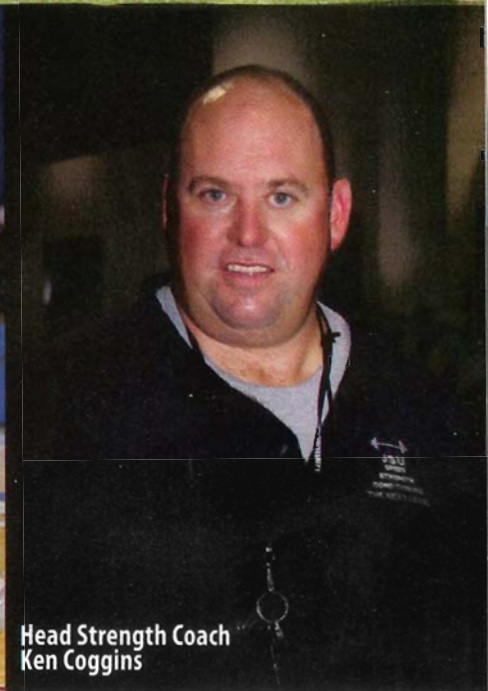
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#35 David Kennebrew



Trai Givens



Head Strength Coach
Ken Coggins

and Delta State University (1988). A few of his success stories are Alfred Williams of the Denver Broncos and Olympic champions Michael Johnson and Picabo Street. The man has done it all!

In this exclusive interview, Coach Coggins shares his ideas for taking an already outstanding athletic program to the next level with a serious strength and conditioning program.

BFS: What is your formula for athletic success?

COGGINS: Old-fashioned hard work. We're teaching our athletes how to be successful through hard work and discipline.

BFS: Is there anyone who strongly influenced your ideas on designing strength and conditioning programs?

COGGINS: When I played college football at Mississippi State University, my strength coach was Al Miller, who is now with the Atlanta Falcons. My workout program is based on his ideas.

BFS: What else did you learn from Al Miller?

COGGINS: The main lessons I learned from Al are the importance of proper technique and introducing variety in training. Al is able to add variety to his workouts by adding just the right "twists" to common exercises.

BFS: What are your core lifts for athletes?

COGGINS: I'm really into the Olympic lifts, as they are athletic movements that develop the explosiveness that is extremely important for athletes.

BFS: Do you perform any special exercises, such as strongman events?

COGGINS: I believe many of those lifts are too hard on the lower back, and the risk of injury is just too high because of the skill level required. I also don't see where those types of movements are sport specific. You won't see my athletes doing those lifts.

BFS: Do you believe high school athletes spend too much time on the power lifts at the expense of other aspects of conditioning?

COGGINS: The problem I have with athletes I work with who concentrated on powerlifting in high school is I have to spend 95 percent of my time teaching proper form on other lifts and exercises that are more sport specific. They also often have problems with flexibility because they seldom stretch. That's one reason I think the BFS program is the best for high school athletes. It has a balanced approach to all aspects of conditioning, not just lifting.

BFS: Speaking of BFS, what do you think of the magazine?

COGGINS: BFS is a first-class publication for the strength and conditioning coach. I've very impressed and always look forward to reading it. I like what you teach about character and hard work, because that's what our program is all about at Jackson State.

BFS: How supportive have the administration and sport coaches been of your athletic program?

COGGINS: They've been great. A lot of what I'm doing is new to some of them

because they'd never had a strength coach here before, and it's been a challenge, but a welcome one, to share what I know with the people I work with.

BFS: What did you say to your football players when you first started working at Jackson State?

COGGINS: I sat them down and said, "Here's how it's going to be. We want to win and to do that we've got to work hard," and they were receptive to that. The fellows who didn't want to work are no longer with us

BFS: Are there any special qualities you look for in new recruits?

COGGINS: We want to recruit young athletes who have high character and who want to excel not just on the field but also in the classroom.

BFS: How do you develop character, especially with older athletes who are set in their ways?

COGGINS: With the football team, we set aside time with our players and our coaches to help build relationships. We get to know

our players, to know what their family life is like. And what has come out of that is this team has grown to be so close, coaches and players alike. We're all working together as a family – we believe in each other.

BFS: Back when you played, was discipline less of a problem than it is today?

COGGINS: No question. The peer pressure now is much more intense. When I played, nobody ever had to tell me to work. Nobody ever had to tell me to go to class. Nobody had to tell me to be on time. I knew that was just the way you do things. Nowadays there are so many things distracting these kids, and there are too many kids who want it easy – they don't want to work for it. What we're trying to teach goes beyond winning games. It's about teaching them how to work hard. We're preparing them for life

BFS: Have you made a difference in the kids academically?

COGGINS: Definitely – if you don't pass, you don't play. You've got to make it academically here first. That being said, since I've been here the grade point average of our

football team has increased tremendously.

BFS: The South has had more than its share of hard times recently. Have your athletes been affected?

COGGINS: We've had a lot of adversities to overcome. Many of our kids have families who lived in the areas hit by Katrina, and we've had some deaths in our football family that have been tough to deal with.

BFS: You don't work a typical 40-hour week. Do the long hours ever get to you?

COGGINS: There are days in the year when I come in at six in the morning and don't get home until nine in the evening, but I don't get burnt out because the reason I'm here is to try to make a difference in these young lives.

BFS: Any advice you would give other strength coaches?

COGGINS: Same thing I tell my athletes: You need to have heart if you're going to be successful, you need to be a good person, and there are no shortcuts. **BFS**

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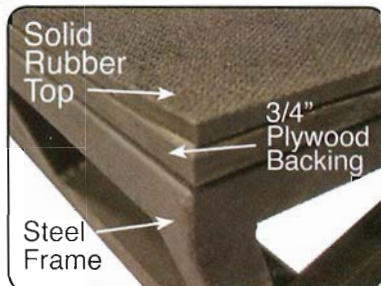
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