



Remember When

BY TERI R. WILLIAMS PHOTOS BY DAPHNE WALKER

It was the first home game of the 2019 Toombs County High School football season. The new aluminum stadium seats in Booster Stadium were packed with both regular fans and those who had come to see the field's new renovations. No one asked if Coach Jacky Jones would be there. It was a given. In fact, not a day had

passed since renovations began following the 2018 graduation that he had not been to the field to observe the daily progress. That night, as the Toombs County Bulldogs took the field, his wife Ms. Betty was at their home a few blocks away listening to every play on the radio. The names of players and cheerleaders would be heard by both with past generations in mind: the grandchild of someone she taught English or some relation to a player he once coached.

Coach Jones retired in 1990 after 30 years of coaching football, baseball, and girls' basketball. Ms. Betty retired in 1998 after 34 years of teaching Language Arts. They weren't certain what to make of my interest. Both insisted their story was nothing extraordinary. But I persisted. I wanted them to know: *What they remembered about our past mattered. And what they gave to the youth as teachers in our community was valued.*

REMEMBERING...

Coach Jones and his wife Ms. Betty live on the corner of Louella Street, named for Ms. Betty's mother. Coach Jones's younger brother Barry and Betty's younger brother Glynn were good friends and played together often. From



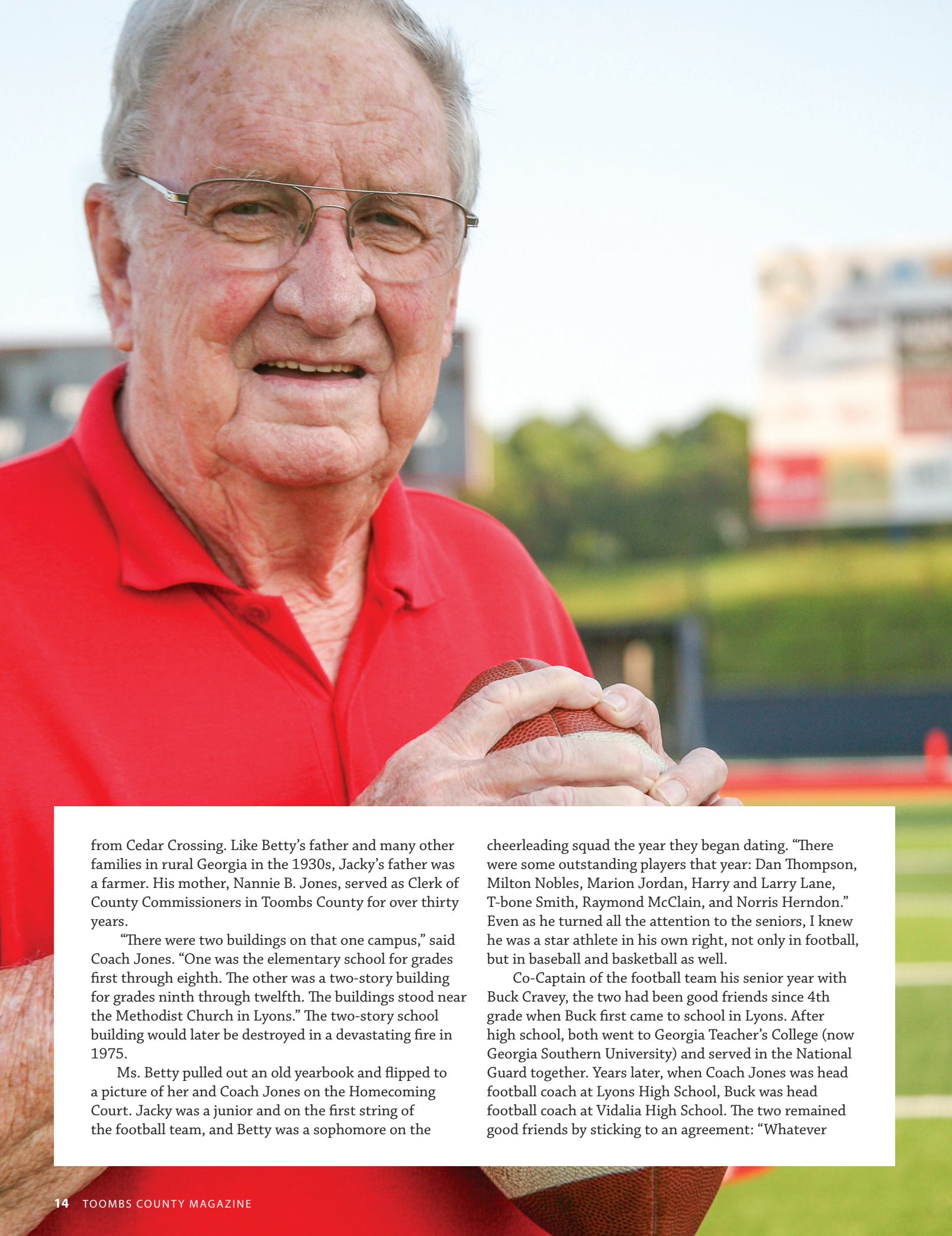
LEFT Jacky and Betty Jones at the recently renovated Booster Stadium where they once played, cheered and coached.

ABOVE On the same field in 1955, Betty was a Homecoming sponsor and Jacky was the football captain.

time to time Jacky would see Betty when he was sent to get his brother and bring him home.

Betty went to school all twelve years in Lyons. Her father, Robert Page, was a farmer. In fact, the Jones's house sits on what was once his eighty-five-acre farm. "My first-grade teacher was Ms. House," said Ms. Betty. "She must have taught everyone in this county, and I loved her dearly." It was a simple statement but spoke of the profound impact Ms. House had on her. I wondered how many children like Ms. Betty chose to become teachers because of the joy Ms. House demonstrated as an educator.

Jacky went to Toombs Central School for first and second grade. He started third grade and finished the rest of his school years in Lyons when his family moved to town



from Cedar Crossing. Like Betty's father and many other families in rural Georgia in the 1930s, Jacky's father was a farmer. His mother, Nannie B. Jones, served as Clerk of County Commissioners in Toombs County for over thirty years.

"There were two buildings on that one campus," said Coach Jones. "One was the elementary school for grades first through eighth. The other was a two-story building for grades ninth through twelfth. The buildings stood near the Methodist Church in Lyons." The two-story school building would later be destroyed in a devastating fire in 1975.

Ms. Betty pulled out an old yearbook and flipped to a picture of her and Coach Jones on the Homecoming Court. Jacky was a junior and on the first string of the football team, and Betty was a sophomore on the

cheerleading squad the year they began dating. "There were some outstanding players that year: Dan Thompson, Milton Nobles, Marion Jordan, Harry and Larry Lane, T-bone Smith, Raymond McClain, and Norris Herndon." Even as he turned all the attention to the seniors, I knew he was a star athlete in his own right, not only in football, but in baseball and basketball as well.

Co-Captain of the football team his senior year with Buck Cravey, the two had been good friends since 4th grade when Buck first came to school in Lyons. After high school, both went to Georgia Teacher's College (now Georgia Southern University) and served in the National Guard together. Years later, when Coach Jones was head football coach at Lyons High School, Buck was head football coach at Vidalia High School. The two remained good friends by sticking to an agreement: "Whatever

What you remember about the past matters. The memories you give to the youth in your community are important.



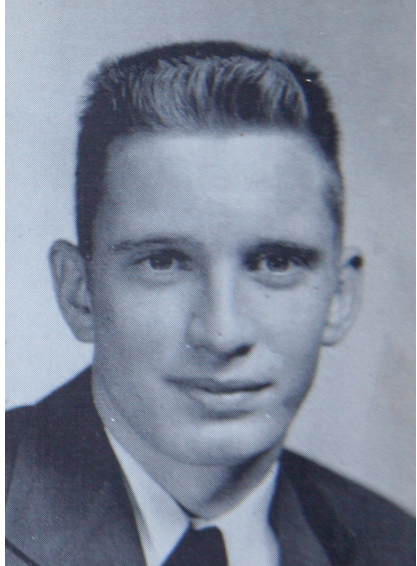
happened on the football field on Friday night, stayed on the football field,” said Coach Jones. “We might get mad and disagree with things on Friday night, but when the game was over, it was over. Buck was the best defensive coach I ever played against.”

Even though sports had been a big part of his high school years, he chose not to play college sports. He said, “I decided I’d rather come home on weekends to see Betty, so that’s what I did.” Coach Jones graduated with a degree in Health and Physical Education in 1959, and Ms. Betty graduated the following year with an education degree in English.

REMEMBERING MATTERS...

Jacky and Betty Jones were married in 1960 at the First Baptist Church in Lyons. Right out of college, Coach Jones served six months of active duty in the National Guard. “Truthfully,” he said, “I would probably have stayed in the Guard, but summer training camp in the National Guard was right when we went to football camp every year.”

Their first year of teaching was in Sylvester, Georgia. The following year, positions became available at Lyons High School, and they moved



Baseball Team 1955

Jacky was a junior and on the first string of the football team, and Betty was a sophomore on the cheerleading squad the year they began dating. **LEFT** Jacky also played baseball and basketball. **OPPOSITE PAGE** The Lyons City Gym was originally part of the school system and where basketball games were held.



Football Squad

Front row, left to right: George Lankford, Buster Burnette, Ashton Thompson, Kenneth Browning, Buck Cravey, Jacky Jones, Ken Youmans, Ray Smith, Raymond Landrum, Frank Kight, Woody Savage. Second row: Coach Edwards, Harvey Ganey, Madison Smith, Luther Ganey, Bobby Hardemon, Sammy Craft, Gordon Mosley, Paul Scott, Tank Thompson, Coach Clegg. Third row: Billy Benton, Monster McDilda, Jimmy Price, Vernon Kennedy, Wayne Smith, Maurice Jackson, Elvis Futch, Luran Hope, Wayne Horton.





home to teach at their alma mater. (Lyons High School was renamed Lyons Senior High School in 1971 and changed again in 1987 to Toombs County High School.) Ms. Betty taught French a couple of years and 11th and 12th grade Language Arts for the remaining of her teaching career. Coach Jones took a position as an assistant football coach and baseball coach and taught Georgia History for one year as well. Two years later, he also took the position as head girls' basketball coach.

In 1966, Ms. Betty and Coach Jones became a family of four with the birth of their twin daughters, Jo(Anna) and Jill(Anna), known as Jo and Jill. The next few years were busy for the Jones family. Ms. Betty would go back to college for her Master's, and in 1969, Coach Jones would become Athletic Director and head football coach. All the while, he continued to serve as head baseball coach and head coach of girls' basketball.

The year 1975 will always be remembered as the year Lyons High School won the football state championship. Once again, Coach Jones turned the focus from himself to others. "Earl Rodgers was my assistant coach, and the B-team coach was Billy Merritt," he said. "Coach Callaway was very instrumental in starting these boys out in middle school." (Coach Callaway would lead the middle school Bullpups through ten undefeated seasons between 1971 and 1982 including a sixty-one-game winning streak.)

The seniors on that state winning team included Tim

Mimbs (also Outstanding Lineman of the Year), Eugene "Cornbread" Corbitt, Ricky Bowen, Joe Roberts, Dale Smith, Tim Galbreath, Randy Michael, Phil Humphrey, Mark Adams, and Mark Rhoden. The opposing team was Duluth High School, and the final score was 20 to 12.

"They had George Rogers on that team," said Coach Jones. "He went on to play for the University of South Carolina and won the Heisman Trophy in 1980. He was good, too. He was very good."

After ten years as head football coach, Coach Jones said, "My girls were in high school, and I felt it was time to take a break." He continued to serve as Athlete Director, head girls' basketball coach and an assistant football coach. But in 1985, four years and three head football coaches later, Coach Jones resumed the position as head football coach for two more years. He spent his last two years before retirement coaching girls' basketball.

REMEMBERING THE SACRIFICE...

A story on the contributions Coach Jones and Ms. Betty have made in this community would not be complete without including at least a portion of his brother's service and sacrifice. Coach Jones's younger brother Barry was also an exceptional football player.



ABOVE Coach Jones's brother Barry was killed by a sniper while serving in Vietnam. The Lyons VFW is named in his honor.

He went to Florence State College, named the University of North Alabama today, on a football scholarship. While there, Barry also joined the ROTC. After graduating with a degree in Health and Physical Education, he chose to join the Army. After only two years, he was promoted to Captain.

At the end of his two-year enlistment, Barry came home to see his family. "I was an assistant football coach at that time," said Coach Jones. "We were open that week, so he rode over to Hawkinsville with me to scout that Friday night. On the way there, Barry told me that if he reenlisted he knew he would be going to Vietnam, and it was what he wanted to do. I tried my best to talk him out of it, but he had already made up his mind. He said he was going to make a career of it. I had no doubt he was a great soldier. He had quickly climbed up the ladder of command and was highly respected by all his men and commanders," something Jacky would later hear again and again. "I said, 'Barry, you need to go ahead and get out. Start coaching.' He told me, 'In a way, I'm coaching now. And if I get out, I'd be letting them down.'"

On February 5, 1968, Barry was in the Binh Dinh province of South Vietnam serving as Infantry Unit Commander of the 11th Light Infantry

Brigade, 1st Battalion, 20th Infantry, D Company. "D Company had been operating in the mountains in a[n] area southwest of Duc Pho for about a month..." wrote his platoon leader Jerry Swenson to Barry's nephew Cam many years later. "Barry received orders to send out a platoon size force to patrol a village about 2 kilometers from th[e] fire base."

He had just called his Lieutenant to report that one sniper had been killed and turned to return the hand set back to the radio telephone operator when he was hit by a second sniper. "A helicopter was there within ten minutes to airlift him out, but his spleen was all shot up, and he went into shock. He died in the helicopter on the way to the base hospital," said Coach Jones.

When two men, one a local pastor in the community, showed up at Coach Jones's door, he already knew Barry was gone. "They told me, 'Barry has been reported missing.' That was all they had been told. But a close friend of Barry's wife Martha had called. Word had gotten around among the wives of men on the base in Hawaii that Barry had been killed. The friend asked if I could come get Martha and bring her home, because she was expecting at the time." Martha would name her daughter Barri after her father.

The knowledge that Barry had chosen to serve his country somehow helped Coach Jones bear the loss of his twenty-six-year-old brother. The VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars) Ladies Auxiliary post of Lyons is named J. Barry Jones Post #3563 in his honor.

REMEMBERING TO HONOR...

The influence of teachers on the lives of our youth cannot be overstated. In an age when connection has all but been replaced by cell phones and other electronic devices, teachers may very well be our greatest hope for positive influence outside the home. "If kids come to us from strong, healthy, functioning families," writes international bestselling author Barbara Colorose, "it makes our job easier. If they do not come to us from strong, healthy, functioning families, it makes our job more important."

Some might have thought the Coach and the English teacher were opposites. But the only real difference between the two was where they taught. As the 20th century American Psychiatrist Karl Menninger stated, "What the teacher is, is more important than what he teaches." And who Coach Jones and Ms. Betty were to their students was a more valuable lesson than any lesson either could have taught. **#TCM**