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## Eddie Robinson's Record and Greatness

Richard C. Crepeau  
University of Central Florida, [richard.crepeau@ucf.edu](mailto:richard.crepeau@ucf.edu)

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I went back to the College Preview Edition of The Sporting News and found not a word about him or his likely achievement. A week before the event an occasional mention was made in some of the sports columns across the country. On Saturday, the day of the event it was noted on most football telecasts, and there was even a half-time feature on ABC. And in the sport's television version of damning with faint praise, the game itself was televised on The Deuce, ESPN2, the cable network most of America has never seen.

Black sport, like many other areas of black life in America, remain nearly invisible in white America, except when it involves crime, rioting, or drugs. Lou Holtz's surgery got more coverage than this. A week after the O.J. trial race still matters in America.

The event was the 400th win in the illustrious career of Eddie Robinson. All 400 of his wins came at Grambling where he has been for 54 years. Win number 400 came almost exactly ten years after Robinson surpassed Bear Bryant as the winningest coach in the history of college football.

Had this been someone at Tennessee, Michigan, or Oklahoma, or even at Wyoming, Utah State, or Toledo, the national media blitz fueled by the public relations juggernaut at the NCAA offices would have been awesome. It would have been the featured TV event of the week. The travelling college football circus of ESPN would have been in Louisiana not in Tallahassee, and Eddie Robinson's life would have been reviewed in all the media.

At age 74 Eddie Robinson is clearly the greatest coach in college football history.

It occurred to me while looking at this record that Eddie Robinson's coaching career began a few months before my birth and that it spans my entire lifetime. If any coach who is just starting in the business is around for the next forty years and wins an average of ten games a season, he will be able to reach this milestone, although he will still not pass Robinson who is likely to pile up many more victories before he finally retires.

Eddie Robinson was born in Jackson, Louisiana, in 1919. In high school he was quarterback for three undefeated seasons, and then at a small Louisiana Baptist college in three years his team lost only once. He graduated in 1941 and shortly after married

his high school sweetheart Doris. He started his head coaching career almost immediately at Louisiana Negro Normal and Industrial Institute, later renamed Grambling State University. He was hired as head football and basketball coach as well as physical education instructor for \$63.75 a month.

In those early years Robinson coached the football team, drove the bus, trained the women's drill team for halftime shows, wrote the game story and distributed it to the local press. His budgets were meager, his facilities were limited, and in the segregated world of the South roadtrips could be a harrowing adventure and an arduous ordeal. In his off-season time he coached baseball, men's and women's basketball, and managed to find the time to earn his Master's Degree from the University of Iowa in 1954.

Coach Robinson has seen over 200 of his players go on to the NFL with over 25 achieving all-Pro or Pro-Bowl status. Among the better known players were "Tank" Younger, "Buck" Buchanan, Ernie Ladd, Willie Davis, Charlie Joiner, Willie Brown, Rosey Taylor, James Harris and Doug Williams.

His players talk about him as a father-figure and counsellor. Doug Williams said that when he left Grambling he felt like he had a degree in philosophy. "It is amazing what that man knows, in addition to all the football he teaches."

As a football coach Eddie Robinson was generally ahead of contemporaries. He ran the offensive schemes made famous by Bowden and Spurrier well before either was being described as an offensive genius. He was using substitutes as messengers long before Paul Brown was said to have invented that practice. But such is the fate of invisible Americans.

His teams have played to sellout crowds around the world, but his detractors continue to question the credibility of his records because of Grambling's allegedly lower level of competition. Although Robinson doesn't directly answer these critics he did say after passing Bear Bryant: "I grew up in the South...I was told where to attend elementary school, where to attend junior high school, where to attend high school. When I became a coach I was told who I could recruit, who I could play, where I could play and when I could play. I did what I could within the system."

And now Eddie Robinson stands way above that system, and yes, he is going to Disney World.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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