



## James Len Blackwood

April 9, 1941 - January 22, 2026

James Len Blackwood, a legendary coach, mentor, and storyteller whose impact on athletes and institutions spanned more than four decades, passed away peacefully at home on January 22, 2026, surrounded by those he loved. James was a devoted husband, father, grandfather and great-grandfather, and an inspiring leader whose passion for sport was always rooted in people.

Born April 9, 1941, in Abilene, Texas, to Len Albert Blackwood and Gladys Florence Blackwood, James was an accomplished athlete long before he became a celebrated coach. In 1959, he helped lead the Abilene High School Eagles to a state championship, running on the mile relay team and placing second in the 880-yard run at the state track meet. He earned a track scholarship to Abilene Christian College, where he competed on the Wildcats' distance medley relay team, which was ranked second in the world in 1961.

James began his coaching career in 1963 at Mann Junior High in Abilene, launching what would become a remarkable 44-year journey in coaching and athletic leadership. Early success followed quickly. As a volunteer assistant track coach at Cooper High School, he helped guide the Cougars to a 1964 state championship. From there, his reputation as an exceptional track and cross-country coach grew.

At Corpus Christi Ray High School, James led the cross-country team to a

state championship in 1965, and a second-place finish the following year. His two-mile relay team set a Texas Relays record in 1967 and recorded the fastest time in the nation. He later coached at Corpus Christi King High School and Richardson High School, where his teams consistently excelled at the state level. Over his high school coaching career, more than 30 of his athletes earned college track and field scholarships.

In 1972, James joined the University of Texas at Austin as assistant track coach, head cross-country coach, and associate director of the Texas Relays. During his tenure, his teams won 13 Southwest Conference championships and finished in the national top 10 on 10 occasions. In 1985, James became the recruiting coordinator for the Texas Longhorns football program and helped build the team that won the 1990 Southwest Conference championship and posted a nationally ranked 10–2 season. Ultimately, 25 of his players went on to play in the NFL.

James played a key role in collegiate athletics nationwide, serving as associate director for five NCAA national championships and directing NCAA District 6 cross-country championships for 13 years. He also co-directed the first UIL high school cross-country meet in Texas. His career included time with the Houston Astros front office and a coaching stop at the University of Southern Mississippi.

James' final coaching home was the University of Texas at San Antonio, where he was a track & field coach for nine seasons, from 1999-2000 to 2007-08. He spent the last seven seasons as head coach of the women's program. During his time with the Roadrunners, he coached All-Americans Ryanne Dupree and Rhonda Ray, along with more than 60 all-conference performers and over 25 conference champions.

Throughout his career, James coached 71 NCAA All-Americans at the

University of Texas, seven at UTSA, and 17 Olympians. Many extraordinary athletes proudly called him "Coach," including Eric Metcalf, Johnny Lam Jones, Henry Marsh, Patrick Sang, and James Lott. Yet for all his accolades, James was most proud of the relationships he built and the lives he influenced.

Beyond coaching, James was known as a gifted storyteller, always ready with a laugh, a memory, or a lesson drawn from experience. He believed deeply in the power of sport to shape character and instill confidence, and he never stopped cheering for his athletes long after their competitive days were over.

James would readily say the greatest win of his life was his wife, Susan. It was fitting that sport brought them together with James as a track coach at UT and Susan coordinating track meets as an assistant athletic director at the UIL. They began dating in 1986 and were married in 1989. True teammates in every sense, they supported one another's careers with pride, encouragement and deep respect. Their love and partnership remain a lasting example to all who knew them.

James' legacy lives on through his family, the countless athletes he inspired, the colleagues he mentored, and the friends who cherished his warmth, wisdom, and humor. He will be remembered not only for his extraordinary career but for the heart, generosity and joy he brought to every chapter of his life.

James is survived by his wife, Dr. Susan Blackwood; daughter, Jessica Lyn Kidd; granddaughter, Taylor Lyn Douglass (Evan); and great-granddaughter, Ella Jade Douglass.

James formed close bonds with his caregivers, and the family especially

wishes to thank Cierra Crumedy, Yvonne Dominguez, Zhaquae Moragne, Angel Ttacomulco, Tiffany De La Torres and Nora Casarez for their love and expertise.

The community is invited to attend a celebration of James Blackwood's life on Friday, Feb. 6, at 11 a.m. at Mission Park Funeral Chapels and Cemetery – Dominion, 20900 I-10 W, San Antonio, TX 78257.

In lieu of flowers, the family welcomes tax-deductible memorial donations to the Coach James Blackwood Endowment in his honor at <https://bit.ly/45xa9Mi>.

# Previous Events

## Memorial Service

FEB 6. 11:00 AM (CT)

Mission Park Funeral Chapels and Cemetery Dominion  
20900 IH 10 W  
San Antonio, TX 78257  
(210) 698-5252  
<https://www.missionparks.com/>

# Tribute Wall



“ *Mission Park Funeral Chapels & Cemeteries created a Webcast in memory of James Len Blackwood*



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**Mission Park Funeral Chapels & Cemetery** - February 06 at 11:14 AM



“ *Jim was a longtime neighbor of ours and always had time to stop and talk. He was so especially kind to our granddaughter who was a distance runner, gave her good advice, always encouraged her. He and Susan were wonderful neighbors. Good guy gone too soon.*

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**Judy Howen** - February 07 at 09:26 AM

HB

“ *I was fortunate to work with James at UT and knew Susan at the UIL. Both class acts and wonderful people. RIP James, and prayers for Susan and the family.*

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**Howard Bushong** - February 05 at 03:40 PM

RR

“ *I greatly appreciated Coach Blackwood allowing me to try out for and compete for the UT Austin cross country and track teams between 1981 and 1983. Rest in peace, Coach.*

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**Roland Rosales** - February 01 at 11:38 AM

KS

*Coach Blackwood imparted his selfless persona on all of us, not only the lucky ones who had the privilege of working with him on a daily basis. The one word that describes him for me ... Unpretentious, you got the real 'him' every time. He was pivotal and life altering for me personally. Thank you Coach for all you did for me and the entire team. Thank you for being you! Much love, will miss you.*

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**Karl 'Laddy' Smith** - February 05 at 01:12 PM

JA

*I just heard of Coach Blackwood's passing and am so sorry. He was such a special guy. I haven't seen or talked with him about 55 years but he was such a wonderful mentor at Ray High School. He was my driver's ed teacher and he was so considerate of my summer work schedule that he came to my house and picked me up and I was his only student at the time. I've always appreciated his time and teaching and have great thoughts about him.*

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**Jay** - April 25 at 08:46 AM