

No Fear

From player to coach, Helms always shines

By MARIA ELENA
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As part of the San Benito Greyhounds football team, the name Jim Helms filled Rio Grande Valley's sports pages. Over forty years later, Helms is still making headlines.

The San Benito native was named Coach of the Year after leading Brownsville Porter High School to its first winning season in its 29 year history. Now after football season, Helms calmly stands in the noisy, busy gymnasium of Porter High School. "We only have one gym," he explains. "So a lot of things are going on."

Despite his modest school surroundings, Helms has a long list of achievements including assistant coaching on four national championship collegiate teams, 12 conference championships and 14 bowl games.

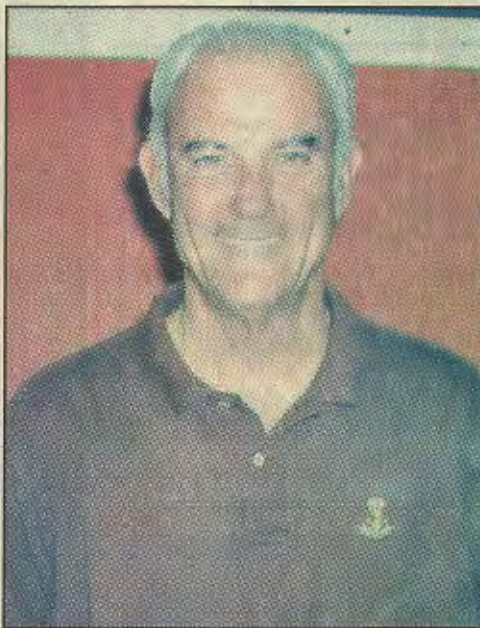
"I'd like to think I've had a little success," Helms says with

a smile. His talent was evident as a football player in the early 1960s, while attending San Benito High School.

Helms says the coach was harder on him than the other players. But that's to be expected when playing for your father.

"It's different when you have to play for your dad. As much as they try not to be harder on their kids, they always are."

Helms' hard work in high school paid off. He was named an All-State player and in 1962, the San Benito School Board of Trustees recognized him by retiring his #21 football jersey. Helms says, "That was a great honor." His father's influence continued during Helms' career. "When your dad's a coach, you always have that interest," Helms says.



"I guess a lot of us with dad's who coach end up getting into coaching, even though our fathers said there's probably other ways you ought to go." Helms spent many years outside the Valley, but he says he always wanted to return.

"One time I thought I was about to do it, then it just didn't
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work out. But I was glad when I finally did it... It's always fun to come back to where you grew up."

Helms was coaching at the University of Illinois when his father's declining health prompted his return to the Valley. "So I just quit and came back down here and decided (to) just stay down here and take care of him."

His relocation to the Valley was around the time San Benito High School was searching for a new head football coach. "I really wanted the job. There's no doubt about it," admits Helms. "I'd loved to have it."

But in what appears to be a matter of timing, he accepted the coaching job offered by the Brownsville Independent School District.

His decision led him to a successful season and coaching honors. "I just happened to be at the right place at the right time. I had a very good team, and they played well," says Helms.

Though the year was a celebration for his team, he suffered a personal loss last February when his father passed away.

Helms and his wife Dabney, who also grew up in San Benito, now reside in South Padre Island. He says they both visit San Benito often, and he even sees a lot of his former Greyhound teammates.

Helms says he would like to be a role model for kids. "(I) want to give these kids a chance to see somebody, just like they are, that can go off and hopefully have success."