

Mike Morgan:

Coach has impressive history at BYU, but believes the best is yet to come at West Jordan

By Bruce Smith
MatchupUT.com

Mike Morgan enters his 12th year as the head football coach at West Jordan High School.

And, still, only his relatives and closest friends really know him.

It's difficult to understand West Jordan's mild-mannered mentor because he's not as verbal or animated as other coaches. However, his head is in the game, and that's where it usually has been since he was young.

The 50 year-old Morgan has been involved in football as long as he can remember. He grew up in Salt Lake City and graduated from Brighton High, where he became noticed after receiving all-state honors as a standout defensive end.

He received a scholarship to attend BYU. At 6-foot-4 and as much as 285 pounds, he started all four years and helped the Cougars win four consecutive Western Athletic Conference championships. He went on to play for three years in the fledgling United States Football League (USFL) and was asked to try out for the NFL's Detroit Lions when he chose to hang up his cleats.

"Winning those four titles was my highlight," he said. "I was good, but I was probably only good enough to be an average pro player. I learned quickly that pro football is a business, and it put a bad taste in my mouth. I'm glad things worked out the way they did."

Morgan recalls his playing career fondly, but rarely talks about it. He views it as a small part of his life history. Being a husband and father of three children has become far more important, as well as educating young people and leading the Jaguars onto the field.



Mike Morgan was a 6-foot-4, 285-pound lineman at BYU and in the pro ranks, and now is the longest-tenured coach among the Region 3 schools.

"I enjoy just being part of a sport that I enjoy," he said. "I think the real highlight of my football career is still to come."

Morgan's life seems less complicated these days, and that's how he likes it. He and his high-school sweetheart, **Keri**, have been married for 29 years, and she's a fixture in the stands.

When Morgan's not teaching or coaching, he and Keri are involved in their kids' lives. **Jody**, 23, is playing football as a senior at Dixie State in St. George; **Cache**, 20, is a sophomore football player at Utah State, and his 13 year-old daughter, **Majerle** (named after the former NBA player), lives at home and attends junior high.

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“They keep us busy,” said Morgan. “During the football season, we’re on the road on the weekends watching one of our boys play. There’s never a dull moment.”

That’s actually been the case for a long time. In Morgan’s younger days, he was remembered at BYU for being in the opponent’s backfield, where he broke the school record for most sacks in a season. And having played pro football makes him a rare commodity among local high school coaches.

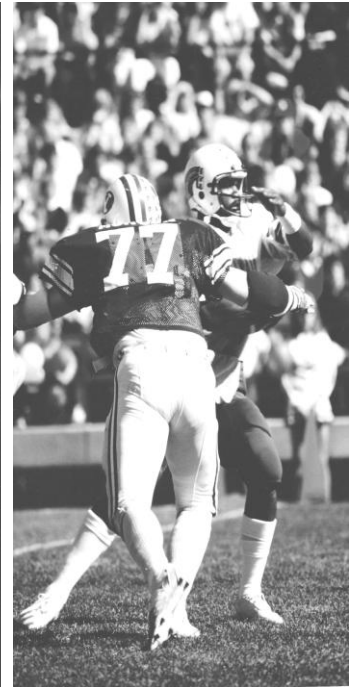
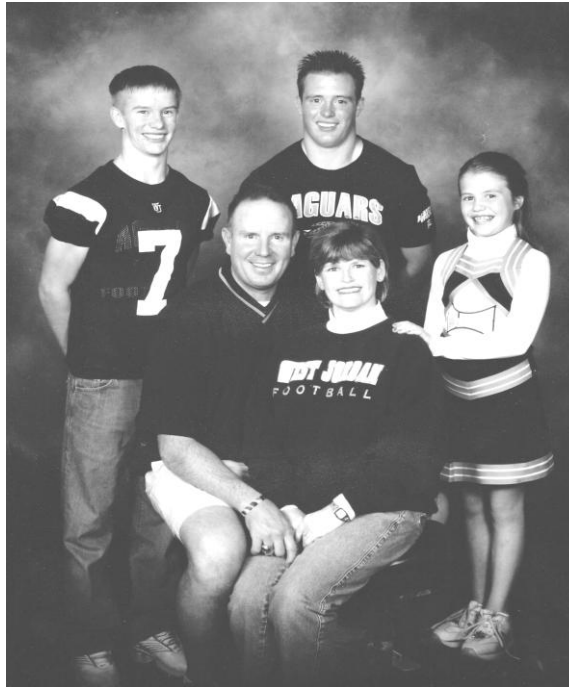
It also has allowed him to meet important people.

When he played for the USFL’s Chicago Blitz, his coach was **Marv Levy**, who later made it to four Super Bowls as coach of the Buffalo Bills. Later, he played under coach **Steve Spurrier** for Tampa Bay.

Then, of course, there are all the standouts he played with during BYU’s glory days from 1978-82. He considers people like **Tom Holmoe**, **Kyle Whittingham** and **Jim McMahon** as friends.

Morgan graduated just prior to the Cougars’ national championship season, but many BYU fans still consider him to be among the school’s best at his position.

The memories of those times rest mostly in a desk drawer, with the exception of a few pictures on the wall.



“I haven’t looked at most of them in years,” he said.

Now, his favorite pictures are of West Jordan players crossing the goal line. He wants to keep it that way.

“It’s not about me,” he said. “It’s about the players. This is their time.”

After his glory days ended, Morgan was an assistant at American Fork, Brighton, Murray and Granger before replacing **Brent Hawkins** at West Jordan in 1999. His first season, the Jaguars won the region title.

It’s been a series of highs and lows since. Two years ago, however, Morgan took a risk that is now the trademark of his program.

In 2008, West Jordan held off Olympus 35-28 in a non-region game and Morgan

Mike Morgan profile

- * - Enters his 12th year as head coach at West Jordan.
- * - Assistant coach at American Fork, Brighton and Murray.
- * - Masters Degree in Secondary Education from Utah State.
- * - All-WAC player at BYU. MVP of Holiday Bowl, 1982. AP & UPI honorable mention All-American.

was introduced to the spread offense. When Oly coach **Mark Smith** became available after the season, he immediately asked him to be West Jordan’s offensive coordinator.

“This (football) is a game. It’s always been that way for me,” Morgan insists. “We play and we have fun doing it.”

So, when you see Morgan on the sidelines, you may not see a smile. But don’t underestimate him. There’s always a smile on the inside.