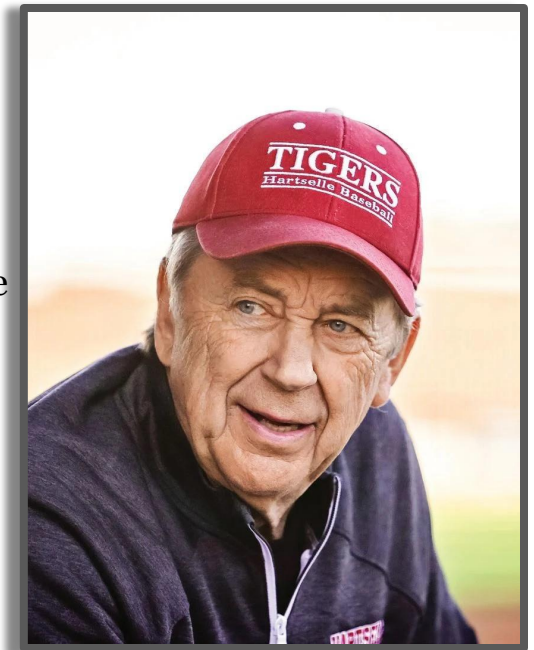


William Booth

By Randy Sparkman

When William Booth walked into the room, every young face turned toward him in expectation. This was a new venture for Booth. Anyone betting on the outcome in that moment would have been confident of success, but no one could imagine that what lay ahead would impact many of those very kids, a legion of their successors, and, ultimately, the school district itself. This was September, 1966, and it was Booth's first day as a math teacher.



William Booth taught advanced mathematics to upwards of 4,500 students over more than 50 years at Morgan County High School and Hartselle High School. It is likely that all of those students would describe their experience in his classroom as memorable. A majority of them would likely contend that their understanding of algebra, trigonometry and calculus, and their ability to learn more of it, was fundamentally improved. A significant number would directly link their experience in Booth's classroom to their career choice and professional trajectory.

Coach Booth's lifelong friend Don Logan remembers, "Well before so much emphasis was put on science, math and engineering, he somehow managed to get kids to sign up for advanced mathematics and they liked it. There is story after story of his influence on the career success of his students. He found a way to make them stay with it, get degrees and good jobs."

Hartselle City Schools transitioned from Morgan County Schools into a city system in 1975. In 1980, with a graduate degree from Alabama A&M added to his Athens State mathematics degree, Coach Booth began to assume various administrative roles in the new district. These included Assistant Principal at Hartselle High School, Chapter I/II Coordinator, Advanced Placement Coordinator, Title I/II Coordinator and Transportation Coordinator. During these years Booth also encouraged the advancement of the HHS mathematics curriculum to include more robust Calculus instruction and Advanced Placement math courses.

William Booth was an example and leader of an ambitious academic mindset at Hartselle City Schools that took root around the time he began his career, solidified over the almost two generations that spanned his tenure, and continues today.



Booth's path was shaped by many. As a young man, he was influenced by his grandfather and namesake who served the Hartselle community as a physician and civic leader. As a student, he was moved by the work of Miss Lizzie Reed Penn and of Professor F.E. Burleson. As a young teacher, he was stimulated by a mix of energetic educators processing the social changes that were finding their way to Hartselle. All left their mark. Don Logan notes, "William always seemed to think more broadly about the impact of education on the lives of students than the rest of us."

Just as Booth's path was shaped by many, Booth shaped the paths of many who followed him. Former Booth student and current HHS math teacher Bucky Garner asserts, "Coach Booth is the reason I am here today. I was able to become a trained engineer because of his classes. I always wanted to be a teacher because I wanted to emulate him, and I found a way back into the classroom."

In 1986, at 42 years old and after 20 years as a math teacher, William Booth stepped, unproven, in front of another group of young people as a baseball coach and mentor. Just as he had done in the classroom, Coach Booth approached the endeavor with enthusiasm, competitiveness, and expectations. He viewed his baseball players as student athletes whose first commitment was to their own academic success and then to the sport. Booth instilled in his young players that in the classroom, on the field, and in life, success is measured by individual effort and by day-to-day, milestone-by-milestone progress from the starting point.

Booth's efforts led his teams to nine State Championships and four State Runner Ups as well as 21 Area Championships. With his 648th win in 2006, Booth became Alabama's winningest high school baseball coach and continues to hold the title with 1,172 wins. He has been inducted into the Alabama Sports Hall of Fame (ASHOF) and the Morgan County Sports Hall of Fame, and was named Decatur Daily's 5A-7A Coach of the Year 17 times. The ASHOF awarded Booth its 2023 Frank "Pig" House Award named after its founder, and the Alabama Baseball Coaches Association awarded Booth its inaugural Lifetime Achievement Award. This award will be renamed after Coach Booth for future recipients.

Through most of these successes on the baseball field, William Booth continued to teach advanced mathematics. Leaving the classroom in 2016, he went on to serve as Interim Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, Director of Operations, and Transportation Coordinator. He formally retired in 2023 with 58 years of service and a winning playbook.

When asked his thoughts about William Booth, Assistant Baseball Coach and HCS Athletic Director, Jake Miles, had this to say, "Coach Booth has worn many hats over the years and has been so good to so many people. To simply say he is 'special coach' or 'special teacher' would be an understatement and not give him justice. In my opinion, the greatest gift Coach Booth gave is that so many kids graduated from Hartselle City Schools believing that, as Coach Booth says, all things are possible with 'a little hard work.' "

