

Stone Jessup, Lincoln Middle School, El Paso, TX

Friday Night Lights and Horse Parades

In 1916, the famous General John J. Pershing stood on a field, inspecting his troops, their horses, and their guns. They were ready to ride. They were preparing for a dangerous expedition to attack Pancho Villa and crush his revolution. Interestingly enough, he did not prepare his troops this day on a military base, rather, a high school football stadium at El Paso High School. Years later, he returned to the stadium after success in World War I, and rode his horse across the 50 yard line.

El Paso High School is the oldest high school in El Paso, and while many people like to focus on the ghost stories related to the old building, few people are aware of the different historic events the school's stadium has hosted since its beginning days from soldiers and generals, to high school and college football games, this stadium is rich with history.

General Pershing never did catch Pancho Villa, but he completely threw Villa's operations into disarray. Pershing was born in 1860 and died in 1948. He commanded the American Expeditionary Force in Europe during World War I. He was the first captain of the West Point class of 1886 and served as president of his class. He later served in the Spanish and Philippine-American Wars, which gave President Woodrow Wilson the confidence to appoint him to lead the raid against the Mexican revolutionary, Pancho Villa. That led Pershing to El Paso, where he set up camp at R.R. Jones's Stadium at El Paso High School, using it as a staging area. He did such a good job, that President Wilson chose Pershing to then command the American Expeditionary Force when America entered World War I. Pershing returned to R.R. Jones stadium at the end of World War I, and rode his horse across the football field, as he celebrated the end of the war.

R.R. Jones Stadium has been voted as a top 10 stadium in the country by maxpreps.com, and was also named a must-see Texas high school football stadium by Dave Campbell's Texas Football. In 2010, it was named as "Best Resemblance to Ancient Rome" in an ESPN Rise Article. In 2014, it was inducted into the Texas Stadium Hall of Fame by TexasBob.com. In 2015, it was voted as the top high school stadium in the state of Texas by the football website "The Old Coach." R.R. Jones Stadium continues to get as much attention present day, as it did before World War I.

The stadium is named after the first assistant principal of the school, Robert Randolph "Railroad" Jones. Mr. Jones knew the name of every single student in the school and had a great enthusiasm that inspired students and teachers. In 1943, the student body president asked the school board to name the stadium after Mr. Jones. Jones later became a principal of the school.

El Paso High School has always been one of the most beautiful campuses in the southwest. The school's architecture, designed by legendary architect Henry Trost, has made it a city landmark almost from day one. The stadium was the first major concrete stadium built in the country. Around the football field, are concrete bleachers, which are

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built into slopes that rise sharply, all the way around the entire football field. The stadium is aligned with the school's entrance pavilion. The school is nicknamed "The Lady on the Hill" for its position on a mountainside overlooking the city. When sitting at the top of the stadium, downtown views can be seen, as well as the border wall. If you sit at night time, you can sometimes distinguish America and Mexico, by looking at the difference in the colors of light bulbs throughout the borderland.

R.R. Jones Stadium was the birth place for Texas Friday Night Lights. It was the first stadium to play a night time game with outdoor lighting and to offer a place for sporting events after sunset. The stadium has a seating capacity of 12,000, and when it was constructed, cost half a million dollars.

The stadium also hosted the first three Sun Bowl football games from 1935 to 1937. The Sun Bowl is tied with the Sugar and Orange bowls as the second-oldest bowl game in the country. The oldest is the Rose Bowl, which started in 1916. The first Sun Bowl game, played in 1935, was between two Texas High School football teams. The following year, the Sun Bowl game was between college teams.

Be it soldiers preparing to defend the U.S. from invading revolutionaries, or home team high school kids defending their field, this stadium has been the beating heart of the history of this city, and should be preserved as such, for future generations.

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