

# Thousands pay respect to Robinson

BATON ROUGE (AP) — Inside the entrance to Louisiana's towering Capitol, a glittering array of trophies and posters commemorated the late Eddie Robinson's nearly six decades of winning football games.

Yet former Super Bowl MVP Doug Williams saw what he really hoped to see while milling around outside, near the base of the Capitol's long stretch of granite steps.

More than 6,400 people filed by, coming to pay their respects to Grambling's legendary coach. And many had no ties to the university where Robinson coached and Williams played.

"This shows you how many lives he touched right here," Williams said of the turnout. "It says a lot about what he's done for America, not just black colleges."

Robinson, who endured the indignities of the Jim Crow era while building tiny and predominantly black Grambling into a football power, died last week at 88.

On Monday, his body lay in an open casket in the same room where Robinson had viewed the body of slain political titan Huey Long more than 70 years ago.

Williams estimated that more than 100 of Robinson's former players had shown up, with more expected to attend a wake and burial on Tuesday and Wednesday in Grambling.

Robinson grew up near Baton Rouge, where a street is named for him.



Leader photo by GLENN LEWIS

**Former Grambling State University football players escort the casket of legendary coach Eddie Robinson from the Louisiana State Capitol Building Monday.**

gold Southern cap and was one of many Southern fans who walked by. "He earned it."

When Robinson's body arrived in Baton Rouge, dozens of his former players, wearing white gloves and a red ribbon on their lapels, helped carry the dark wooden casket into

a football in the coffin and rested her hand on Robinson's head.

"I'm doing OK," she said later. "I already miss him so much, but I can't keep breaking down."

An abbreviated version of the renowned Grambling band played the national anthem after

just the fifth person to lie in repose at the Capitol. Others include Long, the former governor and senator, and his brother, Earl, also a former governor.

When Huey Long died in 1935, the coach and his wife, then teenage sweethearts, made it a point to go to the Louisiana

Since his death, the man often referred to as "Coach Rob" has been eulogized across the nation as a heroic figure: a patriot tested in the segregation era; a coach who built a football institution; a leader who set a life's example for young black men.

A steady stream of mourners passed the casket all day, many pulling out cameras or cell phones to take pictures of Robinson. The casket remained there for public viewing until nearly 5 p.m., when it was closed and moved to the House Chamber for a second memorial service attended by Gov. Kathleen Blanco and several other political leaders.

"He used the gridiron to bring us together and he became one of the greatest civil rights pioneers in all of Louisiana," said Blanco, who presented Robinson's family with an American flag that had flown in the state Capitol. "Over the years, Coach Rob leveled playing field both in football and in life for all of us. He always said, 'In America, anything is possible.'"

Robinson retired in 1997, with 57 years of coaching and 408 victories to his name, and the majority of his players left Grambling with degrees.

"He always preached that if you were good enough, you could overcome adversity," said Larry Metevia, who played center for Grambling in the mid-1960s. "That's what he instilled in just about everybody, not just the guys who played