

William Jewell College: The Site of Chiefs Training Camp from 1963-1990

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Liberty, Missouri was the home of Chiefs training camp for three decades
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Previous Locations: Jesuit High School | New Mexico Military Institute

William Jewell College in Liberty, Missouri, 15 miles from downtown Kansas City, was typical of professional football team training camps of the 1960s up until just a decade ago. Camps could be found all across the country from St. Vincent's College in Latrobe, Pennsylvania where the Pittsburgh Steelers still train, to Oxnard, California where the Dallas Cowboys train.

The first camp in Kansas City opened on July 13, 1963, and the team trained there for the next 28 years. Training camps were long and, in order, so were the pre-season games which numbered as many as six by the 1980s. Moving to William Jewell, however, was a significant upgrade from Roswell and its military school.



William P. Straeter/1970 AP

Days were long and rookies were hazed as veterans made them sing their college fight songs during meals. Fines were levied for showing up late, missing meals, general misbehavior and anything that took away from the planned workday. Missing a meal would cost a player \$50, and losing his playbook, \$200.

As is the case today, days were planned down to the minute beginning with a 6:30 AM reveille and a 10:30 PM curfew. Two-a-days were the order of the day with full padded practices many days of the week.

Gripping was pointless, as it had been in Roswell. "If you begrudge it," explained EJ Holub, "it's hell.

"You've got to do it, so why gripe?"

At first, many of the Texas born players admitted they missed their home state and having their families close by who could stop and visit after an afternoon practice.

As a way of feeling completely comfortable far from his Texas roots, Holub trucked two horses to camp to keep him company. They gave him something to do after practice, he said. "I got them over at this place near camp and I went over and worked with them when I had time."

Practices took place on two fields which, being so close to Kansas City, were cared for by George Toma and his crew who did the same at Municipal Stadium. Later, his son, Chip, and then Andre Bruce would take over and do the same.

Everything was within walking distance: the dorms, the cafeteria, the meeting rooms and back again. At night, players would sprint to a few of the bars that line most every campus before rushing back for bed-check.

What made William Jewell so good for purposes of attracting the attention of future ticket- buyers was its closeness to Kansas City, where fans could make their way up and see just exactly what this new AFL team was all about and head home at the end of the day.

Len Dawson and Chris Burford held down television jobs in the offseason, and it was commonplace to see both conducting interviews with their teammates after practice – both men still dressed in uniform.

In its peak, William Jewell drew the attention of sports fans from throughout the region until the 1970s, when crowds began to disappear as the franchise continued a long losing streak.

It was time for a change.