**Art Preston: Top San Diego athlete and coach dead at 56**

One of the finest athletes ever produced in this county, and possibly the best all-around Aztecs athlete of all-time, died last Wednesday. The body of Art Preston, 56, was found in the cab of his pickup that was parked on Sunrise Highway east of Pine Valley. Also found in the cab was a hose connected to the truck's tailpipe.   
  
Over a period of nearly three decades, Art Preston was a prominent fixture on local sports pages. He is remembered as a premier athlete, a highly successful coach and as the operator of a popular hunting club.   
  
Preston first came to attention while a student at Grossmont High School. In his senior year, he was clearly the county's top prep athlete. He won the scoring championship in football with 22 touchdowns and his exploits were such that 27 years later, he was named to a "dream team" of San Diego prep athletes compiled by The Tribune.   
  
On the baseball diamond he divided time between center field and the pitcher's mound. The diversity didn't seem to bother him. He led the county in pitching and hitting, finishing with a batting average of .533.   
  
After graduating, Preston declined offers from a number of major universities in favor of San Diego State. In four years on Montezuma Mesa, Preston established baseball and football records that have yet to be broken. It is Art Preston -- not Tony Gwynn -- who ranks first as the all-time Aztecs batting champion with an average of .477. Preston is also runner-up on that list with an average of .467 compiled during his junior year.   
  
Preston was an even more dominant force in football. From 1949 to 1951, he led the Bill Schutte-coached Aztecs to a 21-6-2 record, three trips to the Pineapple Bowl in Hawaii and their first undefeated season (10-0-1) in his senior year. Thirty-four seasons later, Preston is still the Aztecs leading scorer with 192 points. Other records include a fourth-place listing in all-time rushing with 1,664 yards and sixth and seventh place with kickoff returns of 96 and 87 yards.   
  
Following his collegiate career, Preston declined offers from NFL teams to sign a professional baseball contract with the Boston Red Sox. Disappointed with his inability to make the major league roster, he dropped out of professional baseball and returned to San Diego where he pursued a career as a high school teacher and coach.   
  
As the head coach of the football and baseball teams at El Capitan High School he consistently posted winning records in both sports. In 1963, he led the Vaqueros to within a touchdown of the CIF championship.   
  
During the late 1960s he developed and operated the 3-K Hunting Club east of Pine Valley. The club and his home were lost to a devastating wildfire in 1970.   
  
Following the fire and a brief stint in Oregon, Preston settled in Fall River Mills in Northern California where he continued to coach and teach. His teams at Fall River High and later Big Valley High regularly won their league championships. -- Jim Brown

  
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