

The East County

East County's Hometown Newspaper Since 1892!



EAST COUNTY COMMUNITY  
NEWSPAPERS, INC.

# Californian

*Serving El Cajon, La Mesa, Santee, Lemon Grove, Lakeside,  
Spring Valley, Rancho San Diego, Jamul, Crest, Dehesa, & Dulzura*

Single Copy Free  
28 Pages

Vol. 108 No. 77 Wednesday, September 27, 2000 © Copyright 2000 by ECCN, Inc. Call Us: (619) 448-8989

## A true Hall of Famer — UC Berkeley honors the late sports great Joe Roth of El Cajon

By Steve Dolan

*The East County Californian*

EL CAJON — One of the greatest athletes ever to come out of East County is being inducted into the UC Berkeley Hall of Fame on Friday, Nov. 3.

Joe Roth, who died of cancer at age 21 in 1977, was a sports standout at Granite Hills High and Grossmont College before attending University of California, Berkeley.

Roth starred in football, basketball and baseball during his Granite Hills days. He led

Grossmont College to the state community college football championship in 1974.

But, even more than that, he forever left a personal impression on the people who remember him from while he was growing up in El Cajon.

"He was just a special young man," said John McAdams, who coached Roth in basketball at Granite Hills: "You don't forget those type. As a coach, he made you look good. He always said the right things to the media. He was gracious to his opponents,

whether he won or lost.

"He always downplayed his role and would compliment his teammates. That's the way he was until the day he died."

Roth was indeed special to the McAdams family in a very touching way.

Debbie McAdams was diagnosed with bone cancer in 1976 and died five years later at age 19. Shortly after her deadly ailment was discovered, she received a heartfelt letter from Roth.

See **Roth**, p. 6

# Roth

Continued from p. 1

Here are excerpts from that letter of Oct. 27, 1976:

"Many people have probably expressed their sorrow to you, but there are few who actually understand how it feels. That is where I think I have something in common with you. I don't know if you remember or not, but I was struck with cancer in May of 1974. Having gone through that experience, I believe I can become a lot closer in thoughts with you and would like to share a few things with you.

"First of all, I consider myself very lucky to be alive today and I am sure that you do, too. I may have been dead by now if something had not been done about my disease. You have been blessed with life through action. I believe you will appreciate living a lot more now than you used to and that you will see things around you that you never noticed before.

"The adjustment period is a tough time. I remember recovering from the operation and having doubts in my mind about myself, but I just set my mind on returning to the normal flow of life, as you must do.

"You must work very hard and be mentally strong because it is a hard process and will be harder for you than it was for me. You don't get something for nothing.

"You will also find out who your true friends are. I can remember when I was in the hospital and your father came and saw me. That's what you consider a true friend, of which I'm sure you have many. Probably the greatest friends you have in the world are your parents and your family.

"They will be willing to do anything for you. You will have to be a big person now because not all people are your friends and can sometimes be cruel. I hope this letter has helped you because it has good intentions."

Roth died on Feb. 19, 1977, a little less than four months after writing the letter.

"That letter shows his courage and positive outlook on things," John McAdams said. "Even when he knew things weren't going to break his way, like he said, you have to hang in there.



Photo courtesy of UC Berkeley

**Joe Roth, a sports standout at Granite Hills High and Grossmont College who died of cancer at age 21 in 1977, is being inducted into the UC Berkeley Hall of Fame on Nov. 3.**

"He was just an outstanding young man. He was gracious, humble and had a great sense of humor. He had all the attributes you wanted an athlete to have. He was a fierce competitor who hated to lose. He was a battler all the time."

Roth certainly caught the eyes of major college football coaches when he led an underdog Grossmont College football team to the state title in 1974. After settling on Cal, he led the Golden Bears to their only conference championship over the past 25 years in 1975.

The El Cajon native quarterbacked Cal to the NCAA Team Total Offense Title in 1975, as the Golden Bears averaged 458 yards per game. He passed for 1,880 yards and 14 touchdowns, with just seven interceptions.

Roth was selected first team All-American by *The Sporting News* in

1976. During that season, he completed the longest pass in Cal history, an 88-yard touchdown to Wesley Walker against Georgia.

His No. 12 is the only football jersey ever retired by the Cal program.

"In his first collegiate start against San Jose State, we were 1-2 at that point," said Kevin Reneau, sports information director at Cal. "We were down with a minute and a half to go. He led an 80-yard drive with a big pass to Chuck Muncie and a touchdown to Wesley Walker. We won seven of eight down the stretch. We had an array of stars. Roth was the catalyst.

"Everybody here loved him. He was low-key and humble. Just as people here began to realize what a tremendous human being he was, his life was snuffed out. It was a real tragedy."