

LeRoy Zimmerman - HoF - 1970

Leroy was born February 20, 1918, in Tonganoxie, Kansas. He moved with his family to Los Angeles, CA in 1927. He attended elementary and Junior High in Los Angeles. The family moved to Arcadia, CA where he attended Monrovia-Arcadia-Duarte High School in 1935-1936. Here he won Varsity awards, in football, basketball and baseball. In 1935 he was All-Conference in football when MAD Wildcats played in the CIF Championship game in the Rose Bowl, against Santa Barbara. MAD lost 14-12, but Leroy threw a 55-yard touchdown pass.

In 1936 he signed to play at San Jose State College. He played freshman football and had a 5-2-1 record. From 1937-1939, he played Varsity Football here. In 1939, San Jose piled up a 13-0-0 record and Zimmerman led the Spartan offense that tallied 324 points, highest in the nation that year, and set a school record with 8 pass interceptions on defense. That year Zimmerman won First-Team All-American, played in the East-West Shrine Game, which the West won 28-11 and was named MVP. Zimmerman was considered to be the greatest player in San Jose State history. He was honored in 1995 with selection to the San Jose State "Team of the Century".

As part of *CNN/SI* special look at college football, as it entered the twenty-first century, *Sport Illustrated* Senior Writer Ivan Maisel, named his top player of the past century in each of the 115 Division I-A schools. His pick for San Jose State was Leroy Zimmerman.

An all-around athlete, Zimmerman was also a stand-out baseball pitcher and in fact, was offered a pro contract in 1940 by the old San Francisco Seals of the Pacific Coast League; but a football injury kept him from that opportunity. Instead, he signed a contract with the Washington Redskins, of the NFL, and played with that team for the 1940-1942 seasons. In 1942, Washington won the championship. He selected to the Pro Bowl, as a defensive back and quarterback that year. He was traded to the Philadelphia Eagles in 1943. Zimmerman played there for the 1943-1945 seasons and one year played with the *Steagles*, a combined team of the Steelers and Eagles, due to World War II, when many players were drafted.

During the 1944 season, he was voted the Outstanding Football Player in the NFL. A quote from a 1944 newspaper article stated, "He was one of the great two-way football players

in the 1940's. In 1944 he did not come off the field for a single down as he played quarterback, kicker, and defensive back with the Eagles, and was named NFL's Best Player of the Season.

In 1947, he played with the Detroit Lions; his final season, 1948, saw him with the Boston Yanks. Following his pro football career in 1949, he was the backfield coach at the University of West Virginia, under head coach, Dud DeGroot.

In 1950, he returned to San Jose State College to obtain his teaching credential. He began his teaching career in 1951, teaching wood shop and coaching Varsity and JV football, Varsity, B and C basketball, and Varsity baseball at Parlier High School, Parlier, California. In 1953 and 1954, Parlier won the Northern Yosemite League Championships in Varsity football, Varsity and C basketball.

He moved to Madera High School in Madera, CA in 1955. He stayed here until his retirement in 1981. Here he taught wood shop and coached Varsity football and Varsity baseball for twenty-six years.

During his last three years at San Jose State and for twenty-six years after the NFL, he pitched softball. In 1970 he was inducted into the International Softball Congress (ISC) Hall of Fame. Today the award for the outstanding pitcher in each ISC World Tournament, is now named the "*Leroy Zimmerman Outstanding Pitcher Award*".

In a newspaper article about his talent in softball, it is stated: "Hard as it is to imagine today, he never used a glove while pitching. In over 2,000 fast pitch starts, spanning twenty-six years, Zimmerman was knocked out of the box in just one game."

Zimmerman revolutionized pitching to the level now seen in collegiate and international play. He developed the riseball and the dropball, which are now predominant, pitches in any pitcher's arsenal. He pitched for the Fresno and Selma Houk Packers and the Long Beach Night Hawks, and led those teams to nine ISC World titles, and was selected to the ISC World teams, ten times in an eleven year span from 1950 through 1960. He was also named the Outstanding Pitcher for the ISC World Tournament five times, tossed two perfect games and had six no-hitters in World Championship play. He once struck out thirty batters in a 14-inning game, and in one of his perfect games, struck out all twenty-one batters. He had over seventy-five shut outs during his career. He had a total of 32 World Tournament victories as a pitcher.

Zimmerman became a 'pitching guru' in the backyard of his Madera home where he offered free pitching lessons to virtually all of the girl softball pitchers at Madera High School. Among those he taught were, none other than former Fresno State four-time All American pitcher and two-time College World Series pitcher, Amanda Scott, who led the Fresno State Bulldogs to the 1009 NCAA Championship. Also included among his 'backyard pupils,' were Mitzi and Nikki Zenger.

Other awards received by Zimmerman during his lifetime were: Santa Clara Valley Hall of Fame, San Jose State College Hall of Fame, San Jose State College Football Hall of Fame, Fresno County Athletic Hall of Fame, and Madera Sports Hall of Fame. The culminating award for him was to have the girls' softball field at Madera High School named The Leroy Zimmerman Field in 1997. This was a result of his fifteen years of teaching girls to pitch softball at no charge. His voluntary work for the Madera Recreation Department and the Madera Chapter of the Lions Club International brought many other awards to him.

Leroy passed away August 22, 1997, in Madera California leaving behind his wife Dena, sons, Rex, Ronald, and Donald, 19 grandchildren and 57 great-grandchildren