

In Memoriam: Professor Emeritus Donald "Don" Sawyer

California State University, East Bay mourns the passing of **Professor Emeritus Donald "Don" Sawyer**, whose service to the university spanned more than five decades as a student, athlete, coach, professor, administrator, mentor, and leader. Few members of the university community have contributed as broadly or as meaningfully to the institution's history.

After graduating from Cal State Hayward in 1968 with a bachelor's degree in Physical Education, Don returned to campus in 1970 as an assistant football coach while completing his master's degree at San Francisco State University. In 1972, he joined the Department of Kinesiology and Physical Education as a lecturer, beginning a distinguished career in higher education that would span four decades. He later earned a doctorate in education from the University of San Francisco and became a respected professor, teacher, and mentor to generations of students.

Throughout his academic career, Don accepted leadership roles that helped shape the university. He served as department chair of Kinesiology and Physical Education, Academic Senator, and Chair of the Academic Senate from 2004 to 2006. In 2006, he was appointed Chief of Staff to the President, serving Presidents Mohammad Qayoumi and Leroy M. Morishita with professionalism, integrity, and a collaborative approach that earned the respect of colleagues across the campus.

When Don officially retired in 2012, his service to the university continued. He returned repeatedly to help lead the institution during times of transition, serving twice as Interim Director of Athletics, Interim Vice President for University Advancement, and Interim Chief Information Officer. Regardless of the title he held, Don approached every assignment with humility, sound judgment, and an unwavering commitment to California State University, East Bay.

Long before his distinguished faculty and administrative career, Don had established himself as one of the university's outstanding student athletes. A member of the 1966 and 1967 Pioneer football teams led by Hall of Fame Head Coach Les Davis, he helped write the earliest chapters of Pioneer athletics. He played in the program's first Far Western Conference victory, a 33–14 win over Humboldt in 1967, and helped lead the Pioneers to their first winning football season, finishing with seven wins, three losses, and one tie. He was among the university's first All Far Western Conference selections, was named the team's Most Valuable Lineman in both 1966 and 1967, and served as team captain during his senior season.

Following graduation, Don became the first Pioneer to sign a professional sports contract when he joined the Oakland Raiders as a free agent in 1968.

His impact on Pioneer athletics continued from the sidelines. As an assistant football coach through 1993 and a track and field coach through 1980, Don helped develop generations of student athletes. He coached multiple Pioneer Athletics Hall of Fame inductees, including football standout Monty Consani and national champion throwers Greg Blankenship and his brother, Mark Sawyer. During his coaching career, he mentored 16 All Americans, including

four NCAA national champions, and was a member of the coaching staff that led the Pioneer men's track and field team to the 1977 NCAA Championship.

Don's contributions to Pioneer Athletics remain unmatched. He is the only individual to have been inducted into the Cal State East Bay Pioneer Athletics Hall of Fame three times: first as a student athlete, then as an assistant coach for the Pioneer football program, and again as an assistant coach for the 1977 NCAA Championship track and field team. It is a distinction that reflects a lifetime of service to the university and one that will likely never be matched.

Those who knew Don remember not only his accomplishments, but also his generosity, humility, integrity, and willingness to help others. He was a trusted colleague, a dedicated teacher, and a mentor whose influence extended across generations of students, faculty, staff, alumni, and friends.

The university extends its deepest condolences to Don's wife, Linda, their family, friends, former students, colleagues, alumni, and the entire Pioneer community.

A Celebration of Life is scheduled for Saturday, October 24th from 11:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m. in the University Union.

Don Sawyer's commitment to California State University, East Bay will continue to be reflected in the students, colleagues, and programs he influenced throughout his career.