

Keeping it strong

Pro Football Hall of Famer Munoz gives back to Chaffey High with camp

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ONTARIO - Anthony Munoz always will be remembered as a Hall of Fame offensive lineman for the NFL's Cincinnati Bengals, but he's never forgotten Ontario is where his magical journey began.

The 51-year old Chaffey High School graduate was back in town last weekend for the fourth annual Anthony Munoz Football Camp, where more than 300 local youths between the ages of 7-17 honed their skills.

Munoz teamed with the U.S. Army and area coaches for the Army Strong Challenge in a gathering where character and selflessness were stressed as equally as technique and fundamentals.

Munoz was an All-American football player at USC and was part of the 1980 Rose Bowl victory over Ohio State, but what many might not know is Munoz was a pitcher on the Trojans' national championship baseball team in 1978.

Munoz and his wife of 33 years, De De, reside in Cincinnati, but the 11-time Pro Bowler never hesitates to give back to his former school and city.

"It means everything for me to come back and do anything I can to help the kids from this community, because this area is the foundation of the man I've become," Munoz said. "I wouldn't trade growing up in Ontario or playing at Chaffey High School for anything and I'm proud that we can offer this camp free of charge to our kids with the help of our sponsors."

Munoz is so well respected Colony Park in Ontario was renamed Anthony Munoz Hall of Fame Park after Munoz became the first Bengal to be

enshrined into the Hall of Fame in 1998.

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In 2009, the Anthony Munoz Award was created and given annually to the nation's best high school offensive lineman at the U.S. Army All-American Bowl.

Munoz is well past his playing days, but the physical condition he's been able to maintain would put athletes half his age to shame, and the message he preaches is simple.

"Many people think a football camp is strictly about football, but I want the kids to leave here realizing how important it is to put your team above individual accolades," he said. "I'm kind of disappointed with the self-promoting that some players of today's era tend to exhibit and I've always been from that school where it's about the team and not the individual."

Munoz is thrilled to provide a camp that wasn't available in his youth and he's hoping to instill a lasting thought that will impact this generation.

"Today's kids are bigger, stronger and faster because of technology, but we also want to let them know that being a good person is just as important as being a great athlete," he said. "I think of all the things people could say about my athletic accomplishments, it would mean much more to me if they thought of me as a good and giving person and I want our kids to understand how important that is."

Former Chaffey High baseball coach Jim Semon (1965-1978) was on campus Sunday to do whatever he could to support his former star.

"Many don't know this, but Anthony could have been as good a major league baseball player as he was a football player had he chose that route. He was such a phenomenal athlete and was so much more athletic and nimble than you might have thought a 6-foot-6, 250-pound athlete could be," Semon said. "I am honored to be associated with Anthony because he is exactly what a world-class athlete should be in the fact that he's so giving of his time and talents."

Munoz is as humble as he is accomplished and when asked what he's most proud of during his professional career, he didn't hesitate to mention team first.

"I'll never forget winning two AFC title games at home with the Bengals because it meant so much for us to give our fans that experience on our home field and we all cared so much to be part of something bigger than ourselves," he said. "Individually, it is so humbling to be thought of as a Hall of Famer and is something I will never take for granted."

For Semon, and those who know Munoz well, it's the person he is that can even dwarf what Munoz was able to accomplish on a football field.

"We all know what he was able to do on a baseball and football field and they were both mind boggling, but I wish everyone knew what a caring and good family man that Anthony is," Semon said. "If you want to meet one of the best people walking the face of the earth, you should meet Anthony Munoz."