

# Simpson, Seinsoth Linked by Tragedy

By **STEVEN WAGNER**

GLENDORA, Calif.—For many, the O.J. Simpson trial has stirred a flood of memories of the popular football star's days as a Heisman Trophy winner.

Lost in time, perhaps, is the tragic impact that Simpson's success on the gridiron inadvertently had on professional baseball 25 years ago this September.

As athletes at the University of Southern California, Simpson and Bill Seinsoth were a dynamic duo. Close friends off the field, they dazzled their opponents on the field—Simpson with his quickness of foot in football and Seinsoth with his quickness of bat and long home runs. Simpson won the 1968 Heisman Trophy and was eyeing a professional football career, while Seinsoth, a first baseman and one of college baseball's top sluggers, was defending his title as 1968 College World Series MVP.

Clearly, the two had bright futures as professional athletes, and neither wasted any time pursuing his respective career. After graduation, Simpson reported to the American Football League's Buffalo Bills, where he had a long and successful career culminating in his election to football's Hall of Fame. Seinsoth, the Dodgers' first-round pick in the 1969 draft's secondary phase, reported to the team's Class A affiliate in Bakersfield, Calif.

The heir apparent to Wes Parker at first base, Seinsoth would soon die on a lonely stretch of Interstate 15 en route to Los Angeles to watch Simpson's pro football debut. He never played in a major league game.

On Sept. 4, 1969, Seinsoth left Reno, Nev., for Los Angeles after a game against the Reno Silver Sox. Ron Cey, a Bakersfield teammate

who later would star at third base for the Dodgers, had planned to make the trip with him. But Cey canceled at the last minute, and Seinsoth made the fateful 700-mile trip alone.

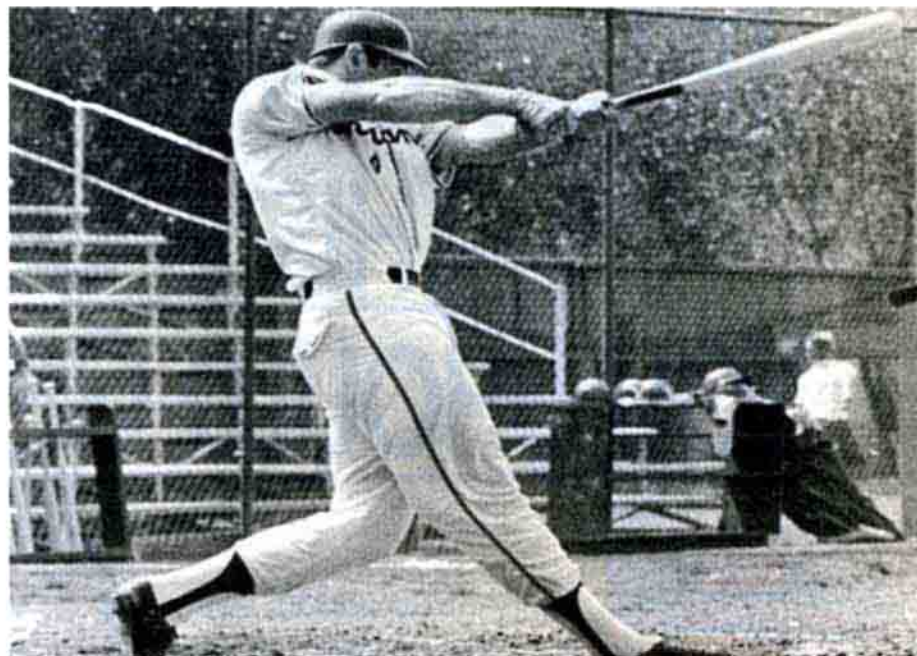
Seinsoth's plan that week was simple: He would arrive in Los Angeles on Sept. 6, pick up two tickets to the Los Angeles Rams-Bills game, then settle in at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum to watch Simpson's first game as a professional.

After leaving Reno, Seinsoth detoured to Bakersfield, picking up a carton of Bill Seinsoth autograph model bats for a friend and stuffing them into the back seat of his green Volkswagen. The next day he left for Las Vegas, where he spent the night at a casino owned by the father of a friend. On the third day, Sept. 6, he headed for Los Angeles.

The stretch of southbound highway from Las Vegas to Barstow is a desolate one, and the winds that send tumbleweeds racing across the scorching asphalt can be tricky—and deadly—to even the most astute driver. The California Highway Patrol could only theorize what happened to Seinsoth.

As he approached Barstow, Seinsoth might have fallen asleep at the wheel. A strong wind gust apparently pulled his car toward the shoulder of the road, jarring him awake. In trying to correct the sudden drift, Seinsoth apparently turned sharply to the right and the vehicle overturned several times, throwing him into a ditch.

Though he sustained critical head and spinal-cord injuries, Seinsoth's great arm strength—he also had pitched for the Trojans—enabled him to drag himself from the culvert to the roadway, where he collapsed unconscious. A passing motorist performed cardiopulmonary resuscitation until an am-



**Bill Seinsoth.** Good friend of O.J. Simpson at the University of Southern California

balance arrived, but the effort was in vain. That night, while Simpson and the Bills were losing to the Rams, Seinsoth was losing his life in a San Bernardino hospital.

Despite his serious injuries, the likable slugger survived the night, only to die the next day. Family members said the bats that Seinsoth drove 200 miles out of his way to pick up might have struck him in the head when the car overturned, causing the fatal injuries.

Seinsoth's dramatic funeral was attended by more than 600 people. He was buried in his Dodger uniform, a ball in one hand and his bat and glove lying next to him in the coffin. The Dodgers sent a large wreath of blue and white flowers in the shape of the team logo.

Seinsoth never saw his good friend O.J. Simpson play professional football. He never

made it to the big leagues, and the Dodgers never fully saw what their promising young slugger could do. Many believe today that Steve Garvey never would have emerged as Los Angeles' first baseman had Seinsoth lived to reach his potential.

Seinsoth's father Bill Sr., a longtime minor league pitcher who knew well what his son could do, also fell short of playing in the major leagues. Called up to the St. Louis Browns in 1944, he never entered a major league game.

Bill Sr., who years after his son's death took a job as equipment manager at Arcadia (Calif.) High, suffered a fatal heart attack in 1984. He was grooming the pitcher's mound that had launched his son to prep stardom.

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