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They're left to wonder what might have been: friends, family of Arcadia's Seinoth recall the talent that seemed destined for glory in Dodger blue.

STEVEN K. WAGNER | SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

Pressed against the backstop screen, I stared through the sagging mesh toward home plate as the Gehrigian figure in USC colors drilled pitch after pitch over the right field fence and onto Duarte Road.

"Who is *that*?" I asked, nudging a classmate. *Crack!* A ball landed 450 feet away and bounced toward the Arcadia Public Library.

"Bill Seinoth."

Seinoth. Everyone knew Bill Seinoth, I thought. Or at least knew *of* him. California Interscholastic Federation Southern Section 3-A player of the year in 1965 as a hard-throwing left-handed pitcher for Arcadia High. College World Series most valuable player in 1968 as a slugging first baseman on USC's national championship team. Drafted by the Dodgers, Houston Astros, Baltimore Orioles and Washington Senators. Heir-apparent to Wes Parker as first baseman for the Dodgers. He was, arguably, one of the finest prospects to come out of California.

"He was definitely a professional prospect," said former Dodger Tommy Hutton, a cousin of Seinoth. "He had all the tools."

Since he first humbled the Arcadia National Little League in 1956, headlines and box scores in the Arcadia Tribune had promised a bright future for Seinoth. That spring day in 1969 I saw what headlines and box scores could only intimate: Bill Seinoth, whose visit that day to his high school alma mater would be his last, was for real.

Four months later, on a lonely stretch of Interstate 15 twenty-one miles east of Barstow, the green Volkswagen Seinoth was driving overturned near the desert ghost town of Calico. Seinoth, 22, who was thrown from the vehicle when his seat belt broke, died of massive head injuries the next day at Harbor General Hospital in Torrance. Authorities speculated that he had fallen asleep at the wheel.

A memorial service, followed by a 250-car cemetery procession, was held a week later at Arcadia Presbyterian Church, where Seinoth had been a member.

Today, more than 25 years after he left Arcadia High with a can't-miss professional baseball career on the horizon, many still remember the most celebrated graduate in the class of '65 as larger than life. And death.

Jane Seinsoth said her son had been driving from Las Vegas to Los Angeles to attend the pro football debut of his friend, Heisman Trophy winner O.J. Simpson. That night, Sept. 6, 1969, while Simpson and the Buffalo Bills were losing to the Rams in the Coliseum, Seinsoth was losing his life.

William Robert Seinsoth was born in Los Angeles on April 4, 1947. He died Sept. 7, 1969. In his 22 years, Seinsoth left an impressive legacy of athletic accomplishment, despite unusual and debilitating personal tragedies.

At birth, Seinsoth was big—nearly 10 pounds. He was so big and so good in Little League that the parents of several players demanded that the Seinsoths pull their son out of the league.

"I remember one occasion when the opposing team just flat out asked him not to pitch," said Chris Arnold, a teammate of Seinsoth in Little League who later played six seasons with the San Francisco Giants. "They were terrified of batting against him."

Some players went even further.

"Our mailbox was blown up four times," his mother said. "We know who did it, but it doesn't really matter."

Alan (Lani) Exton, who coached Arcadia to its only Southern Section baseball title, in 1965, said such adversity in Seinsoth's early years might have helped him mature faster than others.

While Seinsoth was still in Little League, former Dodger Rod Dedeaux, then the baseball coach at USC, began paying close attention to the hard-hitting, hard-throwing, likable 12-year-old whom he had met when the boy was 5.

A man who by then had led dozens of players into the major leagues, Dedeaux—a longtime friend of Seinsoth's father—recognized young Bill as a find. Meanwhile, Bill Sr. continued to encourage his young son, whom the local papers had dubbed "No-hit" Seinsoth. But he never pushed him. He didn't have to.

"There's nothing I'd rather do (than play baseball)," Seinsoth said in 1969. "I feel lost, anxious, when I'm not playing it."

Several years after Dedeaux began taking notice, Dick Conger, a former major league pitcher who lived in Arcadia and served as a part-time scout for the Dodgers, also began showing interest. Conger reported the 17-year-old Seinsoth and his baseball exploits to the Dodgers' Ben Wade, who lived in nearby Pasadena.

When he entered Arcadia High in 1962, the only question was which sport Seinsoth would dominate more, baseball or basketball. He excelled at both and received a scholarship offer to play both at Arizona State.

Despite his basketball prowess, baseball remained his love.

"Even in those days, he was the consummate professional," Arnold said. "When it got down to baseball, he was all business."

During his sophomore year at Arcadia, Seinoth played solidly as both a pitcher and first baseman. His junior year, he was a standout. Although Arcadia lost in the Southern Section final, 7-1, Seinoth's statistics were good enough to earn him all-Southern Section first-team honors. He hit .405 and had an 11-2 pitching record.

Despite his success, Seinoth's junior year was marked by problems. He broke his nose when a ground ball struck him in the face, then broke it twice more that summer when his surfboard hit him in the face.

Doctors decided the nose should be rebuilt. When a plastic surgeon asked Seinoth to select the nose he preferred from among a series of sketches, he chose a prominent nose resembling his own.

"My friends wouldn't recognize me without this beak," he said, and the doctors complied.

Seinoth also suffered a serious cut on his pitching hand that summer when he was assaulted at Balboa Island. Not wishing to upset his parents, Seinoth insisted that he had cut the hand while changing a tire.

By his senior year, Seinoth was coveted by college coaches nationwide. None, however, wanted him more than Dedeaux, and Dedeaux's highly successful USC program won hands down.

Seinoth's father, also a pitcher and first baseman in 15 years in professional baseball, was delighted. Although he had earned a roster spot with the pennant-winning 1944 St. Louis Browns, the elder Seinoth was drafted into the Army before playing in a major league game. His dream of playing big league baseball would have to be fulfilled by his son.

But first, there was a final season of high school ball. Seinoth hit .455 and was 15-1 with a 0.72 earned-run average. He pitched a three-hit, 5-0 shutout in the Southern Section final and was selected 3-A player of the year.

"He was the best I ever coached," said Exton, adding that Seinoth's smiling intensity on the mound gave him an undeserved reputation for cockiness.

Exton, who also coached big leaguers Arnold, Bruce Bochte, Steve Kemp, Dave Hostetler, Alan Wiggins, Matt Young and Rod Booker, said of Seinoth: "He was dominating, intimidating. He was a man playing with boys. Bochte (a former American League All-Star) was a man playing with boys, but he was not as emotionally mature as Bill."

Jay Jaffe, the center fielder on USC's 1968 national championship team, described Seinoth in similar terms.

"There's no question he would have had a great major league career," he said. "He was just a winner."

Arnold, now a sports agent living in Mesa, Ariz., said Seinoth's success in high school was instrumental in launching his own career with the Giants.

"Because Bill was so good, the scouts began coming to our games," Arnold said. "Someone noticed me, and the end result was a career with the Giants. I was the first player from Arcadia High to sign a professional contract, and it was largely due to Bill Seinoth."

As busy as baseball and recruiters kept him, Seinoth kept his priorities straight. He often coached his young nephew, Dave Anderson, who later played football at USC, on various baseball fundamentals. And, he made certain that his landlady's fatherless, 8-year-old son had tickets to the USC baseball games.

"Bill always had time for people," said his sister, Dauna Frazier. "When I was singing with a chorale group in high school, we would have performances that often no one would attend. But I could always look out into the rows of empty seats and see Bill sitting there. He was that kind of guy."

That kind of loyalty led Dauna to serve as her brother's personal publicity agent in high school.

"All the girls wanted autographed pictures of Bill, so I would sign his name and sell them for 50 cents," she said, laughing. "He was in such demand."

Even after Seinoth graduated he remained in demand. School officials often would summon him to counsel students who were having trouble with academics or athletics.

Dedeaux always has politely resisted choosing an all-time, all-USC baseball team. Shortly before Seinoth's death, Dedeaux was asked whether such a team would include the big first baseman.

"Bill Seinoth would make any team I could ever coach," he said. "He's got a major league glove, he's got the moves and he's definitely got the major league bat."

Dedeaux recently reiterated that assessment, saying, "It would be impossible to . . . keep (Seinoth) off any all-time (USC) team."

Other first basemen groomed by Dedeaux include former National League home run champion Dave Kingman and the Oakland Athletics' Mark McGwire.

Seinoth broke in at USC with a bang. His sophomore year, he hit .327 with two home runs and 31 runs batted in.

The next season, in leading USC to the fifth of Dedeaux's 11 national championships, he hit .312 with six home runs and 23 RBIs, despite missing 19 games after a brushback pitch broke his left hand.

He was captain of the team his senior year, hitting .368 with 14 home runs and 52 RBIs. He was named to the first team All-American squads in 1968 and 1969.

"To me, there is no such word as *can't*," Seinoth said in a 1967 interview. "I expect perfection in myself."

To Dedeaux, Seinoth *was* perfection. "I think he had the makings of a superstar," said Dedeaux, who converted the pitcher-first baseman to a full-time first baseman. "I have no doubt Bill Seinoth would have been the Dodger first baseman for a long time to come."

Even so, Dedeaux says Seinoth could have become a successful major league pitcher.

"He had a major league arm and he was left-handed," he said. "And he was smart."

Although he played exceptionally, the 6-2, 210-pound Seinsoth's junior year was marred by more misfortune.

As he and a girlfriend were leaving a restaurant near USC, a man with a butcher knife approached them. The man cornered Seinsoth--who told his girlfriend to lock herself in the car--slashing him across the forearm.

Despite losing a considerable amount of blood, Seinsoth, who rarely discussed the incident but privately admitted he had been "scared to death," recovered and enjoyed his best season as a Trojan.

During his senior year, misfortune struck again. After hitting a home run in the first game of a doubleheader against Oregon State, Seinsoth was struck in the eye and knocked unconscious by a pitch. The injury left his face swollen, and Seinsoth began suffering from blurred vision.

Later that season, he reacted with a rare display of anger when a teammate playfully lobbed a ball toward his head. No one, he admonished, would ever again throw at his head.

"It was a bad beaning," Dedeaux said. "I wouldn't have blamed him if he had backed off after that. But he . . . adjusted just beautifully. He adjusted to everything."

Not *quite* everything. When freshmen Bill Buckner and Bobby Valentine signed with the Dodgers during Seinsoth's senior year, they practiced with the team while awaiting minor league assignments. Seinsoth regularly needled them, making it clear that the batting cage was for current USC players only. In 1969, Dodger Wes Parker was 30 and in the sixth year of a successful nine-year career. Soon, someone would be needed to take over for the perennial Gold Glove-winner. The Dodgers decided it would be Seinsoth, selecting him in the first round of the 1969 draft.

Drafted four times in four years, Seinsoth called his reluctance to sign before graduation "a sentimental thing."

"I guess I felt I owed something to Dedeaux," he said.

In the eyes of Dodger scout Wade, the wait paid off.

"There was no one ahead of him," said Wade, who retired this year as the Dodgers' director of scouting. "He was always a good power hitter, and that's one of the things you're looking for--especially a left-handed hitter. With his tools and his success in college, he really had a good future in front of him.

"I would have to say he was the leading candidate (to replace Parker)."

Wade added, "He had a great attitude, a great make-up. And we knew he would only get better. Because of those qualities and the bonus that he was a local kid, we knew we had to draft him."

Seinsoth negotiated his own contract with the Dodgers. He got a \$40,000 bonus and was sent to the team's Class A Bakersfield club in the California League. At the time of his death, the blurred vision had begun to clear and Seinsoth was hitting a respectable .276 with 10 homers and 37 RBIs.

As his vision returned, so did his sense of humor. When a sliding Fresno runner inadvertently kicked Seinsoth in the head, the Bakersfield trainer, hoping to test Seinsoth's responses, held a finger in front of his eyes.

"I told him that wasn't necessary," Seinoth later said. "I had double vision anyway."

Wade said Seinoth probably would have been promoted to double-A or triple-A the next season.

"Everywhere he went he hit," Wade said. "Had things not turned out the way they did, he probably would have been a bona fide major league hitter."

But Seinoth's talents went beyond the playing field.

"He typified the spirit of the Dodgers," Wade said.

On Sept. 4, 1969, Seinoth left Reno for Las Vegas after a game against the Reno Silver Sox. The Vietnam War was heating up, and Seinoth had learned he might be able to fill an opening in a Nevada National Guard unit.

After detouring to Bakersfield to pick up some personalized bats, Seinoth left for Las Vegas. He spent his final night in a casino owned by the father of a friend, then picked up his enlistment papers the next morning before heading south.

Seinoth planned to arrive in Arcadia that afternoon. He was to have stopped by the home of his sister, Janice Anderson, pick up two tickets for the Rams-Bills game scheduled for that night, then drive to the Coliseum. His Bakersfield teammate, Ron Cey, who later starred for the Dodgers, had hoped to accompany Seinoth to Los Angeles but had a prior commitment, and Seinoth drove alone.

It was theorized that out on the desert that Sept. 6, 1969, a strong wind gust pulled Seinoth's car toward the left shoulder of the road, jarring him awake. In trying to correct the drift, Seinoth apparently turned sharply to the right and the vehicle overturned several times.

Though he suffered critical head and spinal cord injuries, Seinoth's strength enabled him to drag himself to the roadway. A passing motorist performed cardiopulmonary resuscitation until an ambulance arrived.

At around dinner time, the phone rang at the home of Seinoth's parents. It was San Bernardino Community Hospital calling.

The Seinoths rushed to the hospital, only to find their son connected to life-support systems. He died the next day.

Certain he would have approved, the Seinoths permitted the removal of their son's kidneys and corneas for transplantation. Two men, one in Costa Mesa and the other in New Orleans, received the kidneys.

Shortly after leaving Harbor General Hospital, where the organs were removed, Seinoth's mother turned on the car radio. A broadcaster was reporting that Bill Seinoth had died.

Arnold's parents telephoned him in Hawaii to relay the news. Hutton's parents reached him in the Dodger clubhouse at San Diego Jack Murphy Stadium. Jaffe's girlfriend telephoned him. Dedeaux heard of Seinoth's death on the radio.

Seinsoth's father called Exton at his home. In tears, Bill Sr. told his son's high school coach about the tragedy. The elder Seinsoth, who later became equipment manager at Arcadia High, suffered a fatal heart attack in 1984 as he was grooming the pitcher's mound that had launched his son to prep stardom.

Bill Jr.'s funeral was a dramatic one. The Dodgers sent a large blue and white wreath in the shape of the team logo. Seinsoth was buried with a baseball in his left hand, his bat and glove next to him in the casket.

Although Seinsoth was not yet prominent nationally, more than 650 cards and letters arrived from fans, friends, fellow athletes and dignitaries across the country. One is cherished by his mother.

"One thing you know more than anyone is how much better the world is because your son passed this way," it read. "You have every reason to be proud of him . . ."

It was signed, "Ronald Reagan, Governor."

Perhaps Dedeaux, though, said it best.

"If Bill Seinsoth had lived, there's a good chance that no one would have ever heard of Steve Garvey," he said.

I was 16 when Bill Seinsoth died, the memory of those booming drives toward the Arcadia Public Library only months old. I wondered how he could have lose his life in broad daylight on a straight and uncongested stretch of desert highway.

A beachfront mugging couldn't stop him. Neither could a fastball to the head nor a campus slasher. Now, the papers were saying he simply fell asleep at the wheel.

Years later, driving the same stretch of Interstate 15 from Las Vegas to Calico, I had hoped to better understand Seinsoth's death.

As I approached Calico, a strong wind gust blew my car halfway into the adjoining lane.

"Windy, isn't it?" my wife said.

Suddenly, an explosion in the right rear tire sent the car swerving. Fearing that we might flip, I tapped the brake pedal intermittently, finally coasting to a stop on the shoulder. I took a deep breath, then looked to the right and spotted a billboard pointing the direction to Lake Dolores.

Seinsoth's car, I recalled, had overturned at precisely that location.

Standing on the spot where Seinsoth had staggered from the culvert to the roadway, then collapsed, I examined the shredded tire, glad to be alive.

Suddenly, everything made sense.

Steven K. Wagner is a freelance writer/photographer in Glendora, CA