

Ron Underwood

CHSSA HALL OF FAME 1988



“A great many years ago in Kansas” is how Ron tells of his birth, and then proceeds to tell us that he was a high school “speechie” at Downey High in Modesto, long before the term was coined. He was a team debater at a time when a recipe box full of evidence cards was all that was used, and an extemper when it was boys’ and girls’ divisions. His high school time was split between speech and band, but he claims he was a much better speaker than French horn player.

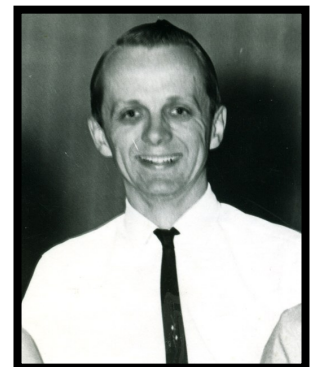
College time was split between Modesto Jr. College, Diablo Valley College and Fresno State College. A speech major, he competed in debate, oratory and extemp in college, and spent a lot of time judging tournaments in the Fresno area.

His coach in high school was CHSSA Hall of Famer and first president Edna Spelts. Upon earning his teaching credential in 1963 he began teaching at Downey high where he succeeded his coach at his alma mater. After nine years at Downey, Ron transferred to Modesto’s newest Beyer High School, where he taught and coached for thirty-three years until retirement in 2005.

Ron served in many league and state speech positions during his forty-two year career. He was YFL president, vice-president, and treasurer. For CHSSA he served nineteen years as area II chairman, three years as vice-president activities and as curriculum representative and representative at large. He quips he is embarrassed to claim his one year as CHSSA secretary for Cummings.

Statistics were never “that important” to Ron, but he has some good ones: The second ever eighth diamond NFL Award recipient; forty-two years sending nearly 600 students to State and thirty-five years sending 160 students to nationals including a national champion in congress and other national award winners; many state finalists including eight state champions. Perhaps, most impressive, however, are his more than 42,000 NFL coaching points - the highest in NFL history.

When asked, after forty-two years of coaching, if he had any philosophy that guided him along the way, he responded, “As much speech opportunity for as many as possible. I was never one to run a ‘star-only’ program. By serving as many as possible, I probably sacrificed time that could have been spent getting a few ‘stars’ to shine even brighter. But, I feel that speech education has so much to offer that I always wanted to make it available to as many as possible.”



Throughout Ron’s thirty-three Beyer years, his wife Sharon attended nearly every tournament, and even a few that Ron couldn’t. She often assigned judges and recorded all of Beyer’s NFL points. Ron strongly feels that all of those years were strictly “a joint effort.” Since retirement, the Underwood’s have moved to Fresno. They still help in various YFL and SVFL tournaments and both look forward to many years sans NFL points, school bus rides, and after school practices until past dinner time, but Ron is quick to tell you, “I loved every minute of those forty-two years --well almost--and would do it all over again., without question.”