

2013 Athletic Hall of Fame Honoree



LOU BERBERET

CLASS OF 1947 (1929-2004)

Lou Berberet was a gifted catcher who pursued a remarkable career as a Major League Baseball Player with four teams - the New York Yankees, the Washington Senators, the Boston Red Sox and the Detroit Tigers. He also played football and baseball while attending Santa Clara University for two seasons, before establishing a new record for a signing bonus with the New York Yankees in 1950.

Louis Joseph Berberet was born in Long Beach in 1929. He was one of five siblings who all attended St. Anthony School from kindergarten through high school. Whether it was on the football fields and baseball diamonds of Long Beach as a youth, in major league clubhouses as a seven-year big league catcher, or residing in Las Vegas, Lou Berberet spent his life making friends.

"Especially here in Long Beach, everyone knew him," Tom Berberet said of his father. "He never went any place where people didn't know him."

As a student at St. Anthony High School, Lou quickly embraced everything sports, playing varsity football, basketball and baseball all four years. He was captain of both the football and basketball teams, and as a senior in 1947, he was selected Long Beach Athlete of the Year and earned a football scholarship to Santa Clara University. In 1988, Berberet was selected for induction into the St. Anthony High School Hall of Fame.

At Santa Clara University, Lou studied and continued to attract attention, excelling in both baseball and football for two seasons. In 1950, after two seasons at Santa Clara, Lou signed his first professional baseball contract for the then-whopping total of \$21,000 with the mighty New York Yankees.

He played a year with Binghampton (N.Y.) in the Eastern League before a two-year stint serving his country in the Army. In 1954, Lou finally got the call from the New York Yankees and played five games for them that season, with two hits in five at-bats. Lou played in two more games in 1955, again going 2 for 5. He often joked that he was a career .400 hitter with the Yankees. "It's right there (in the record books)," his son Tom laughs. "It's undisputed."

In 1956 he was traded to the Washington Senators. He also played for Boston and Detroit. A stocky player, Lou was a very solid defensive catcher and "decent" left-handed hitter. He retired after the 1960 season having a career batting average of .230, with 31 home runs, 153 runs batted in, and an impressive fielding percentage of .992, including three seasons (1954-55, 1957) in which he made no errors.

He is one of only four regular catchers to field a perfect 1.000 for a full season. In a Tigers victory 12-4 over Chicago White Sox, he belted a first-inning grand slam off Early Wynn. It was the American League's 3rd of the day, tying the major league record for number of slams on one day in the same league (Detroit, April 24, 1960).

Following his retirement, Lou returned to Long Beach where he coached youth teams, including the 1963 Peterson Post Team that won the American Legion World Series. He was active in the Boys and Girls Clubs of Long Beach and Las Vegas where he spent the last 27 years of his life with wife, Lila Faye. In retirement, he also officiated football and baseball and served as an evaluator of officials for the Big West Conference.

Lou's health began to deteriorate in 1993 when he had a stroke, but instead of complaining about it, he worked hard to rehabilitate and was playing golf again within two years.

Lou Berberet's children (son Tom Berberet, daughters Deborah Berberet, Lori Berberet and Mary Kato) as well as his eight grandchildren, remember him as, "A fun guy with an unmistakable laugh", and Tom says that, "As the years went on, he had a softer and kinder and gentler heart." He was one of a kind.

