

Tommie Brown

Tommie Brown graduated from Oroville High School (OHS) in 1955 and was an outstanding three sport athlete. He played football, basketball and baseball every year, playing basketball and baseball at the varsity level as a sophomore, junior and senior. He also boxed and was a Block O member all four years, serving as Society vice-president as a junior.

Prep athletic honors came in abundance to Tommie while at OHS. He was co-captain of the football team as a senior, and made the All-Sierra Foothill League (SFL) team as a junior and again as a senior. He was honored as All SFL in basketball in his senior year as well as being selected to the All-Star team at the Acker Basketball Tournament. As a senior, Tommie was 4th in scoring in football in Northern California putting up 138 points for his undefeated 1954 team. That team scored 303 points while allowing just 34. That year, Tommie was the first OHS athlete to be selected to play in the prestigious North/South Shrine Football game in Los Angeles. In the 1950's, the NFL Detroit Lions had an All-Pro defensive back known as Dick "Nite Train" Lane. In the North State, Tommie was known as "Little Nite Train." To this day, there is an ongoing debate as to who was the finest athlete ever to attend OHS...OUHSD Hall of Famer David Washington, OHS 1958 or Tommie Brown.

Aside from athletics, Tommie was also very active in Associated Student Body (ASB) affairs at OHS, being elected ASB president as a senior and a member of student council. He was class vice-president as a sophomore and member of the student council executive committee. He was a member of the mixed chorus as a senior.

Following graduation from OHS, Tommie followed his OHS coach and OUHSD Hall of Famer, Joe Felipe to Yuba College, playing one year for a team that went undefeated. He then signed a professional baseball contract with the Pittsburgh Pirates and was assigned to Grand Forks, North Dakota, where he played for the Pirates Class D team. He then played on the Pirates Minor League team in San Jose, CA for several years. Tommie had a lifelong work career as a long distance truck driver for Foster Farms, and was employed there until his retirement.

Following his baseball career and returning to Oroville, Tommie and his friends formed a social club known as The Highlighters and were part of the Oroville YMCA activity club. They held activities at the YMCA with Tommie as leader of the group.

In the South Oroville African-American Historical Society (SOAAHS) March 2020 issue of "The Next Generation", Tommie is featured in an article written by president and OUHSD Hall of Famer, John Henry Rivers. It chronicles Tommie's life in Oroville from the time his family located here in 1945.

OUHSD Hall of Famer, Colonel Fred Jones, United States Marine Corps, Retired, and 1959 OHS graduate, writes in his letter of support for Tommie, *"I started to spend time with him when he was a student at Yuba Junior College. I was absolutely in awe of his remarkable athletic ability and I was thrilled that he took the time to mentor me and help me with football. He was a natural leader, and of course, extremely popular with a legend of friends and admirers. Our friendship was unusual as he was much older than me. Since I was a promising high school athlete, he was one of the guys who encouraged me to stay on the "straight and narrow" and get good grades.*

When my father abandoned our family, he reached out to me with empathy and encouraged me to hang in there and do the best that I could to help my mother and improve myself. His compassion and concern for my welfare helped me immensely through a difficult time in my life. During the next few years, Tommie became one of my very best friends. Tommie's friendship and mentoring was one of the main reasons I was able to adjust to my very humble economic situation and sense of abandonment.

Tommie's most memorable personal attributes were: his positive attitude and infectious enthusiasm, his honesty, great work ethic, sincerity, compassion and generosity. Tommie's gift of friendship and mentoring sustained me through many tough times as I grew into manhood and developed life coping skills and a sense of determination to never doubt my self-worth. In a few words, Tommie Brown had a positive impact on Oroville and most especially, Southside."