

WHITTENTON



Jesse Whittenton passed away on Monday, May 21, 2012 at his home in Las Cruces, New Mexico, after bravely battling cancer. Born Urshell James Whittenton in Big Spring, Texas on May 9, 1934, Jesse was 78

The sports world and football fans, and especially the communities of El Paso and Las Cruces, remember Jesse as a tough and handsome defensive back with the Green Bay Packers from 1958 to 1964. Jesse graduated from Ysleta High School in El Paso and went on to star at Texas Western College (now UTEP) where he performed as an all-around star, running, passing, kicking and receiving. Jesse is still considered one of the best all-around athletes ever to play at UTEP. In the 1955 Sun Bowl against a highly touted Florida State team, Jesse passed for three touchdowns, ran for two and kicked five extra points - accounting for 35 of UTEP's 47 points and a victory - still a Sun Bowl record. He is enshrined in the UTEP Hall of Fame as well as the El Paso Athletic Hall of Fame; and in 1998 was named as Legend of the Sun Bowl.

As a Green Bay Packer Jesse helped the Packers win NFL Championships in 1961 and 1962. With an NFL career that spanned 112 games, Jesse went to the Pro Bowl twice and was named First Team All-Pro in 1961. As an important bit of his personal celebrity Jesse played for Green Bay Packer Coach Vince Lombardi, a place in history that holds special reverence to any sports fan. Coach Lombardi offered unusual praise for Jesse in his book *Run to Daylight* when he said that Jesse, as his defensive corner-back, was as close to a perfect defensive back as anyone in the league. Jesse's performance with the Packers placed him in the Green Bay Packers Hall of Fame.

When he retired from football in 1964 Jesse's sports career wasn't over. He had been a competitive golfer and became a member of the PGA of America in 1965. He and his cousin bought the Horizon Hills Country Club (now Emerald Springs) in El Paso in 1965 and hired a young man named Lee Trevino; it was Trevino's first country club job at \$30 a week. Later he and Trevino,

with other partners, started the Santa Teresa Country Club in New Mexico (in 1971), on the outskirts of El Paso. Jesse played a couple of years on the Senior Tour, but he made his mark as a PGA pro playing tournaments within the Sun Country PGA Section. Jesse won the Sun Country Senior Club Professional Championship in 1992 and was named the PGA Sun Country 1992 Player of the Year. In 1995 he won the Sun Country Senior Match Play Championship.

In 2004 Jesse and his wife Barbara moved to their home in Sonoma Ranch and from then on he played most of his golf at Sonoma Ranch Golf Course, where he helped out as a starter and course marshal. He was highly popular within the golfing community. While not golfing or marshaling Jesse enjoyed making birdhouses in his spare time, most of which he gifted to friends. He also swooned over his two beloved Norwich terriers, Buster and Sheba. No matter who he came in contact with Jesse was respected as a man and a friend. His sport legacy, apart from his Hall of Fame celebrity, lasts as a tough performer, a winner and a fierce competitor. His legacy as a person lasts as a gentleman, a loving husband and father, and a really good guy.

Jesse is survived by his wife Barbara, two sons, Jesse Jr. (Suzy), Lee Whittenton; daughter, Lissa Whittenton; step-daughters, Kimberly (Richard) Wilkie and Michelle (Steve) Hollis. Jesse is also survived by his two sisters, Louise Muckelroy and Bobbie Jean Thompson and seven grandchildren. A celebration of Jesse Whittenton's life will be held at the Sun Bowl in the Larry Durham Center at the football offices on Friday, June 8 at 5 pm. Casual attire is appropriate.

In lieu of flowers donations can be made to one of the following: A scholarship fund that has been setup in Jesse's name, "Jesse Whittenton Football Endowed Student-Athlete Scholarship". Gifts may be made online at givingto.utep.edu or mailed to UTEP, Development Office, Kelly Hall, 7th Floor, 500 W. University Ave, El Paso, TX 79968. Also, Safe Haven Animal Sanctuary, 840 El Paseo Rd, Las Cruces, NM 88001

Arrangements by Getz Funeral Home and Getz Family Crematory corner of Solano and Bowman Ave., Las Cruces, NM 526-2419. To sign the local online guest book go to www.GetzCares.com.