

# Saying farewell to an idol

Forgive me if one or two of the words in this column are misspelled. The keyboard is a bit slick from the wetness still dripping from beneath my eyelids.

Like the sign in the outfield bleachers of Qualcomm Stadium on Sunday said, "Tony, today there is crying in baseball."

Indeed, Sunday was a day to bid farewell to San Diego Padres' hitting artist Tony Gwynn. But for me, the past two weeks of following Gwynn around has been much more than simply saying goodbye to my hero.

It's been about letting go of my childhood, as well. So as I drove down to San Francisco with my dad one weekend and flew to San Diego the next, my mind has drifted to the many memories I have of watching, reading and listening to Tony Gwynn.

I've been alive for 20 years. Gwynn has played baseball for the Padres for 20 years.

As the years have passed, and as I've moved from San Diego to Portland and on to Eugene, he's always been there for me to follow, watch and admire. But it was never about his phenomenal talent, although his unparalleled success made you respect him more and more.

It was about who he was, how he acted and how he treated people.

Also in my transformation from child to man has come my change from die-hard fan to sportswriter. Granted, this is only my fourth year experiencing the profession, but I now view sports much differently. I've seen Arizona men's basketball coach Lute Olson blow up at a reporter for asking a critical question, and I've seen Rasheed Wallace swearing like a sailor as he threw a locker room towel in the media's direction after a game, telling us to turn the other direction.

This makes me appreciate Tony Gwynn all the more. No matter how busy he was, or how many re-

porters had requested him, he always found the time. He understood the media and knew that each person had a job to do, and most of the time, his quotes were a big part of their job.

As one San Diego Union-Tribune reporter wrote Monday, "In all of baseball, Gwynn is the go-to guy. Visiting writers make reservations at the Marriott and Tony Gwynn's cubicle. We should've given him frequent-quote points."

But for me, Gwynn was not someone I covered for a newspaper. He represented my upbringing as a person, which often involved eating ice cream out of a plastic helmet at then-Jack Murphy Stadium. It was during those memorable nights when my dad and our friends would find joy in simply watching Gwynn swing his magic wand, even if his teammates consisted of nothing more than minor leaguers and has-beens (as was the case in the infamous fire-sale years of the early '90s.)

In the ever-changing world of sports, Gwynn has been the constant. I never really allowed myself to picture Gwynn not in a Padres uniform, even though I knew the time was approaching as his body stopped cooperating with his mind.

Which is why, on June 28, 2001, when he made the announcement of his retirement after the season, I knew I had to be there for the end. The final two games on the schedule were Sept. 29 and 30 at San Francisco's Pacific Bell Park. My dad and I bought two tickets for each game (at a price much higher than face value) and were set.

Of course, the events of Sept. 11 pushed the season back a week, but that didn't stop our desire to see his final road games. The weekend turned out fabulous. With the blue skies and bluer-than-blue water beyond the outfield walls, Pac Bell is a gorgeous park to watch a game. Gwynn was honored before the game with a video tribute and presented with a cable car bell that listed his career accomplishments.

He handled his road departure great, but admitted that he didn't know how he would handle his final home games. And as it turned out, neither did I.

So with money I didn't have, I booked a flight to San Diego and watched as the Padres took on the

Rockies in the final weekend of the season.

In the games I attended during both weekends, I saw Barry Bonds' 69th home run and Rickey Henderson's 3,000th base hit. Both thrilling moments. But they didn't even compare to seeing Gwynn's 3,141st — and final — hit on Saturday. He went the other way, as he does well, and laced an RBI double into left field.

In his limited pinch-hitting role this year because of his knees, Gwynn only got one chance per game to get a hit, which he usually did. But on Sunday, in front of 60,103 fans, he grounded out to shortstop in his final at-bat. It didn't matter. Being able to stand on my feet and cheer the greatest pure hitter of this generation for a final time was the important thing.

And being there for the lengthy postgame ceremony was special. Bob Costas did a great job as the emcee, and seeing all the people he announced that had been a part of Gwynn's career come back on the field made the reality sink in that the illustrious career had come to an end.

But nothing could top the very end of my Tony Gwynn story. When the ceremony was over and people were supposed to leave, nobody did. Nobody wanted to say goodbye just yet. Tony, just like all of us there that night, wanted to say thanks one last time.

I watched, while leaning against the railing along the right field foul line, as Tony shook hands and hugged those that had grown to love him as a friend.

And before I could even prepare for it, there he was in front of me.

We shook hands. I told him how much he meant to me and how much of an inspiration he had been. I mentioned my cousin, who is a member of the San Diego State baseball team that Gwynn will be coaching soon, and he told me that he'd take care of him.

And as our faces shared the big screen for those precious seconds, I noticed that we had one very special thing in common.

In a moment that will forever stay etched in my mind, I noticed that me and my hero were staring straight at each other with eyes covered in tears.

Thanks, Tony.

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# Ducks golfers stay consistent at OSU

By Jesse Thomas for the Emerald

They began the day in 12th. They finished in 12th. At least they were consistent.

The Oregon women's golf team remained consistent as they finished the final round of the OSU/Shanico Invitational in the pouring rain Wednesday. The Ducks had a final round of 312 to finish at 932 for the tournament.

Senior Kathy Cho, who sat in a tie for 12th after the second day, had trouble and shot a final round 80 to finish in a tie for 21st at 227.

Other Oregon highlights include freshman Jonna Nealy and sophomore Lacy Erickson, who both shot respectable 2-over 74s to lead the Ducks. Nealy finished the tournament in a tie for 37th at 231, after sitting at 46th entering the round.

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"Jonna and Lacey played well, especially considering the conditions," Oregon coach Shannon Rouillard said. "It basically poured on us for 15 holes. But mentally, we need to become tougher under these conditions."

California earned the individual title at 882, after their fifth player's score was better than that of Arizona who also finished at 882, who took second. Stanford came in a close third at 885, with Washington far behind for fourth at 897.

"We have a lot of work to do and that's the bottom line," Rouillard said. "We'll keep refining our short game this week and work on a few other things, but we'll get there."

## News briefs

### UCLA and UW feature two No. 1s

LOS ANGELES (KRT) — When Washington plays UCLA, it will be more than a matchup between top-10 teams. It will be a meeting of No. 1s.

Reggie Williams was the top-rated high school receiver in the country last season. Matt Ware was the most sought-after defensive back. When they took their recruiting visit together to UCLA, it looked as though the Bruins might land both of them.

The prodigies will go facemask to facemask Saturday, lining up across from each other at receiver

and cornerback. UCLA coaches were crushed when they lost Williams to Washington, but they might be even more frustrated trying to defend him.

"He's a bigger Freddie Mitchell," UCLA coach Bob Toledo said. "I'd love to have him. I don't know how you stop him."

Although Ricky Manning is UCLA's top cornerback, he might not be tall enough at 5-foot-9 to match up with the 6-4 Williams. Since Ware is 6-3, he has a leg up on the assignment he's preparing for.

— By Lee Jenkins

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## Pilkington

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to make it there," Pilkington said. "He kind of shows me how hard you need to work and what steps you need to take to be an All-American."

In addition to Seth's desire to be an All-American, his long term goal is to be an Olympian.

"To take running as far as I can go: That's my ultimate goal," Pilkington said. "I know that there are other guys across the country that are training, and it motivates me to think that they are working just as

hard and if I work just as hard, I can beat them."

Pilkington's teammates at Oregon are pleased to have him on the team.

"Seth, being a true freshman, has stepped it up and will be our No. 2 runner all season," fellow runner and roommate Andrus said. "It's not a huge surprise, though, because he came here highly recruited out of high school."

Even if the accolades of All-American or even Olympian come, Pilkington will probably remain the same soft-spoken "normal" person he is today.

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Project Saferide is hiring an Education Coordinator for the 2001/2002 school year. The Education Coordinator works to promote sexual assault awareness and related topics to the mission of Project Saferide for the Saferide staff, volunteers and the campus community. Requires ten hours a week and is a stipend position. Applications can be picked up in the Women's Center (Suite 3, EMU) and are due by Friday, October 19.

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