DON SAWYER

Upon completing his degree at Cal State Hayward, where he was an All-Far Western Conference selection at offensive tackle, Don Sawyer was signed as a free agent by the Oakland Raiders in 1968. The Raiders switched him to center where he had a chance to work with the legendary Jim Otto, a future pro football Hall of Famer.

Released by the Raiders prior to the first pre-season game, Sawyer joined the coaching staff at Chabot College where he assisted Gene Wellman coaching the linemen. He coached one year for the Gladiators and one year as an assistant at Canyon High while earning his Master’s degree in kinesiology and physical education at San Francisco State.

Sawyer returned to Cal State in 1971 as a faculty member and coach, assisting with the Pioneers’ football program until the sport was dropped following the 1993 season. In addition, he coached the throwing events (shot put, discus and hammer) for the Cal State track team from 1974 to 1984. Two of his protégés – Greg Blankenship and Mark Sawyer, Don’s younger brother – became NCAA Division II champions under his tutelage.

As an athlete, Sawyer played football at Castro Valley High from 1960 to 1963, earning All-Hayward Area Athletic League honors his senior year. At Chabot, he was All-Golden Gate Conference at defensive tackle before being switched to offense at Cal State. His Pioneer teammates elected him the Most Valuable Lineman for both the 1966 and ’67 seasons and he served as captain his senior year when Cal State went 7-3-1, the school’s first winning season.

On the academic side, Don received numerous distinguished awards in recognition of his teaching. He was chairperson for the Department of Kinesiology and Physical Education in 2005, Chief of Staff for two university presidents from 2006 to 2011, chairman of the Academic Senate from 2004 to 2006 and was presented with the “President’s Medal for Service” by Cal State East Bay President Leroy Morishita in 2012.

Don and his wife, Linda, have been married 41 years and have lived in Castro Valley the entire time. They have one daughter, Jolene.