

Jan. 17, 2021

--JON ARNETT, USC AND RAMS RUNNING BACK GREAT, DIES

LOS ANGELES--Hall of Fame halfback Jon Arnett, one of USC's greatest running backs who then starred with the Los Angeles Rams, died on Saturday (Jan. 16) of heart failure in Lake Oswego, Ore. He was 85.

Known as "Jaguar Jon" because of his acrobatic agility and elusiveness running the ball that was honed by his time as a youth gymnast, Arnett excelled as both a running back and punt and kickoff returner. He was inducted into the USC Athletic Hall of Fame in its 1994 inaugural class and the College Football Hall of Fame in 2001.

A 3-year (1954-56) letterman at USC, he earned All-American and All-Pacific Coast Conference first team honors as a junior in 1955 and also was the recipient of the Voit Trophy as the West Coast's most outstanding player. That season, he led USC in rushing (672 yards), total offense (822 yards), scoring (108 points), kickoff returns (418 yards) and punt returns (282 yards). He also completed 12 passes for 150 yards.

As a 1956 senior co-captain while playing just half the season, he finished 10th in the Heisman Trophy voting and won the Pop Warner Award (top senior on the West Coast) while repeating as the Voit Trophy winner and an All-PCC first teamer. He rushed for 625 yards in 1956, topped Troy in scoring (43 points) and even threw a touchdown pass. After the season, he played in the College All-Star Game, East-West Shrine Game and Hula Bowl.

He started as a 1954 sophomore, leading the Trojans in rushing (601 yards), scoring (55 points), punt returns (129 yards) and interceptions (3). He also completed 17 passes for 164 yards. USC played in the Rose Bowl that season.

Arnett, who prepped at nearby Manual Arts High, still ranks in USC's career Top 25 lists for rushing (1,898 yards), punt returns (430 yards) and kickoff returns (430 yards).

He also was on USC's track team (1954-55-56), placing second in the long jump at the 1954 NCAA meet. USC won the NCAA team title in 1954 and 1955.

The Rams made Arnett the second pick of the 1957 NFL Draft and he played there for 7 seasons (1957-63). He was a Pro Bowler in his first 5 years and was an All-Pro in 1958 when he led the NFL in punt return yardage. He still holds the Rams' record for longest kickoff return (105 yards).

He then played 3 seasons (1964-66) with the Chicago Bears. In his 10-year NFL career, Arnett ran for 3,833 yards with 26 touchdowns, caught 222 passes for 2,290 yards with 10 TDs, returned 120 punts for 981 yards with a score and had 126 kickoff returns for 3,110 yards with 2 TDs. He also threw 2 touchdowns.

After his playing days, Arnett worked in the sales and marketing, real estate development, stock brokerage, executive search, advertising, mortgage banking and investment counseling industries. Most recently, he had a food distribution business.

He and his wife Jane founded the Retired Professional Athlete Association in 2005 to advocate on behalf of retired football players and their families.

He is survived by his wife Jane, son Matt, daughters Kristen and Kimberly and brother Bill. His late brother, Bob, followed him to USC and lettered as a halfback in 1957 and 1958. Services are pending.

