

By NICK PETERS

Selecting today's Southern Cal game to honor the memory of Joe Roth couldn't have been more apropos.

Almost two years ago to the day—Nov. 1, 1975, to be exact—Roth poignantly illustrated what he was made of while directing California to its most significant football victory in two decades.

A crowd of 58,811 poured into Memorial Stadium to watch the Golden Bears' exciting offense confront a USC squad which was unbeaten in 18 games and had a string of 28 in a row without defeat in the Pac-8.

The mighty Trojans of John McKay were coming off a 24-17 whipping of Notre Dame at South Bend and were riding high with a 7-0 record. Moreover, the 5-2 Bears had not posted a victory over USC in Strawberry Canyon since 1957.

Roth's 16-yard touchdown pass to Wesley Walker made it 7-0 in the second quarter and a fierce goal-line stand enabled the underdog Bears to contain the Trojans to a 7-7 halftime tie before a national television audience.

"It was such an emotional game—going out there and seeing that crowd really juiced us up," recalled Roth, who guided the Bears 80 yards following the second-half kickoff, hitting tight end George Freitas for a touchdown and a 14-7 edge.

USC tied it again, but Cal went ahead to stay when Roth capped an 87-yard march by going over from the one early in the final period for 21-14. Joe finished with 19 completions in 31 attempts, 244 yards and two TD passes.

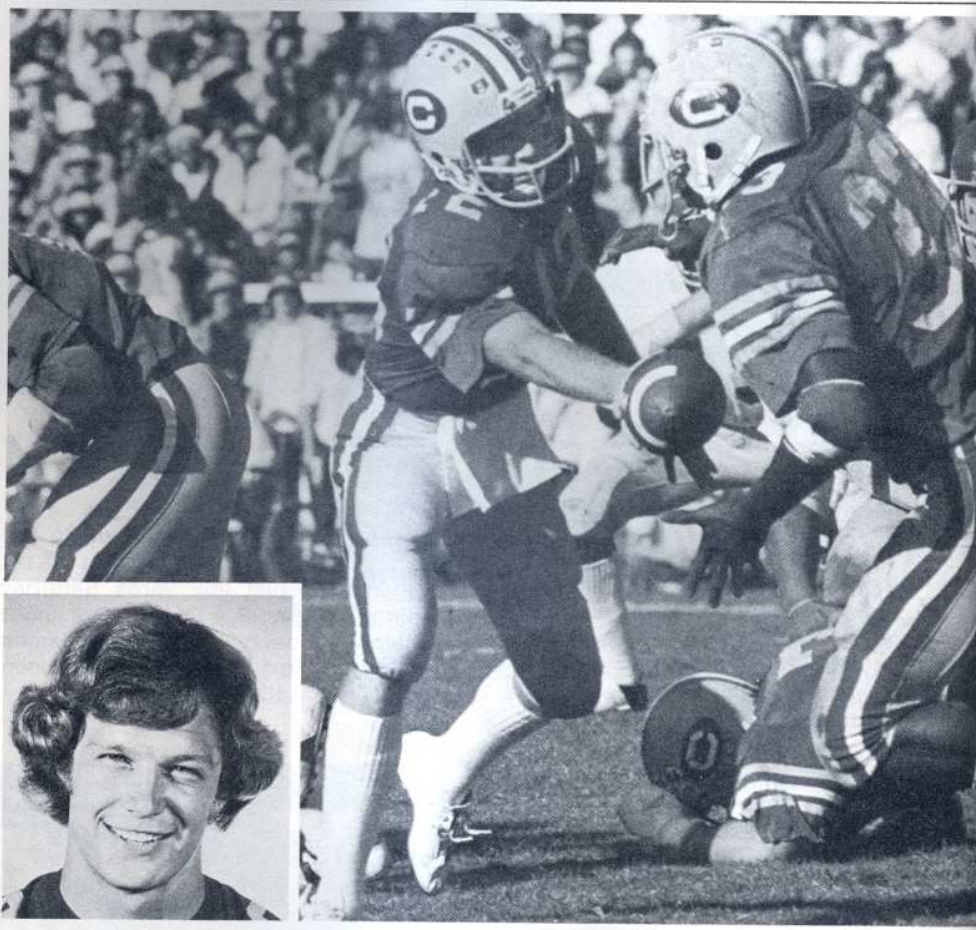
Roth's performance was played down—probably a relief to a modest, quiet youngster who preferred to avoid the spotlight. The focus that day was on Ricky Bell and Chuck Muncie, Cal's star outplaying the USC ace and, therefore, receiving most of the ink following a great team victory.

But others realized Roth's value and what he meant to the team. The USC performance in an obvious pressure situation stamped Joe as one of the nation's finest quarterbacks, removing all doubt that he could win a big game.

"Joe Roth will be a great quarterback," Head Coach Mike White accurately predicted following the USC game. "He has great feel and great touch and is doing some things that simply amaze us. The way Joe picked out his receivers against USC, I don't

JOE ROTH

A great human being who also played quarterback



Joe Roth dispatches fullback Tom Newton on a power play during the dramatic 1975 game against USC.

"The photos on the wall seem to tell it all; They show the people who have been good to me; Those, right now, I wish I could see."

— Joe Roth, Jan. 27, 1977

think Bart (Steve Bartkowski) could have done any better."

His teammates also were convinced. Noted Muncie: "I think he's already where Bart was last year. What he's done these last few weeks is outrageous! What he has over Bart is coolness under pressure. There were times when Bart would get a little frantic. Not Joe—he's calm and confident."

Not a bad tribute considering Roth had started but five games for California. It was a long way from those days at El Cajon's Granite Hills High, when

recruiters considered Joe too fragile for college ball. Five major college games and already he was being groomed as an All-American.

"Joe was gangling and not that quick afoot—not the type any big college would want," recalled Jim Symington, Roth's head coach at Granite Hills and now an assistant at Grossmont College, where the quarterback blossomed into a junior college All-American.

"He had the size in high school, but was only 165 pounds. He realized he was better off going to J.C. for more ex-

perience."

Roth was reared in El Cajon, a town with a population of 48,000 about 20 miles east of San Diego. He practically was an only child, for Joe was a tyke of seven years when brother Tom went off to play football at Washington State in the mid-Sixties. An elder brother, John, also played football in high school, but not in college.

Joe first played organized football in the 9th grade at Granite Hills, quarterbacking the freshman team and being its MVP. Ditto on the junior varsity his sophomore season. By the time Joe was an 11th grader, he was leading the varsity to a 6-3 record.

He grew to 6'3" as a senior and made All-Grossmont League as a quarterback, completing 78 of 143 passes (.545) for 994 yards and eight touchdowns on a 7-2 club. Joe also was a two-year starter at first base on the baseball team, batting .447 as a senior, and was the center for three years on a poor basketball squad.

"I remember Joe when he was a little guy because I met the family while recruiting Tommy for Grossmont College," said Oakland Raiders' assistant Lew Erber, a former Cal aide who played a significant role in bringing Joe to Berkeley.

"Joe definitely was a prospect in high school because he could throw the ball," Erber added. "Major college recruiters probably shied away from him because he was so wiry and light, but you could see he was a passer."

Joe's junior college career verified that observation, but the young athlete already had had his first brush with cancer. "A mole grew under my left ear during baseball season my senior year in high school," Roth explained. "It kept growing, but it wasn't changing color, so I didn't worry—even when it was bleeding a lot.

"When it got to be about marble-size, I went to the doctor and he burned it out. During my frosh year at Grossmont, it grew back and I kept aggravating it with my football helmet. It kept getting bigger and it made it tough for me to shave. It wasn't painful at all, but it was quite an eyesore."

The problem affected Joe's confidence in his physical appearance, but it didn't stand in the way of his athletic prowess. Coach Dave Jordan's football teams had gone 6-12 the previous two seasons at Grossmont, but Joe turned things around. Grossmont was 7-2-1 overall in 1973, Roth completing 141 of 250 passes (.564) for 1,471 yards, 12 TDs.

The best was yet to come. In 1974, Grossmont won the conference title at 6-0-2 and entered the State Division II J.C. playoffs with an 8-0-2 record. Roth had 184 completions in 320 attempts (.575) for 2,129 yards, 23 TDs and 16 interceptions. The 184 completions

cracked the State J.C. record of 181 by Steve Myer, who later starred at New Mexico. Joe also broke the school records of Brian Sipe, who gained fame at San Diego State.

"We let him throw the ball," said Symington. "His strength then was his ability to read defenses. A lot of kids have stronger arms, but Joe really knew how to use his. He was so intelligent as a quarterback, always doing what he had to under pressure."

The State J.C. playoffs that season proved the point. Joe had a shaky start in a game at Santa Rosa, falling behind 9-0. But his 14-for-28 passing and 246 yards brought an 18-12 victory. In the Division II championship game at San Diego's Aztec Stadium, Roth was 13 for 23 with 267 yards and three TDs in a 34-17 rout of Orange Coast. He finished with a 17-2-3 record in junior college.

"He was always calm, cool and collected," said Symington. "Joe led by example—he wasn't a screamer. His attitude and presence made him a leader. I've seen a lot of QBs with physical tools, but they just didn't react like Joe. He had a knack for audibilizing when other guys would freeze."

Erber, then a Cal coach, made Roth his top recruiting priority. "He was the best J.C. prospect around—of course," said Erber. "His temperament comes to mind because it reminds me of Kenny Stabler's. Joe was never excitable, always cool."

Even with cancer over his head like the Sword of Damocles. During his freshman baseball season at Grossmont, Joe first learned he had cancer. He'd gone to a dermatologist to have the troublesome mole removed. It was sent to a lab, where it was determined to be malignant.

"It was pretty hairy for a while," Joe



Roth and teammate Dave Oliver celebrate a scoring pass on which they connected in Grossmont's 1974 state championship win over Santa Rosa.

recalled. "My parents were up in Idaho and the doctor wouldn't tell me anything. He said there was some problem with my insurance and that he had to talk with my folks. I figured something was the matter and I was surprised my parents cut their vacation short to come home.

"They said they came back just to take me to a new doctor, but it was a plastic surgeon and I knew something was up," Joe explained. "He did an exploratory surgery right away and I was really sweating it for a couple of days. Then I was told there was a 99 percent chance I was cured."

Apparently relieved following the optimistic prognosis, Roth concentrated on football and enjoyed a tremendous sophomore season in 1974. Predictably, Joe was very mature when it came time to select a major college. Several recruiters were interested, but Joe wasn't about to waste time. He narrowed his choices down to two passing schools: California and San Diego State.

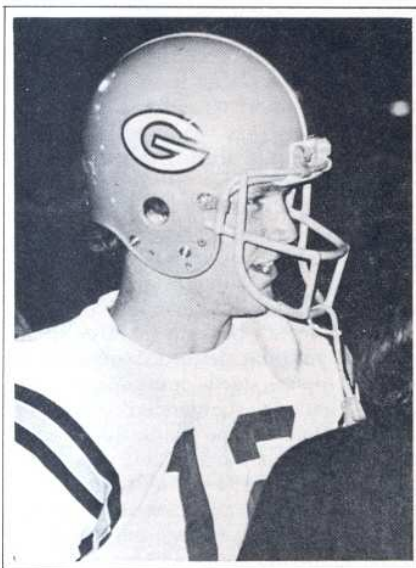
"He made his decision very intelligently," Symington pointed out. "He went to Cal because he felt he could play right away."

The Golden Bears also were recruiting a highly-rated J.C. passer named Jeff Austin, who opted for Colorado. Roth was aware of Austin's presence, but he took his chances and came to Cal without much fanfare.

"I had some second thoughts when Austin was about to sign," admitted Joe, "but I was sold on Cal because a passing offense and the academics were both important to me. But spring football was really tough. We kept things simple in J.C., but this offense was really immense and complex."

Erber, who had since joined the 49ers as an assistant, had no doubts Joe would make the adjustment. "I can't remember ever watching him play in

continued



Joe turned Grossmont's football fortunes around during a brilliant freshman season.

J.C. and not being impressed with the way he handled himself and the team," Lew pointed out.

"His academic prowess was impressive because nobody ever handed him an A—he always worked for it," Erber added. "He was just a very disciplined youngster, very stable. He was the best in the country and had all it takes to quarterback in the NFL, while the other guys all were lacking something."

But Roth's progress remained a source of amazement to those close to him. Perhaps because he didn't walk with a swagger or lacked the gung-ho attitude of some athletes, it was difficult to imagine this personable, quiet "kid next door" asserting himself as a great leader. Surely, the spring of 1975 gave no indication of what was to come.

All-American wide receiver Steve Rivera probably said it best as the 1975 season was drawing to a close. "I really can't believe how outstanding Joe has become," Rivera marvelled. "When he first came out for football in the spring, he really didn't have a clue what was going on. But his progress has been amazing—it's really something to see him get so good."

At the conclusion of spring drills, in fact, Fred Besana was the No. 1 quarterback and Joe was the eager understudy. But he worked hard during the summer and came to pre-season camp at St. Mary's College anxious to unhinge Besana as the Bears' leader.

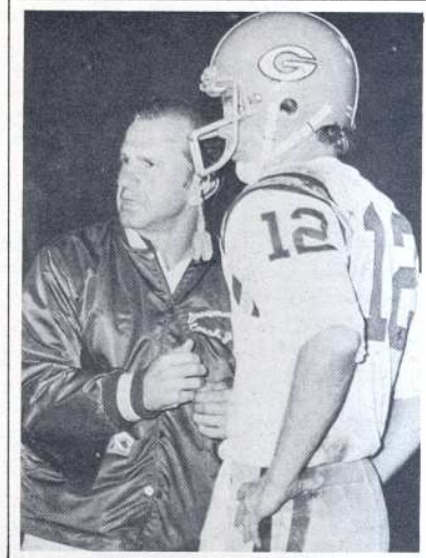
It was during a hot summer day in August of 1975 that Roth's bout with cancer became public knowledge. Riding back to the Cal campus for a medical examination, Joe was asked by this reporter about the scar on the left side of his neck. He then relived those "hairy" moments of the previous year, casually shrugging off his fate.

"I go back every six months for a check-up and there's been no problem," he said. "None of the cancer entered my lymph nodes—I feel fine." To be sure, Joe Roth gave the impression—though he may not have totally believed it—that he was cured. "After you beat something as terrible as cancer, the pressures of football are meaningless by comparison."

Those familiar with the disease, however, indicate there is a hypothetical five-year period. Nobody is cured, they say, until that mentally painful race with time has ended. Joe Roth was too intelligent not to know this, but he had everyone—possibly even himself—convinced his cancer was licked.

"Having the great season in 1976 took his mind off it," said White, who kept the pressure off Joe by not rushing him into action. Besana, in fact, played the

Grossmont photos courtesy Russ Gilbert, El Cajon Daily Californian



Grossmont Coach Dave Jordan and Roth often discussed strategy that paid off in a two-year 17-2-3 record.

entire season opener at Colorado, Roth relegated to holding the ball for placements in a 34-27 California defeat.

The following week, the Golden Bears were stunned by West Virginia, 27-10, in the Memorial Stadium opener. Joe made his varsity quarterback debut and staged a 67-yard drive in the second quarter for Cal's only touchdown. He provided enough leadership and poise to convince White he was ready for more action.

Besana started the Pac-8 opener at WSU as Cal took a 7-0 lead after one quarter. But White wasn't pleased with the score, so he replaced Besana with Roth. Joe was jittery and the move seemed questionable when the Cougars took a 14-7 lead.

But Roth started the feel his way and a 41-yard TD toss to Walker cut the WSU lead to 20-14 at the half. Linebacker Bill Patterson then returned a Roth interception 63 yards for a 21-20 WSU lead, but Joe mounted a 95-yard drive and scored from the one as Cal went ahead to stay.

"I played all right," was Joe's post-game assessment. "There were some good plays," he admitted at Pullman, "but there were some bad ones, too—that interception was brutal."

Still, 13 for 23 passing in three quarters was nothing to be ashamed of. If nothing more, Joe's handling of the squad that day convinced White he needed a leader who made things happen. Roth filled the bill and was No. 1 quarterback the rest of the season, posting an 8-1 record and directing the nation's most potent college offense.

The following week against San Jose State's vaunted defense, Joe's alert au-

dible with mammoth Wilson Faumauina charging down the line resulted in a 22-yard Tom Newton TD for a 17-10 Cal lead in the third quarter. But Roth saved his best for last in a memorable Memorial Stadium finish.

The Spartans had bolted ahead, 24-20, on Rick Kane's TD run with 3:10 remaining. A fired-up SJS defense pushed Joe back to a third-and-22 on the Bear 10. Muncie then made a tremendous leaping catch for a 25-yard gain and a first down on the 35. Another first-down pass to Rivera set up the clincher, a 46-yard TD bomb to Walker with 1:08 to go for a 27-24 victory.

"I know the USC game was great in '75," said nose-guard Bob Warner, perhaps Joe's closest friend on the team, "but I'll never forget the San Jose game. That pass to Muncie was memorable. Without that first down, it's all over; but Joe came through."

Roth first showed how he could handle pressure in the SJS contest, but he paid the price—injuring his right shoulder and his sternum enough to prevent him from starting the next week at Oregon. Besana led Cal to a 10-7 halftime lead at Eugene. Roth took over in the second half and spurred a 24-0 blitz that made it 34-7.

Then came a 51-24 Muncie-led romp over Oregon State, setting the stage for a Los Angeles date with UCLA. Joe had his finest passing day (17 for 31, 236 yards), but five fumbles by Cal helped the Bruins bolt to a 28-7 lead in a 28-14 victory. "We missed our chances—we let it slip away," said Roth.

A lesser team could have folded, for the defeat knocked Cal to 4-3 and the Bears' title chances seemed slim with USC, Washington, Air Force and Stanford approaching down the stretch. The aforementioned clash with the unbeaten Trojans, therefore, had to be rated a turning point for the Bears and Joe Roth.

After the stirring USC upset, a let-down would have been natural. But Joe wouldn't let it happen. Despite six drops by his receivers, Roth shattered Cal passing and total offense records with 24-for-37 accuracy, 380 yards and four TD tosses against Washington.

The 375 yards of total offense obliterated Bartkowski's school record of 309 and the 380 passing yards erased Jay Cruze's former mark of 354. The performance earned him national back-of-week recognition by both wire services and improved his sensational three-game stats against UCLA, USC and Washington to 60 completions in 98 attempts for 860 yards and seven TDs.

"Joe can be as good as Bart," claimed
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Hackett. "He doesn't throw as hard, but he has a quicker release and better feet. It's the quickest I've seen—better than Bart's or Jim Plunkett's."

Roth seemed embarrassed by all the fuss, but his ability was obvious. In less than one year, he was making people forget Bartkowski, the NFL's No. 1 draft pick in the spring of '75.

"I was a little frustrated not playing right away," admitted Joe, "but in looking back, not being rushed probably did me a lot of good. But how can you not pass well with receivers like Rivera, Muncie and Walker?"

It wasn't false modesty. Joe was genuinely awed by the commotion and he sincerely was grateful for the play of his line ("I owe everything to them") and the offensive system. "It's a super offense and we're so well prepared," Joe noted. "When you have so much time, you can't help picking out second and third receivers—somebody's got to be open."

Warner attests to the fact Joe was overwhelmed by the recognition he was beginning to receive. "He was never a braggart as a football player," Warner recalled. "Joe was the same the first day of spring football as he was when we were winning those big games."

Following the Washington game, Cal journeyed to Air Force and jumped to a 24-7 halftime lead as Roth connected with Walker for TD bombs of 34 and 65 yards. But the light air of the Rockies and possible overconfidence helped the Falcons make it a respectable 31-14 at the finish. "I guess we might have been looking ahead a bit," Roth said.

There was good reason to overlook Air Force. The Bears knew they could clinch a tie for the Pac-8 title by downing arch-rival Stanford in the Big Game. More importance was attached to the season finale because Cal was turned down by the Liberty Bowl (which took USC) and it was a case of Rose Bowl or nothing.

Roth started things with a short touchdown pass to Muncie and the Bears posted an overwhelming 48-15 runaway. Muncie and Rivera, playing their final game, commanded most of the attention, but Joe was 14 for 23 with 163 yards and called a beautiful game.

The Bears were delirious following the game. Most of them already were making Rose Bowl plans, brashly predicting a USC victory over UCLA the following week, an outcome which would have put Cal in the Rose Bowl as the outright Pac-8 champion.

But Roth, appropriately, kept his cool amid the pandemonium in the visitors' lockerroom.

"USC has the better athletes," Joe of-



Joe credited the play of his line and Cal's offensive system for his remarkable passing success.

fered, "but their offense just can't move like UCLA's. The Trojans have got to be able to throw—they just can't give it to Bell everytime." His words were prophetic. USC gave it to Bell most of the time, couldn't throw the ball and lost to UCLA, 25-22, on a night in which the Bruins fumbled 11 times, losing eight of them.

Cal's only solace was a nation-leading offense that amassed 2,522 yards on the ground and an identical 2,522 yards in the air—perfect balance. Roth completed 56 percent of his passes (126 for 225) for 1,880 yards, and 14 touchdowns, tying Craig Morton's single-season record.

Roth was the Pac-8 passing and total offense leader over UCLA All-American John Sciarra. He was eighth in the NCAA passing stats and led the nation with 8.4 yards per attempt and in interception avoidance with seven.

"There was no doubt he had greatness as a quarterback," said Cal offensive co-ordinator Roger Theder. "Roth had what Namath has. He didn't throw with great velocity, but his release was so quick, defenses didn't know how to react to his throwing motion. Guys like Plunkett and Bart had more velocity, but Joe's release and touch were the best. And Joe had super ability in picking out receivers."

Hackett concurred. "Joe was in a class by himself," said the USC aide. "A lot of guys were stronger and threw harder, but Joe compensated with a great ability to anticipate and release quickly."

Though Muncie and Rivera were in the NFL, Roth was headed for more honors in '76. Cal's offense, it was believed, would succeed regardless of

who was playing and the 6'4", 200-pound Roth was expected to make a Heisman Trophy pitch with three tough games on the road at season's start: Georgia, Oklahoma and Arizona State.

"I'm looking forward to playing the best," Joe said prior to the opener. "I'm not really concerned about all that All-American and Heisman talk, but if we do well, everything will fall into place."

Joe lived up to his press clippings at Georgia, hitting Walker on bombs of 69 and 88 yards as Cal rocketed to a 24-12 lead early in the third quarter. But Georgia bounced back for a 36-24 victory.

"Passing went beautifully as long as we didn't have to throw," said White. "Then the complexion of the game changed too quickly and too much pressure was placed on Joe. He still had a spectacular game." Roth completed 21 of 36 passes for 379 yards, the second best single-game effort in Cal history.

"Those two touchdown passes couldn't have been thrown any better," recalled Walker, who grabbed a bomb "that had to go 50 yards in the air" for the 88-yarder that is the longest completion in Bear annals.

Cal dropped a 28-17 decision after falling behind 21-0 at Norman. The Sooners controlled the ball from the start, Roth throwing only once the entire first quarter. But he finished with a school-record 27 completions in 46 attempts for 284 yards.

"He's the best I've seen since Namath was at Alabama," declared Sooners' defensive co-ordinator Larry Lacewell.

"Roth is the best I've faced as a coach," said Head Coach Switzer. "None of the others had such a quick delivery with such a great arm while

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throwing such a soft ball—all of his should be caught. I'll bet he's never been harassed so much, but he kept getting up and hitting his receivers. We took away his deep stuff, but he still hurt us. I could tell he was hurting at the end of the game, but he kept going."

Until his final days as a cancer victim, the Oklahoma game was Joe's most courageous performance. Those asked about Roth constantly refer to that muggy afternoon at Norman, when the gritty quarterback kept reeling against the ropes like a battered boxer, buckling but never breaking.

"I'll never forget it," said Warner. "Joe kept getting hit, but he kept picking himself up. It was incredible how tough he was." Added Theder: "The way Joe played against Oklahoma showed that his pain threshold was unbelievable."

Redshirt quarterback Eric Anderson, who made the trip to Oklahoma, uses the game as an example of how Roth handled pressure. "I'll never forget the way he fought through a tough situation—I learned something from it," said Anderson.

"He wasn't down on our line one bit," Eric added. "He was man enough not to blame anyone for what was happening. The game was important to Joe, but having some fun was the big thing. I'll never forget Joe's composure and his coolness under pressure."

Mental anguish was added to physical pain in the plane ride back from Oklahoma. "I became concerned when an x-ray during a routine physical examination in August showed a spot on Joe's lungs," said team physician Dr. Jerome Patmont. "I thought it was a flaw in the film, but I couldn't be sure."

"To be positive," Dr. Patmont explained, "we had to have more x-rays, so I advised Joe of this on the trip back from Oklahoma. The new tests ruled

out any abnormality and I told Joe's parents (Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence Roth) at the Arizona State game that week that everything was normal."

White, however, claims the knowledge of a possible problem affected Roth the rest of the season.

The absence of the injured Walker and fullback Paul Jones from the lineup probably had more to do with Roth's passing slump the rest of the way, but the fact remains he was a .584 passer with 663 yards and three TDs against ranked Georgia and Oklahoma before showing .498 accuracy, four TDs and 14 interceptions the final eight games he played.

"Joe played his heart out in those first two games, but he was never the same after that," said White. "At times, he came off the field and he seemed to be relieved to be out of there. I don't think anyone knew how ill he was, but in retrospect, he certainly was under a lot of mental pressure."

"The season kept getting tougher and tougher after the Oklahoma game," agreed Warner. "Maybe the cancer started affecting his throwing, but he just didn't have his old zip down the stretch." As the season ebbed, so did Roth's confidence—and Besana saw more playing time. Joe apparently was pressing, placing too much responsibility on his shoulders.

But there were bright moments. Roth missed on his first five passes and an ASU interception gave the host Sun Devils a 6-0 lead, but the Bears went to a ball-control offense and pulled out a 31-22 upset. Joe was much happier that night than following the opening losses.

Team success was far more important than individual accomplishments to Roth, who uncorked a 57-yard bomb to Walker in the next week's 43-16 drubbing of San Jose State.

Roth scored a TD and threw for two others against Oregon the following week, but it took touchdowns on the last three drives to give the flat Bears a 27-10 victory. It was a portent of things to come, for Cal was jolted by lowly Oregon State, 10-9, at Corvallis the next week. Joe sprained his right knee and had to be taken off the plane in a wheelchair as the team's fortunes dipped sharply.

"Joe is probably trying to do too much himself," noted White. "As a result, he's been forcing some bad passes. Under the circumstances, he's performed very well with two big-play men (Muncie and Rivera) gone. They made most of our critical plays one year ago. We're not making them now."

Roth stood on the sidelines while UCLA crushed Cal, 35-19, and was ineffective as the Bears bowed to vengeful USC, 20-6. Then the team turned conservative and Roth called a smart game in a 7-0 victory over defense-minded Washington. Cal's vaunted air game was mediocre, but at least Joe and the Bears were winning again.

"We put the cart before the horse, trying to do too many things too fast early this season," said White. "We put it all on Joe because we had some big plays at Georgia, but we never really established anything. I really blew it after the ASU game. We won with a running game, yet we went back to a wide-open style and were lulled into false security because we beat San Jose and Oregon."

"Beating Washington gets us back on the right track," the head coach added. "This is a step in the right direction and Joe is playing well again. He's deserving of All-American recognition."

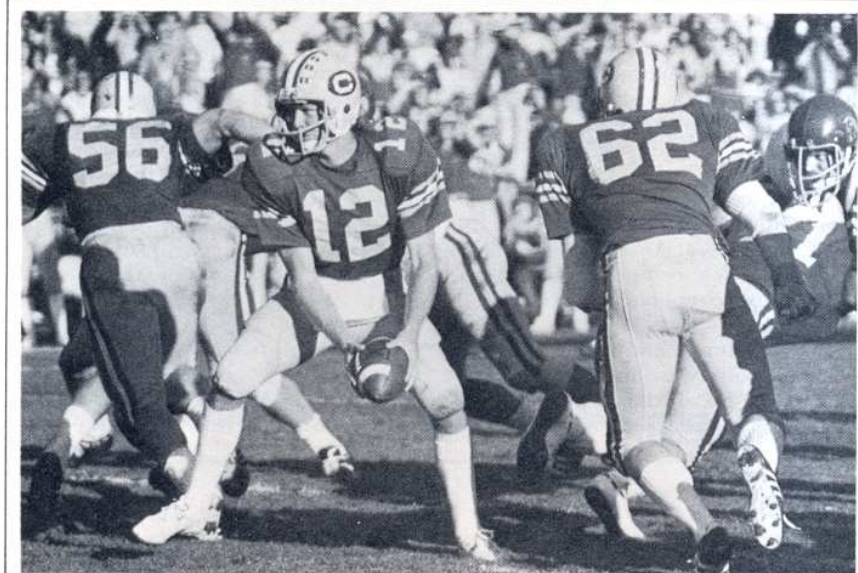
White's statement gained stature the following week when WSU and torrid Jack Thompson came to Berkeley. Roth and a sturdy defense guided the Bears to a 23-0 lead over the Cougars with 1:53 to go in the third quarter. But Cal got conservative and Thompson went crazy down the stretch, making it a 23-22 thriller.

"I didn't want to put it up and risk an interception, but being more conservative doesn't bother me so long as we win," said Roth. Joe had another off-day in the Big Game, totaling only 100 yards through the air as Stanford's Guy Benjamin directed a 27-24 victory.

"Joe has all the tools and the pressure is off him now, so I'm sure he'll be great in the bowl games," said White. But the pressure was just beginning. Roth was a dejected figure in the Cal dressing room. Perhaps it was the disappointment of a 5-6 season, but maybe it was more than that.

This reporter wanted to do an in-

His passing and all-around play had been so impressive in 1975 that Roth headed into his senior season as a pre-season All-America selection, a definite Heisman Trophy candidate and a virtual cinch to be picked in the pro draft's first round.



depth analysis of the lacklustre season with the quarterback, but Roth appeared so depressed following the Big Game, it hardly seemed the proper time for a lengthy interview. Joe gave me the phone number at his parents' home in Jerome (Idaho) and said he would be there the following week for the Thanksgiving holiday.

Roth threw only six touchdown passes in 1976, showing a sharp dropoff from the 14 of 1975. And he was intercepted 18 times last season, as compared to only seven as a junior. Joe still finished third in the Pac-8 and fifth nationally in passing, but something was the matter and it figured to be an interesting story.

Nobody, however, realized at that point what was happening to Joe's body. The Thanksgiving weekend telephone interview never came off, for it was surely something that could wait until Roth neared participation in the East-West Game.

While in Idaho, however, Joe made a discovery that was to alter his dwindling life. He was showering and discovered lumps on his chest. The next day there were more. He returned to school the following week and that Friday night (Dec. 3) during halftime of the Cal-USF basketball game, Joe approached Dr. Patmont and asked about the lumps.

"I almost fainted," recalled Dr. Patmont. "I knew right away it wasn't good. Until cancer comes back, you always feel it's cured. But once it comes back, it's a death sentence. I told him I'd have to have one of the lumps x-rayed. He came to my office the next week and had about 30 tumors under his skin."

Dr. Patmont removed one of the lumps off Roth's shoulder and set up a meeting with Dr. Michael Friedman, head of the Cancer Research Institute at San Francisco's U.C. Med Center. Dr. Friedman's findings confirmed Dr. Patmont's fears. Joe was told he had recurrent malignant melanoma, a virulent form of cancer which starts in the blood and spreads through the body, attacking the vital organs.

"Dr. Friedman told Joe there were signs of it in his liver and he gave him his options," recalled White, who acted as a surrogate father for the ailing athlete in the absence of Joe's elderly parents. "That's when Joe really showed great courage. He listened to the doctor and decided on chemotherapy. The guy never broke down. He was tough."

The bad news travelled fast and it was common knowledge among athletes and the campus community

that Roth was gravely ill. Out of respect to his request for privacy, little was written about the cancer until Joe issued a statement from Honolulu, Jan. 5, confirming the melanoma.

It didn't take an expert to figure that something was seriously wrong. Roth was given permission to arrive at the Palo Alto East-West camp late, allowing him to spend his final Christmas weekend with his family at Jerome. When he appeared for practice, lower back spasms caused by the cancer kept him out of action.

"I first realized something was the matter when I phoned him at Palo Alto from my folks' home in Washington," said Warner. "He told me that he wasn't feeling well and that he probably wouldn't play, so he asked me not to bother coming down. I had my suspicions because he just didn't seem right when we were working out in early December. He'd get tired quicker than usual, but he kept plugging."

The first chemotherapy treatment was administered at U.C. Med Center, Dec. 14-15. "He was a strong guy, so they gave him a quadruple dose and it just ripped him," White recalled. "It took 45 minutes to get the drugs into his system intravenously. He was really sick that night, but he came around the next day and soon was off to Idaho for Christmas."

"The thing that was so important to Joe was that he'd be allowed to lead a normal life. That's why Dr. Friedman gave him permission to play in the post-season games. Being able to go to the East-West Game, Hula Bowl and Japan Bowl gave him a big boost. That

gave him something positive to look forward to. He didn't want to go back home and be isolated."

Roth did not suit up for the East-West Game, but was Hawaii-bound the next day. Two days later, Joe and White prepared a statement. This reporter was phoned from Honolulu and Joe officially admitted he was battling cancer. "I'm under no pain and I feel good," Joe said. "After you've had this once, you always know there's a chance it'll come back, so it didn't come as a shock. But I had no idea it was a recurrent malignant melanoma during the season."

Roth's statement was then relayed to the wire services and his malady was common knowledge. Skip Bayless, the Los Angeles Times reporter who has completed a book on Joe's life, was sent to Hawaii for the story and spent some time in a hotel room with Roth prior to the official announcement. That interview provided much of the first-hand information for the book.

No newsmen spent much time with Joe following the Bayless interview. Those close to him, in particular, respected his privacy.

Joe went out in style. He completed four passes in the West's 20-17 Hula Bowl victory.

"He was amazing at Hawaii," said Theder, who helped coach the West. "He was in unbelievable pain at the East-West camp and he was getting sick at times in Honolulu, but he carried on as if nothing was the matter. Most of the other players really didn't know and Joe wanted it that way. He didn't want them feeling sorry for him and easing up in practice."

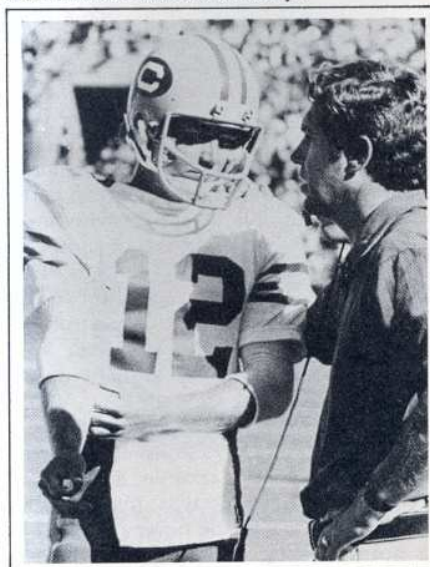
At Tokyo, Roth split West QB duties with Vince Ferragamo and completed five of six passes for 75 yards in a 21-10 victory. "Joe was something in the bowl games," said White, who coached both the Hula and Japan Bowl winners. "He hung in there at Hawaii and kept getting stronger. When he played in Tokyo, he already was late for his monthly chemotherapy treatment—an amazing performance under the circumstances."

When Roth returned to Berkeley, his life was as normal as possible. He worked out in preparation for the NFL draft, carried 17 units and played intramural basketball. There wasn't much change in his routine. He still attended Mass every Sunday at Newman Hall and drew closer to White, using the coach's residence as a second home. Roommate John Matlock, Newman Hall's Father Michael Hunt, fellow players Besana and Warner and coaches White and Al Saunders were frequent companions.

Voluntary contributions and letters poured into the Roth apartment and

continued

On the field, off the field and to the end, Roth and Cal Head Coach Mike White maintained a close friendship.



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JOE ROTH

continued

Joe, as usual, was somewhat uneasy over the commotion, though thankful for the concern. "They wouldn't be making such a fuss if I was somebody down the corner with cancer," said Joe, who was scheduled to address a seminar on the emotional needs of cancer patients at the Claremont Hotel, Feb. 14.

The previous week, however, Joe became seriously ill and was admitted at U.C. Med Center. The previous Sunday, he golfed with Besana and White and was hitting the books hard for a physical education exam. The following weekend, prayers were asked for Joe at Newman Hall. His family came to his side and he remained in the hospital for a week before insisting he be allowed to return to his Berkeley apartment.

Joe Roth came home on a Thursday. Three-hour shifts of students, coaches and other friends provided constant companionship for the stricken athlete, who could not walk because of clotting in his legs. Through it all he maintained a sense of humor. He died two days later, Saturday, Feb. 19, three months and 10 days shy of his 22nd birthday.

That night, prior to the start of a Cal basketball game, athletic director Dave Maggard announced the grim news. A hush fell over the crowd and tears flowed. Roth's death was inevitable, yet it was so difficult to accept because of his strength, courage and great human qualities.

"His courage was unbelievable," said White. "He handled the situation better than most of us who were around him. Joe's outlook was so positive, so hopeful—it rubbed off on everyone. He was hurting, yet he carried on like nothing was happening. We hit the beach and surfed at Hawaii and played golf less than two weeks before he died."

"He treated his condition like a man, never complaining," offered Besana. "Joe was always aware of what was going on, but he gave it his best shot because he didn't know any other way. His faith in God had a lot to do with it."

Added Maggard: "Joe was a phenomenal guy, showing great courage and a great desire to live. To the end, he never gave up. The awareness of how he wanted to handle it was a help to those near him. The way he accepted things made everyone tougher and stronger. Joe Roth was an All-American boy. When I think of him, his athletic ability is inconsequential."

Matlock saw another side of Roth. "I was very privileged to know him as well as I did," said the roomie, a Cal grad. "We met when he was just another football player and he never changed as a human being. He acted as if every-

thing depended on you and prayed as if everything depended on God."

Roth didn't have a steady girlfriend, or many close friends. "I think he knew all along that something was going to happen and he didn't want people to get hurt, so he didn't let them get too close," noted Hackett. "His tremendous faith in God helped him considerably. Not many people really realized the magnitude of his faith."

Joe's closest female companion, and self-proclaimed "study buddy" was Holly Zamzow, like Joe, a P.E. major. "We got along well because we were sort of similar," said Holly. "Joe was quiet, sensitive and shy. He used to laugh over the fact he was a football star because he really never cared for all the publicity."

"He was a guy who really appreciated his privacy," she noted. "He didn't like to be singled out when he played football and he felt the same way when he was really sick. Joe had tremendous self-discipline because you never heard him complain or make excuses. Because of his strong faith, I think he had death well into perspective."

"Joe just had everything so well figured out, no hang-ups," Holly added. "A lot of guys heading for the big money might have quit school, he just kept studying. He went to the hospital Wednesday and he was hitting the books hard Sunday, Monday and Tuesday. He just wouldn't give up."

"Joe was sort of simple and uncomplicated," Warner said. "I'm sure if he made big bucks playing football, he'd still be driving around in his VW. Joe just wasn't very flashy, more of the straight-arrow type. He mentioned that he wanted to play NFL ball, get his Masters and teach at Grossmont College."

"It's difficult to understand how he kept his chin up with all he was going through, but he had a lot of inner strength," Warner summed up.

Joe Roth undoubtedly has found his peace, but his memory will live on at the University of California. He was something special as an athlete, but more importantly, he stood alone as a human being. That's why he was posthumously awarded the Berkeley Citation at June commencement exercises, the only student so honored in Cal history.

And that's why we're all here today to pay tribute to his memory, courage and spirit in the first annual Joe Roth Game. One dollar from every admission will enter the Joe Roth Memorial Scholarship Fund, which will annually support a designated senior athlete who best exemplifies Joe's qualities.

Nobody will come close ■