



NEWS

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“Superfan” Ernest Thompson Has Seen it All **El Camino College El Camino College Football – Ranked No. 1 in Nation** **Murdock Stadium – 60 years // Coach Featherstone – 25 years**

Ernest Thompson is a Warrior.

A “superfan” of El Camino College football for six decades, Thompson attended the first game in Murdock Stadium when it opened on Thanksgiving Day 1949, nearly 60 years ago.

“We played East Los Angeles and beat them – I tell you, though, I don’t think we had more than two players weighing over 200 pounds,” chuckled Thompson, who brought his daughters (then 6 and 3) to the match-up, and many, many games after that.

“A lot of people came to watch the team that day and see the new stadium. It was built in sections; so on that first day, the home side had two sections finished, and one section on the other side. The press box wasn’t even finished yet. On the hills there were plants with little red berries, and people were sitting on the hillside watching the game. It was a great day.”

From that day on, Thompson has been dedicated to following the Warriors, now ranked No. 1 in the nation, with an undefeated season so far. At age 91, he is a fixture at ECC home games – right at the 50-yard line – and continues to attend as many games as possible. He has been to games all over the state and has watched many championships.

“I remember one time, Ed Dunn, the fella across the street, and I went to a Bakersfield game when they were just building the freeway,” he said. “There was a storm on the way home and rocks and mud were sliding off the mountains and accidents were everywhere along the freeway. We were lucky to make it home without an accident!”

Another game, Thompson and his neighbor drove to Santa Barbara and it rained all the way up there. The storm was so terrible; they just got something to eat and went home.

“At one championship game at Orange Coast College, I saw Coach Featherstone, and said ‘Coach, I didn’t drive all the way here to lose!’ and Featherstone promised we would not lose that night,” he said. “Sure enough, we came through – and won.”

Thompson saw Featherstone as a player at ECC from 1967-69 and watched him come back to coach the top-ranked team in 1985.

“I want to salute Mr. Thompson for being a true Warrior for all these years,” Featherstone said. “He comes to see us play and we appreciate it – talk about a football fan! I believe in positive energy in the game of football, and with our fans in the stands, cheering for us, it helps us do our job.”

Coach Featherstone is also facing a milestone – this is his 25th year as the head Warrior football coach. He is El Camino College’s winningest head football coach. Featherstone also has the highest winning percentage of any active coach in the Southern Section of California, including 37 community colleges from Bakersfield to San Diego.

“I had so much fun playing here at El Camino College and then being able to come back and coach – it has been great; never a dull moment,” said the venerable coach, who has never missed a game or practice in 25 years. “I’ve enjoyed every practice, every snap of every ball, every game, and of course – the wins. I am really lucky to be a part of this.”

In 2008, Featherstone was awarded Football Coach of the Year in the Mission Conference for the second time in three years. In 2007, he was voted the National Coach of the Year for the second time, along with accepting his eighth California State Coach of the Year award. Additionally, Coach Featherstone was honored by the American Football Coaches Association.

“The good thing about coaching is that it keeps me young – these kids are great and they are always there, working hard,” he said. “Not a week goes by when a Warrior is not on national TV. It is so much fun to see them in interviews and making big plays.

“My greatest joy is seeing these students leave here with scholarships, get a degree, and then play professionally or get a great career in a great profession. What they learn here is discipline – and that is something they can take with them wherever they go. Going into my 25th year, I think we have another solid team – a fun bunch to coach. I’m excited to play each game this season.”

Thompson wholeheartedly agrees. When he is not traveling the world with his daughters, he will be at Warrior games. He doesn’t ride his bike or walk to games anymore, and it is harder these days to get around, but he’ll be there. ECC Athletic Specialist Carolyn Biedler meets him at the gate.

“He always comes through the middle gates and always has a smile on his face,” said Biedler, who is also celebrating 25 years at El Camino College. “He is the most dedicated fan I have ever seen; he has all these great stories about the college and about the team. He knows a lot of statistics, too – the people who sit around him ask him questions and he knows the answers. Ernie comes to every single game he can, and donates to the football boosters every year. He is a true Warrior.”

Thompson has taken several classes at El Camino College, from management to welding, all pertaining to his work for the City of Los Angeles as a maintenance supervisor. He retired in 1981 and now spends time with his grandchildren, great-grandchildren and two daughters, who also attended El Camino College.

“It is a great school, with great credentials – I have enjoyed seeing it grow over the years, I’m sure glad we have it,” he said.

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