



**Marin County Star Athlete, Sam Chapman**

**By Scott Fletcher**

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Summer is here, and the sounds of baseball can be heard from local playgrounds all the way to Major League Baseball stadiums. A number of Major League players have called Marin County home, but the very first was Sam Chapman, a star center-fielder for the old Philadelphia Athletics. Chapman was born in Tiburon in 1916 and attended Tamalpais High School in Mill Valley, where he was a standout athlete playing five varsity sports. He loved baseball and recalled that, “My favorite team was the old San Francisco Seals. I used to take two ferryboats across the San Francisco Bay and a long streetcar ride to get to the ballpark to watch the Seals play.”

After a stellar high school career, his Tam H.S. football coach encouraged him to visit the University of California campus. Sam liked it and decided to enroll. At Berkeley, Chapman favored football over baseball, and became the team’s star running back. In his senior year,

Chapman, nicknamed “The Tiburon Terror”, helped lead Cal to a 9-0-1 season, earning a trip to the 1938 Rose Bowl, where they defeated Alabama, 13-0. Incredibly, that turned out to be the California Bear’s last Rose Bowl win.

Fresh out of college, Chapman turned down a chance to play professional football for the Washington Redskins, instead signing with the American League’s Philadelphia Athletics. He soon became a star center fielder both offensively and defensively, with the 1941 season being the best of his career. That year he batted .322, hit 25 home runs and drove in 106 runs. But just when his career was peaking, World War II came along and Chapman enlisted in the US Navy. He attended the Norfolk Naval Training Station in 1942 and then transferred to Corpus Christi, Texas where he earned his ‘wings’ as a torpedo bomber pilot. Chapman would eventually serve as a flight instructor for the Navy at Waldron Field in Corpus Christi. After the War he re-signed with the A’s and was an all-star in 1946. He played five more years for the Athletics and was a solid, all-around player for them until being traded to the Cleveland Indians at the end of the 1951 season. He retired at the end of that season with a career batting average of .266, 1,329 hits, 180 home runs and 773 RBI’s.

On retiring he said, “I could’ve gone back to Cleveland in 1952, but I had four children by then, and I was always traveling. I figured it was time to get out.” Chapman returned to California and went into the contracting business before returning to minor league baseball and playing three years for the Oakland Oaks in the Pacific Coast League. After the 1954 season, he worked 17 years for the State of California as an inspector in air-pollution control in the San Francisco Bay area, utilizing his college training as a chemistry major. In the long history of Athletics baseball, few players enjoyed such a loyal and enthusiastic following as the former Philadelphia outfielder.

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