

**Roger Coyer**  
**Mesa City Sports**  
**Hall of Fame**  
**2018**



By Jason P. Skoda

When Roger Coyer was named an All-State defensive end for Westwood in 1966 he asked himself – Why me?

Coyer had similar sentiments more than 50 years later when he was told that he was selected for the 2018 Mesa City Hall of Fame.

He said he was in a state of disbelief and was very touched by it, but really didn't understand why he was selected.

And yet never took a similar 'Why me?' approach when it came to his deafness that occurred after he contracted bacterial meningitis at the age of nine months.

It's glimpse into the humble and positive man Coyer was back in his playing days and the man he is now.

"I always accepted myself as a deaf person," he said through sign language interpreter Kathy Peltier. "When I was growing up I went on as normal as I could. I've always tried to make it a positive.

"I continue to tell deaf people they can do anything except hearing. That's the only difference between them and anyone else. They can still do physical activities and just about anything, especially sports."

Coyer, 70, certainly proved that during his playing and coaching days.

He made an impact with the Warriors soon after moving to Arizona from Oklahoma as a middle schooler when his mother took a job with Emerson Elementary in Mesa.

Coyer played for the freshmen team and eventually got called up to varsity. He quickly developed and grew into a top player for the Warriors as a half back and defensive end.

As one of the state's top defensive players Coyer was a hard man to stop, and he didn't let limitations slow him down, either.

The two-year starter at defensive end for Westwood while helping the Warriors to a state runner-up finish in 1966. He was named first-team all-state and made his way to Mesa Community College.

"They were impressed with my skills early on and gave me a shot," he said. "Coach (Ray) Brown believed in me so I played as hard as I could for him."

Back in the early 1960s – sign language wasn't as universal already – so having a deaf player on the field required some adjustments.

Coyer said the quarterback would come into the huddle and lift up his helmet so Coyer could read his lips for the play. Then he would watch for the center to snap the ball. It was easier to do on defense when he had a good angle to view the ball begin moving and since he couldn't hear a whistle he just played until he knew the play was over.

"It wasn't a problem," he said. "I just had to keep me eye on the ball and react. It was easier on defense and I got the point where I could time it pretty good."

One time his deafness helped him score a touchdown. He was on the punt receive team on his middle school team. The opposition punted it and his coaching coaching staff told everyone to stay away and not field it.

Everyone backed away and the opposition let up a little bit so when Coyer saw no one fielding the ball, he picked it up and ran for a touchdown.

"Everyone said you weren't supposed to touch it and I said, 'I didn't know,'" he said. "That's when word started to get out that there was a deaf player in Mesa."

He also played basketball, baseball and track for the Warriors, but football is where had the most talent. He played for MCC before heading to Gallaudet University, a college for the deaf in Washington, D.C.

Coyer continued to play football at Gallaudet, a Division III program, learned sign language and most importantly met Nina, his wife of 43 years.

Together they headed to Kentucky where was a coach and teacher at the Kentucky School of Deaf. He coached football, basketball, track and cross country. The football program has a lot of success and won the National hearing championship in 1993.

"He was a very consistent coach," Nina said through the sign language interpreter. "I became a football widow every fall. He had plays on paper all over the floor in the living room. He was inspiration for all those boys as they saw how successful he was in his career."

One that started back in Mesa where he was accepted as a football player and not a deaf football player.

"No one made a big deal about it," he said. "I had a great experience and tried to be the best teammate I could be no matter what. I never heard anyone cheer but I could see their happiness when we did something good."

There was a lot of good for the program back then and Coyer was a big reason for it. It's why he is one of eight athletes being inducted into the Hall on Nov. 19 at Red Mountain High.

"I'm was in shock," said a tearful Coyer about getting the call. "I never expected something like that."