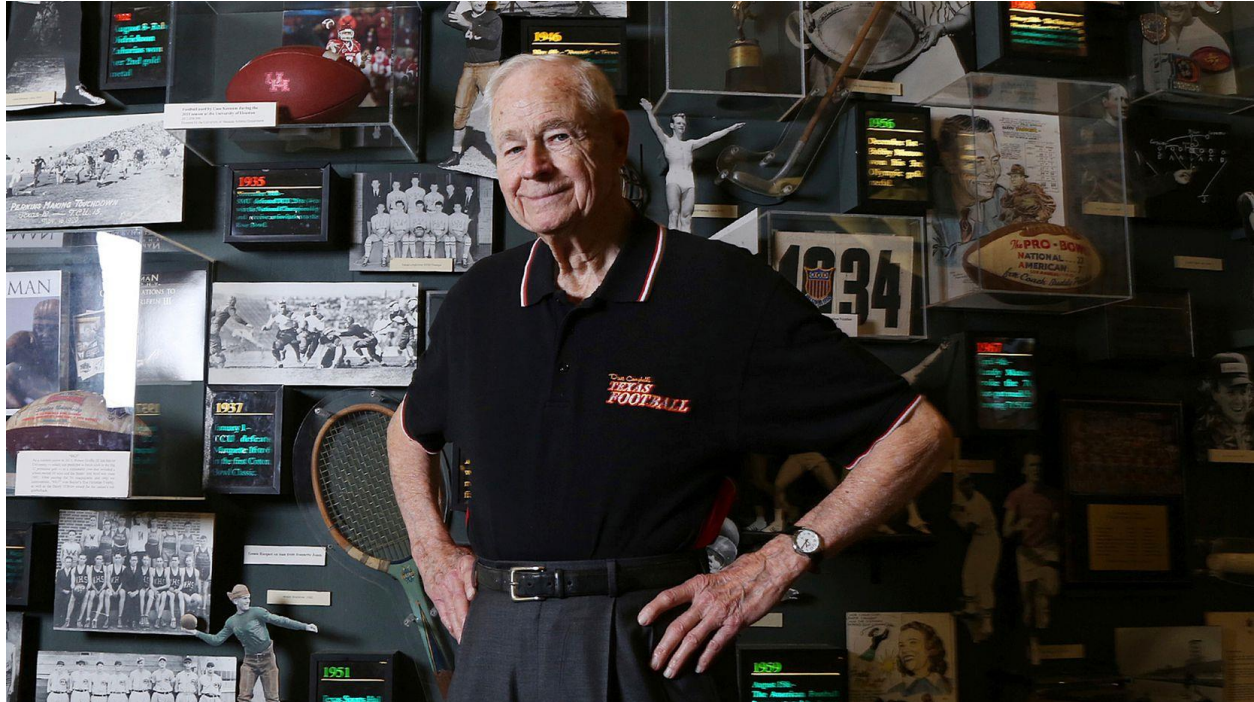


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Remembering the life of Dave Campbell, whose career transformed sports journalism in Texas

Dave Campbell, the legendary sports writer who founded Texas Football magazine, died last Friday at the age of 96.



In this Dec. 12, 2015 photo, Dave Campbell stands inside the Texas Sports Hall of Fame in Waco, Texas. Campbell, founder of the Texas Football preview magazine that became a fixture in this football-crazy state, has died Friday night, Dec. 10, 2021, at his home in Waco, said Greg Tepper, managing editor of Dave Campbell's Texas Football. He was 96. (Rod Aydelotte / ASSOCIATED PRESS)

By [Kevin Sherrington](#)

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For the record: Dave Campbell did *not* come down from Mount Sinai with *Texas Football* under his arm on his initial attempt at everlasting fame and a decent living wage. His first inspiration was a bowling magazine. Which is a little like finding out that before the Ten Commandments, Moses floated a wine list.

Fortunately, no one in Waco wanted to buy ads for a bowling rag, and as a result, Dave spent the next several decades selling football magazines and revolutionizing sports pages on the side.

“I can make an argument,” proclaimed Tony Pederson, chairman of the journalism division at SMU’s Meadows School of the Arts, “that he had more impact on Texas journalism than any other single person.

“*Texas Football* changed sports journalism in Texas.”

And if that was all you knew about Dave, who [died Friday at 96](#) after a stroke, it would be enough to carry most obituaries. He had no idea his inspiration would come to this. He’d come up with it after noticing how poorly the Southwest Conference was served in national football annuals. Little care went into stories written remotely. Most had more holes than Clyde Barrow’s getaway car.

Dave figured to cure the problem by getting everything first-hand. The *Waco Tribune-Herald’s* four-man sports staff — Dave, Hollis Biddle, Al Ward and Jim Montgomery — wrote all the copy, college as well as high school, for the first edition in 1960. Texas’ Jack Collins peered from the cover. Biddle helped Dave lay out the magazine on the Campbells’ kitchen table.

The first year, Dave’s bright idea lost \$5,000. The next year, it was only \$3,000. His big break came in ‘65, with Texas Tech’s Donny Anderson on the cover. A chief selling point was a retrospective by Steve Perkins on the best of SWC football since World War II, the first of many by illustrious Texas writers such as Dan Jenkins and Jack Gallagher as well as others.

And then there was this, too: A cash prize for the best prediction on the SWC race.

By the mid-’60s, Dave had started up *Arkansas Football*, too. At one point or another, he also published magazines about the Cowboys, Oilers and Saints as well as monthly newsletters.

“I had stuff all over the house,” he told me in 2009.

Over the last 40 years, I’ve written a handful of *Texas Football* cover stories as well as a few SWC chapters. Back in the early ‘80s, especially, no one got rich writing for the magazine, and it was a lot of work. You did it because of the magazine’s prestige.

And because Dave asked you to do it.

Most of us would have done just about anything he asked, which explains at least one seat on the Texas Sports Hall of Fame nominating committee. He’d been a factor in the Hall’s move from Arlington, where it had languished, to Waco. On the committee, he tested our collective loyalty only once, when he pushed a Waco resident for the Hall based on the fact that he’d climbed several of the world’s tallest peaks. Even Dave couldn’t slip that one past us.

Like many of his Greatest Generation peers, Dave served in World War II and was awarded a Bronze Star. But he was different from most sportswriters who populated pressboxes in the ‘50s, ‘60s and ‘70s. A typical scribe in those days worked hard and partied harder, and the stories he told the next day were generally more compelling than the one he filed the night before.

Tall and lean and straighter than his ramrod posture, Dave always seemed like he just got out of church. Humble, soft-spoken, warm as buttered toast. If he wasn’t exactly Mr. Rogers, he hailed from the same neighborhood.

Once, Dave and Denne Freeman, sports editor of the Dallas branch of the Associated Press, walked into a Fort Worth institution thinking they were checking into their hotel. Turned out it was a bank. Security took one look at their suitcases and figured they might be bucking for a large withdrawal.

Once everything was sorted out, Dave turned to Denne and said, “Do we really look like bank robbers?”

Dave didn’t look like a stick-up man or sportswriter or anything of the sort. But he could hang with any of the latter once he sat down to a keyboard.

“He was among the group of sportswriters in the state who elevated the sports story to cultural journalism written with literary flair,” said Pederson, who, before his stint at SMU, served as sports editor, managing editor and executive editor of the *Houston Chronicle*.

“He could quote Kipling and Browning easily. And he constantly emphasized thoroughness, fairness and, above all, accuracy.”

Pederson, a Baylor grad, got his start at the *Tribune-Herald* working for Campbell and credits his old boss for the careers of dozens of journalists, including the *Chronicle’s* Pro Football Hall of Fame writer, John McClain, as well as *Houston Post* and *Dallas Morning News* alum David Casstevens, as evocative a writer who ever occupied a Texas press box.

“Early in my sports writing career,” Casstevens wrote on Facebook, “Dave gave me an opportunity for which I’ve always been thankful. Great boss. Caring individual.

“True gentleman.”

David Barron was working as assistant city editor for the *Tribune-Herald* and moonlighting for *Texas Football* in 1981 when he accompanied Dave to Dallas for Texas-OU. On what he called “one of the best days” of a career that would take him to the *Chronicle* and distinguished service as a sports media columnist and Olympics writer as well as four decades and counting at *Texas Football*, Barron said he quizzed Campbell about the many sports characters he’d covered in the previous four decades.

“You can ask a lot of questions in two hours if you put your mind to it,” Barron said.

The incredible breadth of Dave’s professional career — 40 years as sports editor in Waco, another 25 as owner of *Texas Football* and his continuing influence all these years over the magazine he created — was exceeded only by his patience and kindness.

On a personal note, few people in the business have meant more to your intrepid reporter. From the day he pulled me aside with kind words in a Waco press box in the early ‘80s, when I didn’t even think he knew who I was, to three years ago, when he sent me an autographed copy of *Texas Football* with a generous sentiment, Dave had been a never-ending source of support.

And I was far from his only case. You didn’t have to work for Dave. Besides the dozens of careers he influenced directly in Waco, he encouraged generations of writers who considered him a father figure right up until the end of his 96 years.

The problem of such a long life is that you usually end up outliving your mourners. Friday at 11 a.m., Austin Avenue United Methodist Church in Waco will be wall-to-wall.

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