

## Ozzie Smith Comes Home

Baseball Great Returns to Cal Poly  
for Plaza Dedication, Commencement

by Vicki Hanson

On Saturday, June 14, the greatest shortstop in the history of baseball stepped up to a speaker's podium at California Polytechnic State University to deliver keynote addresses at morning and afternoon commencement ceremonies.

Known in baseball as "The Wizard" for revolutionizing defensive play at shortstop while fielding for the San Diego Padres (1978-1981) and the St. Louis Cardinals (1982-1996), Osborne Earl "Ozzie" Smith, a Cal Poly alumnus, was the sole inductee in 2002 to the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, N.Y. (see story in Cal Poly Magazine, summer 2002).

Also widely known for his work with young people, Smith was awarded the honorary degree of Doctor of Humane Letters by Cal Poly at Saturday's morning commencement. This was only the 10th time an honorary doctorate has been granted by the university since Cal Poly's founding in 1901.

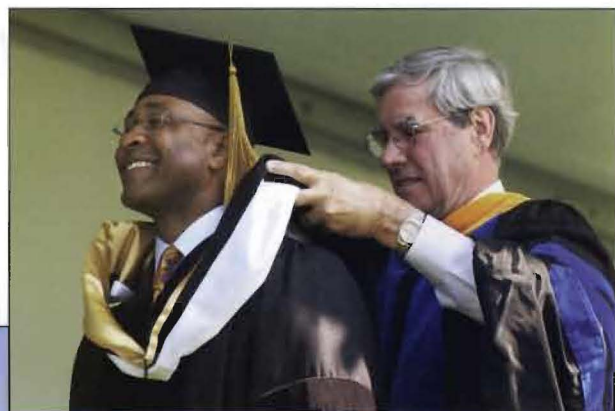
"Ozzie is a distinguished alumnus whose life, career and community service exemplify the Cal Poly tradition of excellence," said President Warren J. Baker. "He stands as a shining example of the university's aspirations for its diverse student body, as well as its learn-by-doing educational philosophy."

Known throughout his career for his magic on the field, Smith won 13 Gold Glove awards and set six Major

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*President Baker bestows an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree on Ozzie Smith.*

*Photo by Laura Dickinson, The Tribune*



*The media and Smith's fans turned out for the ballplayer's appearance at the dedication of Ozzie Smith Plaza and for the unveiling of his statue.*

*Photo by Bob Anderson*





*Smith poses next to the Harry Weber sculpture on Ozzie Smith Plaza.  
Photo by Laura Dickinson, The Tribune*

League fielding records among shortstops, including most assists, double plays and chances accepted.

He was also a successful offensive player, accumulating 2,460 hits and 580 stolen bases, and was named to 15 All-Star teams in 19 Major League seasons. His elegant glove work helped lead the St. Louis Cardinals to three World Series, including a 1982 championship. His congenial personality, consummate professionalism and trademark back flip made him a fan favorite.

On the afternoon preceding commencement, a statue in Smith's honor was unveiled at a 3:30 p.m. dedication of Ozzie Smith Plaza, located between Baggett Stadium and Bob Janssen Field on the Cal Poly campus.

The three-quarter-life-size bronze statue of Smith was created by noted sculptor Harry Weber, who has also sculpted statues of the other St. Louis Cardinal players named to the Baseball Hall of Fame. A scholarship endowment for Cal Poly baseball has been created to honor Smith, with a limited number of statue miniatures available for donors.

"The Ozzie Smith Plaza and the statue are in recognition of Ozzie's many contributions to his sport and

for being an outstanding role model for young athletes and the country's youth," said Cal Poly Athletic Director John McCutcheon.

"Ozzie is an amazing, first-class athlete," said Dan Marple, a former Cal Poly teammate and Cal Poly assistant coach, "and classy in the way he went about his work."

At Cal Poly, Smith broke a number of school records, including at-bats (754), career stolen bases (110) and stolen bases in a season (44) – the last a record he broke twice. A four-year starter at shortstop and a three-time All-Conference selection, he became a charter member of the Cal Poly Athletics Hall of Fame in 1987.

Off the field Smith has performed a different kind of magic through his

charitable endeavors, which include working with groups such as the Ronald McDonald House, The Boys Club of St. Louis, Annie Malone's Children's Home, and Kids in the Middle. A new position as education ambassador for the Baseball Hall of Fame has been created especially for him.

In 2001 Smith received the Walter Peyton Sweetness Award for his contributions to his community and his sport. He has also earned the highly coveted Roberto Clemente Award (1995), the principal humanitarian award of Major League Baseball; the Baseball Hall of Fame's Branch Rickey Award (1994) for "service above self"; and the NAACP Image Award for Sportsmanship, Humanitarianism and Community Involvement (1983).

Since retiring from baseball in 1996, Smith has been a public figure in other venues. He served as host of "This Week in Baseball," as color analyst for Cardinals broadcasts, and as baseball analyst for CNN/NI (a joint venture between CNN and Sports Illustrated). He is currently a guest commentator for Fox Sports. He owns two St. Louis-area restaurants and has performed in three productions at The Municipal Theatre in St. Louis – including starring as the Wizard in The Muny's production of "The Wizard of Oz."

At the plaza dedication Smith spoke to a crowd of some 500 faculty members, students, staff and Central Coast baseball fans, calling his career and return to Cal Poly a dream come true.

"Thank you for following me down my yellow brick road," he told the cheering fans, before signing autographs for them – including a crowd of children – for nearly an hour.

