

October 2006

san pedro

MAGAZINE

FROM
FOOTBALL
TO THE FRONTIER

Tim Wrightman's



A Press-Telegram Publication



WRIGHTMAN

Tim Wrightman walks along a portion of his 150-acre Lazy Bear Ranch. (photo by Capitol Photography)

Interview by Joshua Stecker

IN THE RIGHT PLACE

Tim Wrightman's Lazy Bear Ranch

In the 1980s, Tim Wrightman was San Pedro's Golden Boy. The son of a longshoreman and a graduate from Mary Star High School and UCLA, he went on to NFL fame as part of the Chicago Bears' Super Bowl XX championship team in 1986. Today, at 46, Wrightman is taking life a bit easier, instead of avoiding tackles from 300lb behemoths, he spends his days hunting, fishing and entertaining guests at his Lazy Bear Ranch in Weiser, Idaho. Wrightman recently chatted with *San Pedro Magazine*, reminiscing on his days growing up in San Pedro, going to Mary Star, playing with the Chicago Bears and his new endeavor as ranch owner.

Continued on page 22



San Pedro Magazine: **Ok, first thing's first. How the heck does a guy from San Pedro end up in Weiser, Idaho?**

Tim Wrightman: I found this area of Idaho through my dad, Jack. As the story goes, he was driving through Idaho back to California from a Montana Elk hunt in 1961 with two of his buddies. They stopped in the small town of Weiser because they were too tired from driving or drinking (this part of the story is still vague). They pulled into a motel and when they went inside there was an old cowboy talking to the motel manager and he asked my Dad how they did on their Elk hunt. "Not too good," he said. The old cowboy asked them if they had brought their shotguns with them because he had a small place with some Chukar that needed to be thinned out. Well, that old cowboy wasn't being totally honest; he didn't have a small place but a ranch of over 20,000 acres with birds all over it. Being the brilliant guy he is, my Dad made fast friends with the cowboy and in the years to follow would spend the whole month of October at the ranch hunting birds. Longshoreman had it great even back then with a month off to hunt birds! I started coming up to this area in the early 90s to visit my Dad who retired here in 1987. I immediately fell in love with its abundant beauty and wildlife.

SPM: **How did the idea of starting your own ranch come about?**

Wrightman: In the late 90s, attitudes towards hunting started changing rapidly in Idaho. I figured if I ever want to have a place to enjoy the outdoors, I better get in the game and buy some ground. In 2000, I purchased 98 acres of farmland on the Weiser River. At that time, I was still living in So Cal and pursuing an acting career. I would travel back and forth to Idaho to plant trees, work on the pond or develop wildlife habitats. I can remember walking to my truck in Malibu after a week of working on "Baywatch" and saying to myself, "That was pretty insignificant; I'd rather be planting trees in Idaho than hanging with Pamela Anderson on the set of 'Baywatch.'" Since then I have reassessed that position! In 2002, I met one of my best friends, Jerry Salt, an excellent builder/contractor from the Salt Lake City area. I was showing him some of my designs for a lodge I thought I would build in the future. Jerry looked at the plans and said, "Let's build it." The timing wasn't what I had planned for, but any good game plan has to be flexible. With the help of family, friends like Jerry and Linda Atkinson, the lodge was completed in 2003. The idea of having guests at the ranch really didn't take hold until 2005. I was having one of those days when a city kid should not attempt to be a farmer. It was like a bad episode of Green Acres. Then it hit me like a ton a bricks, why not do what I love and get paid for it! I had always admired Teddy Roosevelt, one of the great conservationists of our time and an avid hunter. Roosevelt was a visionary when it came to the protection and preservation of natural resources. That's when I got out of the farming business and created the Lazy Bear Ranch, so I could assist people in enjoy hunting, fishing and conservation.

SPM: **Where does the name "Lazy Bear Ranch" come from?**

Wrightman: When I played at UCLA I was a Bruin, a baby bear. Then I grew up and became a Chicago Bear. I originally wanted to name it The Bear Ranch but when I went to register the name and create the website I found out two things. One was that the name was already taken, and second, some people define a "Bear" as a hairy gay man, which I am neither. So I thought Lazy Bear Ranch would convey a little bit more about what I'm about at this stage in my life. Which is about relaxing and appreciating what really matters and what nature has to offer.

SPM: **Where does your love of hunting come from?**

Wrightman: Some of my favorite memories from my childhood are of my dad and I hunting. When I was too young to hunt, I'd act as his bird dog and spend the day with him. It was a great bonding experience. My mom got me into football, and my father got me into hunting.

SPM: **How much time do you spend at the ranch?**

Wrightman: I initially planned on spending just a few months of the year out here. But now I've grown attached to the peaceful atmosphere and the solitude that's sometimes hard to find in a larger city. I can decompress here. What started out as a weekend getaway is now a lifestyle for me.

SPM: **Can you describe the ranch and its surrounding area and talk about the kind of amenities your ranch provides?**

Continued on page 24



Chicago Days: Wrightman practicing with Chicago Bears' coach, Mike Ditka. (photo provided by Tim Wrightman)

Wrightman: It's a great getaway spot for Men or Women's Only Weekends. Packages vary and can include hunting, fishing, winery tours, horseback riding, biking, yoga, massage and fitness instruction. Should you wish to include meals in your package, your dining experience will be catered to suit your needs.

Our convenient location is Southwestern Idaho features some of the more diverse year round activities in the U.S. We're just minutes away from Hell's Canyon, North America's deepest and most beautiful river gorge. We can arrange day trips for white water rafting, salmon fishing, downhill and cross country skiing and private wine tasting at more than 8 local wineries.

Lazy Bear Ranch is located on 150 acres of land with access to hundreds of more acres of hunting grounds. The south boarder of the main ranch is located on the Weiser River, which has been named in the top ten of the best small mouth bass fishing rivers in the country. The North boarder of the main ranch is the "Weiser River Rails for Trails." This is a 70-mile long non-motorized trail that follows the Weiser River, used exclusively for hiking, biking and horseback riding. The Lazy Bear Ranch has two of its own ponds over 10 acres in size that are stocked with large mouth bass and bluegill that guests are welcome to try their luck at.

I'm personally proud of the lodge because I designed and decorated it with mostly all of my own ideas. I even came up with the acronym SIR for the style, which stands for Sophisticated Industrial and Rustic. The 5,800 square foot lodge is smoke-free and features two stories. It provides luxury lodging for up to five guests. Each room is

comfortably appointed with luxurious beds, bedding and private baths. My residence is on the upper level. The Ranch's meeting area, "The Bear's Den," provides an upscale lounge atmosphere for our guests to relax, share an adult beverage and stories at the custom bar while enjoying the 6-foot TV. A great room adjoins the "Bear's Den," that can be used for meetings, parties or any type of large function. We've also got a 7-person outdoors Jacuzzi that has a 360-degree view of the beautiful Weiser Cove area. When I have hunters come in I take care of everything for them from ground transportation to all the appropriate licensing. You don't even need to leave the ranch for your recreational needs.

SPM: What makes your ranch unique or different from others in your region?

Wrightman: Me! (laughter) I believe that any type of guest ranch that caters to the public whether it's a get away retreat or a hunting lodge has to be personality driven. I don't know anywhere else in the world you can go hunt with a couple of guys that have won a Super Bowl. Depending on their schedules, I try to have at least one of my former Super Bowl XX teammates join us for the weekend. Jimbo Covert will be here in November with his own group. The other factor that makes the Lazy Bear Ranch unique is how everyone here has one passion, to make your stay the most successful, enjoyable relaxing, vacation you've ever had.

SPM: What are your future plans for the ranch?

Wrightman: One of the things I miss a lot about San Pedro is the beach. This year I created a beach area and already set the

pylons to build a dock. There's no way a 9-acre pond can replace the Pacific Ocean, but I can dream can't I? The sand beach and the dock will make the pond more accessible for swimming and boating in addition to fishing. I'm installing new, more efficient irrigation systems for the lands I've set aside for wildlife. I am taking another 40 acres of farm ground out of production and turning it into permanent nesting cover for pheasant, quail and partridge. I also plan on installing more goose boxes for the geese to nest in next to the ponds. Last spring I rescued four goose eggs when their parents abandoned the nest. I hatched them out and I officially released them two months ago, but they drop by for a visit now and then. Last week, I was out four-wheeling in the field and felt something brush past me. I almost jumped off the four-wheeler into a ditch; it was the geese coming back for a visit. I'll continue to plant trees and set aside land for wildlife. It's a conservation work in progress.

SPM: Can you name drop and talk about the notable celebrities/football figures that have stayed at the ranch?

Wrightman: No, because of the high terror alerts I am unable to provide you with this information (laughter), however, I can tell you what happened when my buddy Brad Wright [7-foot center from UCLA and various NBA teams including the New York Knicks] was coming out to film his outdoors show called a "Big Fish Out of Water." The premise of the show is that Brad is a total city guy and knows nothing about the outdoors. The idea for the show was to take him duck hunting. So, I say to Brad, "The hardest thing about taking you duck hunting will be if I can find you any waders." Brad's reply was, "Waiters? You actually have people serve food in the duck blinds? Boy, you are full service!" And no, Dick Cheney has not been invited.

SPM: Do you offer price specials for people who are from San Pedro?

Wrightman: Absolutely! I would love to have a lot of people from the South Bay come visit. It's actually a very short flight, less than two hours direct from LAX to Boise. Then I am a short hour drive from the airport. If you leave right now you'll be here in a little more than three hours! I remember when I was living in So Cal and wanted to do outdoor activities, it was hard to find places in LA County to do it. That's one of the reasons I started the Ranch, so that people who wanted to experience the outdoors would still find a friendly place to do it.

SPM: What is the top game hunted at the ranch?

Tim Wrightman: One of the unique things about the Lazy Bear Ranch is that we only offer fair chase wild bird hunts. I've been to a lot of hunting lodges from South Dakota to Argentina and I can't think of any place you can hunt wild ducks and geese in the morning and pheasant and quail in the afternoons. I tell people if you're a "killer" and it matters to you how many birds you take home, you'd be better off going to a bird farm where they raise the birds in captivity. But if you're a true hunter that enjoys seeing bird dogs work, the rush of wild upland game busting out at your feet, the



The Lazy Bear Dog Kennel

thrill of migrating ducks and geese landing in your decoys, then this is the place. I like to have hunters, not killers, visit the ranch.

SPM: What do you say to people who disagree with hunting for sport?

Wrightman: I respect viewpoints on both sides of the discussion. Everything in life is about balance. One thing that's important to realize, however, is that sportsmen and sportswomen are often the biggest supporters of wildlife and land conservation. They're habitat oriented and involved. Hunting and angling has a tremendous economic value [more than \$542 million annually in Idaho alone according to a recent survey by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service] As a hunter, I live by a code of ethics to leave the land I have hunted on better than I found it. To never shoot anything that I will not eat and to respect the game at all times. When people make comments about the dead things I have hanging from my walls, I try to explain to them it's like a beautiful piece of artwork to me. When you go and buy a painting and hang it on your wall it evokes a certain emotion in you. When I look at a piece of taxidermy it evokes an emotion in me, of how much I enjoyed the camaraderie of that day with my friends, of how much I love the outdoors and all the animals in it.

SPM: Reminiscing a bit, what does San Pedro mean to you these days?

Wrightman: San Pedro will always be my hometown no matter where I live. When I was playing for the Bears it bothered me that they would list my hometown as Harbor City. I was upset and went into the Public Relations Office and told them to change it to San Pedro. They apologized and said that they just got the information from my birth certificate. That's what happens when you're the son of a longshoreman and born at Kaiser.

SPM: What's your fondest memory of Mary Star Football?

Wrightman: If it weren't for Coach Bob Bradarich I would have never played football at all. I remember when I was in 7th grade and I wanted to play tackle football and they wouldn't let me. They meaning the Pop Warner league, the reason was that I couldn't make the weight. I wasn't fat, at least that's what my Mom told me, I was just big boned, I guess that even when I was little I was big. So, I went with a friend of mine who was 16 at the time to sign up and play football at the San Pedro Boys Club. That lasted about 5 minutes; I walked into the locker room and saw Mickey Teora sitting in front of a locker. I was so intimidated by how big he looked and the fact he had a beard already, I ran all the way home and told my Mom I don't want to play football. I want to be a soccer and baseball player. The next baseball season at Fromhold Field, Bobby was my coach on the Sharpshooters. He was also the line coach at Mary Star. Between him and Coach Radisich they convinced me football was my sport and Mary Star was the place to play it.

I could go on and on, like the time I was vomiting through the whole first half of a game and at half time Coach Bradarich very cautiously took care of me. In the locker room he had me lay down on the training table, lifted up my jersey and poked and prodded at my sick stomach. He then took an aspirin, put it in my belly button and secured it with a Band-Aid, then gave me gentle words of encouragement, "Now get out there and hit somebody and remember you're responsible to clean that stuff off your face mask."

But, the thing I remember most is that the last time I really had fun playing football was at Mary Star.

SPM: How did you get drafted to play for the NFL?

Wrightman: Practice, practice, practice. Actually, I was ranked as the number two tight end coming out of college in 1982. The Bears had an old scout by the name of Fido Murphy. Fido would hang around the UCLA practice field and tell me that Mike Ditka saw my game film and liked me a lot, because I reminded him of himself. I never really trusted what Fido was saying because everyone told me that he really didn't know what was going on with the Bears, he was just an old friend of George Halas, the Bears owner. People said that Halas just kept Fido on as a favor to the old days. Well, Fido *did* know what he was talking about and the Bears took me as their second pick in 1982.

SPM: What do you remember most about playing with the Bears?

Wrightman: Of course, you would think that winning the Super Bowl would be right up there at the top of the list, and it is, however, personally, the game that we played against the San Francisco 49ers that year is up there too. Before that game I was only playing when we were in two tight end formations. Going into the 49er game I was the only tight end that was healthy enough to play. [Emory Moorhead had a pulled hamstring] And I took advantage of it having a great day blocking for Walter Payton and catching three passes for 87 yards. I won a game ball for my efforts, but more importantly, I got to start splitting playing time with Emory. That was my turning point with the Bears and it made me feel

terrific because I could actually contribute to such a great team.

The other thing I really got a kick out of was watching Mike Ditka explode over Jim McMahon's antics. I remember in one game Jim got to the line of scrimmage and saw that the defense was doing something that he could take advantage of by changing the play. Ditka was going crazy on the sideline when he heard Jim was changing the play. It sounded like, "McMahon don't you change my play, don't you dare change my play, you stupid #*(%, I can't believe this \$%^*, *#@* is changing the play...Great throw!"

SPM: Do you wear your Super Bowl ring often?

Wrightman: Yes, I love wearing it because it's a great conversation piece. It gets me all kinds of free stuff from dinners to being upgraded to first class on airline flights (laughter). Actually, I do wear it, I remember the first time I wore it in public. I was doing a charity event in Las Vegas and they put us up at Caesar's Palace. I was having breakfast in the coffee shop sitting in a booth up against a back wall when I noticed people were staring at me. Every time I lifted my fork to eat people were fixated on my Super Bowl ring and me. I started to get up to tell the manager I should be moved to a more secluded table because of my celebrity status. As I got up to speak with him I noticed that I was sitting under the Keno Numbers Board and nobody had any idea who I was! (laughter) So I do wear it but I am humbled by it as well.

SPM: How did you end up playing for the Chicago Blitz?

Wrightman: How I became the first player signed in the USFL has a San Pedro connection. George Allen was the head coach and part owner of the Chicago Blitz. George's personal assistant was San Pedro's own Van Barberie. It's through Van that I made my first contact with Coach Allen, which led me to be the answer to a sports trivia question. Ah, what a price to pay! I've always loved going against the grain but that wasn't one of my better ideas. I like to think my time in the USFL wasn't wasted on injuries and bad coaching, but that I was waiting for the right time to rejoin the Bears. Not bad timing on my part, my first year I got to be a Super Bowl Champion.

SPM

The Lazy Bear Ranch is located at 612 Unity Lane, Weiser, ID 83672. For more information on the ranch, call (208) 549-1529 or visit lazybearranch.com. You can also learn more about Tim Wrightman at timwrightman.com.