

Demetrio Samaniego
SC Alumni – Coach – Educator
Inducted into the SC Hall of Fame October 15, 2010

Demetrio “Sam” Samaniego was born in Safford Arizona to “Cuco” and Rose Samaniego on May 27 1932. “Cuco” worked as a cowboy for Virgil Mercer and Johnny Rhoades in Sombrero Butte, Arizona during “Sam’s formative years. Being a cowboy is a hard life and “Sam’s” family life was no different. From Sombrero Butte, the family moved to Mammoth where he attended 3rd grade. After that, it was constant shifting from place to place. The Samaniego family finally settled in Eloy where Rose convinced “Cuco” to settle down. “Sam” says that he must have attended every school in Pinal County. Those experiences did not sit well with him.

At Eloy Elementary, “Sam” became interested in sports which up to now were not a priority with him. He discovered that he was pretty fast and placed second in the 100 yard dash in 10.3 at the Arizona State Meet in Phoenix and long jumped 19 ft. 3 inches as an 8th grader. Horace Chesley got him involved in sports and besides track; he participated in football, basketball and softball plus chorus. On weekends, he and some friends picked cotton. “I was not very fast at it,” says “Sam.” Academics did not interest him until he enrolled in high school.

In 1948, he entered Santa Cruz High School and took part in athletics and student government activities. He and some of his classmates, under the leadership of Superintendent Wes Townsend, were responsible for establishing the basis of the new ASB Code along with selecting the school mascot and colors. Along with athletics, studies became an important facet of his student life although he sorely lacked many fundamentals due to his elementary school experiences. In his junior year he was chosen to attend Boy’s State and served Santa Cruz well by winning one of the mythical mayors’ posts. “Sam” was elected ASB president as well as Boy of the Year his senior year. He also managed to get on the honor roll his last semester, his last goal. During the summer of ‘51, he became the school’s first athlete to gain all-state recognition in football and beat out “Red” Stevens of Casa Grande for the quarterback spot in the Summer All Star Classic. After the All-star game he attended Palo Verde College and played football for Larry Kentera, former ASU assistant and NAU head coach. “Sam” had two outstanding seasons achieving all conference honors as a running back. By now, academics had become very much a part of his life, and finished his career at Palo Verde College with a 3.7 GPA. In 1953, he enrolled at ASC at Flagstaff and played running and defensive back for the Lumberjacks. He gained all conference honors his senior year. He finished his senior season as a member of the Chain Gang and gained membership in the Blue Key Honor Society.

In 1955, his professional life began as a junior high P.E. instructor and assistant coach at Palo Verde College. He taught two years, married Rosie Rodriguez in Blythe California. They had four children, Roxanna, Samuel, Teresa, and Cynthia. All attended college and three are UC and CSU graduates. In 1957 he and his wife moved to Miami, Arizona. At Miami he taught P.E. and assisted head coach Paul Petty in football for the Vandals. He coached two years and in 1959 became head football coach at Palo Verde High School. He served in this capacity for four years, received his Masters at ASU and moved on to Victor Valley High School, in Victorville, California as defensive coordinator and P.E. instructor. In 1967 he became Apple Valley’s first football coach taking his team to the state’s C.I.F. playoffs two out of his three years spent there. His goal of becoming a college football coach started to become a reality.

“Sam” left Apple Valley in 1970 to become head football coach, Athletic Director, and fulltime Spanish instructor at Victor Valley College. He quickly started the High Desert Gridiron Club to help defray some expenses incurred by his football team. In his five years at the helm, his teams managed to win the conference title once, placed second twice, finished third once, and concluded his last year as football coach A heart problem required him to give up football thus denying him the opportunity to return to the game he dearly loved. He did manage to help coach his son’s little league football teams a couple of years. “Sam” said that he never enjoyed an activity as much as he did football and had it not

been for it, he's not sure where he would be today. He is also proud of the fact that 39 of his players received scholarships during his tenure. "Sam" became involved in many community activities. After his retirement, his Gridiron Club expanded throughout the High Desert and for many years helped defray costs of the high schools in existence today.

As head of the Spanish Department, "Sam" brought his discipline and hard work approach that had brought him success as a football coach to the Spanish Department. He developed a Student Exchange program with the University of Guadalajara and the University of Tepic in Nayarit, Mexico. He also managed to take students during Spring Breaks to Mexico to enrich their skills in the language. "I wanted my students to practice what they had learned in the classroom and to enjoy the riches that the language had to offer," according to "Sam." Along with his Student Exchange Program, "Sam" and other Deans from colleges nearby established student programs in London and Spain. "Sam" became Dean of Arts, Letters and Science in 1986 and held that post until his early retirement in 1993. As Dean, he was instrumental in developing a rich diversity program that helped bring about different hiring practices and curriculum changes in the various departments. He is also responsible for the very successful paralegal program, one of the few in Community Colleges that exist today. His last achievement was gaining status as Professor Emeritus at Victor Valley College. He taught part time Spanish at Chaffey College until he retired in the spring of 2009. "As I tell all my friends, not bad for a po'boy from Eloy," says "Sam."