

Sjsu's schweiger has new number, New perspective

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Jersey No. 17 isn't typically sought out by 275-pound defensive ends, but it's a perfect fit for San Jose State's Jeff Schweiger.

Schweiger sees redemption and atonement in those digits, which the former Valley Christian High star will wear for the first time Saturday in SJSU's opener against UC-Davis.

"It's real significant to me," said Schweiger, explaining that the one is the number for God, and seven is the number Jesus uses for forgiveness.

"It's one, forgiven," he continued, "for all the stuff I've done. I've lied to a lot of people, abused a lot of people and hurt people in my family and close to me with some of the stuff I've done. "But everything is different now."



San Jose State's Jeff Schweiger, a former star from Valley Christian and transfer from USC, is a defensive end who wears NO.17 for a reason.

Schweiger, 22, took a circuitous journey to peace and purpose in his life, which he says he finally found when he shed the rock-star' lifestyle he had embraced at USC and became a Christian. Along the way, he rediscovered his passion for football at, of all places, his hometown school, which never had a chance five years ago when Schweiger was one of the nation's top recruits.

"When you are chasing that pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, it's hard to find," said SJSU receiver Kevin Jurovich, a close friend of Schweiger's since high school. "He's open about his faith, and that's where he's found his love and sense of belonging, and he's totally happy now. You can see it in the smile on his face: contentment and fulfillment."

Schweiger, a senior, has been all smiles since he transferred to SJSU two winters ago. But it wasn't long ago that Schweiger's face was filled with pain and confusion.

In fall 2004, a few months after graduating from Valley Christian, Schweiger was on top of the football world. The former California high school player of the year had been a key backup on USC's national championship team. Fans sought his autograph. He had a swanky apartment in downtown Los Angeles. He had a beautiful girlfriend. It was his dream come true.

"When I was real young, I'd lay on my bed and think about my future, and I was like, 'I want beautiful women; I want money; I want fame. And football is the vehicle that will do that for me,'" Schweiger said. "My freshman year, I felt like I had it, but it still didn't make me happy."

The next spring he won a starting job, but he broke his right foot the first day of fall camp. The injury wasn't serious - he required surgery and missed four games - but it released inner demons that Schweiger never knew he had. Finding no answers, Schweiger turned to drugs and alcohol.

"My life depended on football so much that when it was gone, even the chance of not being able to have it, paralyzed me with fear," Schweiger said. "So I started to do crazy stuff. The drinking and drugs and girls were an escape because I just wanted to be free from the pain. When I'd do that stuff, I'd be free for a minute, but when I was done, the pain came back twofold every time."

Schweiger's depression grew as his playing time dwindled. Soon, the guy who used to be first on the practice field and at meetings began to show up late - if at all. By the start of his junior year, Schweiger was too far down the depth chart to ever recover.

That's when he turned to faith and found the answers he was looking for. He studied the Bible and read spiritual books that changed his outlook.

"I found that I was playing football for acceptance and fame and was motivated by fear," Schweiger said. "The Lord just freed me."

Schweiger didn't know if football fit into his new life. When he had a chance to play in the 2007 Rose Bowl against Michigan, he declined. That night, he told his father that he was through with football.

"He was in that frame of mind for a couple of months," Jeff Schweiger Sr. said. "It wasn't fun anymore. It was killing him, basically."

Fast-forward to this summer, when a long-haired, carefree Schweiger ran circles around SJSU's offensive linemen and regularly harassed the quarterbacks. Teammates often ask him how he can be so intense and spiritual at the same time. "I tell them I hit you as hard as I love you. If I hit you soft, you know I don't care," he said, laughing.

Schweiger's intensity helped win over coaches and players quickly. Some players privately wondered if the fallen star from USC would consider himself too "bigtime" for SJSU, especially last fall when his participation was limited to practices.

Teammates have never seen his national championship ring (although they have asked), and serving as practice fodder last fall didn't faze him. He was named one of SJSU's scout team players of the year. "He's fit like a glove," Coach Dick Tomey said.

Not surprisingly, big things are expected of Schweiger. His arrival allowed SJSU to move Jarron Gilbert, an allconference end last season, to tackle, and Schweiger figures to be a key component to what might be the best defense the Spartans have fielded in years.

"He's back to what got him successful in the first place - his family, his loved ones and working hard," Jurovich said. "He knows this is the place he's supposed to be."