

## Author explores lives of diverse group of San Diego athletes

By GREG BALL - For the North County Times | Posted: Sunday, November 1, 2009 12:00 am

Glancing at the cover of author Joey Seymour's debut title, "San Diego's Finest Athletes: Five Exceptional Lives," one might be inclined to ask the question "Who are these people?"

Aside from Padres first baseman Adrian Gonzalez and Olympic diver Greg Louganis, the athletes explored are hardly names at the forefront of most local sports fans' consciousness ---- and that's exactly how Seymour wanted it.

In writing the book (Sunbelt Publications, 186 pages, \$17.95), Seymour sought to tell the stories of five unique athletes with roots in San Diego, reaching across five decades and five sports while also seeking out athletes who overcame some kind of adversity, whether it was racism, sexism, homophobia or the challenge of a childhood that straddled an international border.

"There's been enough written about Junior Seau," Seymour said. "There's been enough written about Ted Williams. There's been enough written about Tony Gwynn. Choosing more well-known athletes might have made this more of a commercial success ... but I want people to get to know these athletes.

"San Diego has never won a championship in one of the four major pro sports, but we have these five great champions from San Diego. I wanted people to read this and be able to be proud."

Seymour dedicates a chapter to each of the five athletes he chose to explore.

Maureen Connolly was a North Park native who became a tennis star and in 1953 was the first woman to win all four Grand Slam tournaments in one year. Her tennis career was stopped short at the age of 19 when she was injured in a horseback riding accident, and she died of cancer at 34.

Charlie Powell went directly from San Diego High to a career as a defensive end and linebacker with the San Francisco 49ers and Oakland Raiders from 1952-61. He also boxed professionally, amassing a 24-11-3 record with 18 knockouts in a career that saw him once fight Cassius Clay before Clay took the name Muhammad Ali. Powell, who is black, endured racism; for example, in many cities he was forced to stay in different hotels than his white teammates.

Louganis, an El Cajon native who attended Valhalla High, earned the world's attention by winning four Olympic gold medals in diving during the 1970s and '80s. He later announced that he is gay and tested positive for HIV in 1988. Seymour details how Louganis struggled with his sexuality and battled perceptions throughout his diving career.

Tiffany Chin grew up in Scripps Ranch and cut her teeth as one of America's top ice skaters of the 1980s at a rink in Mira Mesa. She failed to medal in her only Olympic appearance (1984 in Sarajevo), but in winning the U.S. Nationals the following year became the first non-Caucasian to do so. A Chinese-American who was often the subject of media criticism due to her mother's strict, yet traditionally Chinese, parenting style, Chin is credited with opening doors for future Asian-American skating standouts Kristi Yamaguchi and Michelle Kwan.

Gonzalez is by far the most recognizable figure explored in Seymour's book. The two-time All-Star has hit 130 home runs and driven in 400 runs in four seasons with the Padres, but fans may not know that he split his childhood between Chula Vista and Tijuana, sometimes changing uniforms in the car as he and his family crossed the border on days when he had two Little League games in two countries.

"San Diego's Finest Athletes" came about as part of Seymour's thesis for his master's program in history at the University of San Diego, combining his love of sports ---- he worked in sales for the Dodgers, Angels, Royals, L.A. Kings and Newport Beach Breakers of World Team Tennis before attending USD ---- and interest in history.

Seymour, 29, said he is already outlining plans for his next book ("I think there are many more stories to tell"), but for now is enjoying the accomplishment of publishing his first one. "San Diego's Finest Athletes" hit book shelves just last week, and a launch party is scheduled for Thursday at the San Diego Hall of Champions (more information is available at [www.SunbeltBooks.com](http://www.SunbeltBooks.com)).