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Retired Ranger Jesse Priest is new member of the Albuquerque Baseball Hall of Fame

Bob Campbell, Staff Writer, Midland Reporter-Telegram

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Once one of the best minor league pitchers in the nation, retired Texas Ranger Sgt. Jesse Priest of Midland returned to the principal setting of his life as an athlete when inducted into the Albuquerque Pro Baseball Hall of Fame on July 29.

Honored with 1970s outfielder Tom Paciorek and pitcher Dennis Lewallyn and the 1972 Albuquerque Dukes, the Burnet County native enjoyed taking the field again and having his 38-13 record of 1951-52 recognized.

He had also played for the Sweetwater Swatters, Harlingen Capitals, Shreveport, La. Sports, Temple Eagles, Augusta, Ga. Rams, Lubbock Hubbers and Midland Indians before joining the Texas Department of Public Safety in 1956.

A right-handed sidearm control pitcher, Priest pitched a two-hitter against the Hubbers in 1951 while losing for the first time that season, 2-1, after winning 17 straight games, upon which Hall of Fame pitcher Dizzy Dean signed the opposing pitcher to play for the New York Giants. "I loved Albuquerque and still do," said Priest, 79.

"It's a good town and the team (now called the Isotopes) has always had good support.

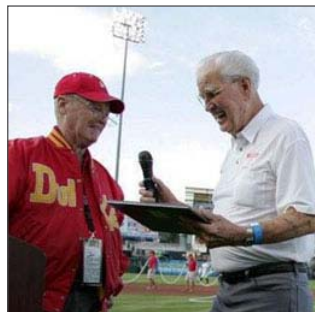
Pitchers today go five or six innings, throw 100 pitches and have long and short relievers. If you started in my day, you were expected to finish. If you didn't, it was embarrassing."

Priest and his wife, Lubbock native Barbara Wages, have a son, Rick, and daughter, Niki Speicher, of Midland and three grandchildren. His brother Noel is in Grand Prairie and sister Lelia Juricak in Austin.

"I came out for football in the Navy and got my teeth knocked out, so I decided baseball was safer," he said, laughing. "That was when they had soft leather helmets."

Married at home plate on July 12, 1952, and given 10 percent of that night's receipts by Dukes owner Cy Fausett, the Priests walked under bats held by teammates and were photographed by the Albuquerque Journal.

A TDPS trooper for 12 years in Canyon, Childress, Lubbock, Seymour, Haskell and Graham, Priest became a Company C Ranger in 1969 at Wichita Falls and investigated the



Jesse Priest receives Hall of Fame plaque.

Photo courtesy of Barbara and Jesse Priest.



1972 shooting deaths of two Jack County women who burglarized the home of a cocaine dealing couple and killed their dog.

“They were weighted down with heavy rocks in a stock tank out on a ranch,” he told Texas Ranger Hall of Fame & Museum interviewers from Waco last fall. “It took a long time to solve that case, a little over a year, and we arrested Leroy Laffoon in Lake Worth.

“Laffoon got 75 years and when I took him to Huntsville, he said, ‘If you got anybody you don’t like who’s giving you a hard time, for \$500 I can take care of it for you.’ I told him I couldn’t think of anybody.”

Sometimes kidded about his full name, Jesse James Priest, he was promoted to sergeant, the equivalent of a lieutenant in the modern Ranger Service, worked five years as a supervisor here and retired in 1980.

Two other important places are Wichita Falls, where Kiwanians named him “Law Enforcement Officer of the Year,” and Haskell, where he was Jaycees president and a Little League-Pony League coach for nine years.

Company E Capt. Jerry Byrne and Sgt. Jess Malone took Priest a personalized set of Ranger dominoes after his June gallbladder surgery and Malone said Wednesday he has “not heard one person say anything bad about Jesse in 30 years.

“That speaks volumes about the man. He carried on the traditions of honor, integrity and courage we saw in the Rangers who came before him and after him. There is no riding the fence, no middle of the road with Jesse. Things are either right or wrong.

“I’ll retire in October and I hope one day somebody will look back on me and have as much respect as I have for him,” Malone said.

Priest managed a Breckenridge ranch for two years after leaving the Rangers, worked in security for ClayDesta Plaza’s construction and was a Midland County Attorney’s Office investigator for 12 years.

Six feet, 3 inches tall and 175 pounds during his playing days, his big hands and forearms indicate he once was an athlete. “I enjoyed both careers and wouldn’t take for any of it,” he said.

“I did my best in baseball and am glad I didn’t make the Major Leagues because I would have missed all my law enforcement experiences and wouldn’t have the family I do now.”



Jesse Priest in his Texas Ranger days.
Photo courtesy of Texas Ranger Research Library.

<h2>Jesse Priest</h2>	
<i>Pitcher, Albuquerque Dukes, 1951-52 West Texas-New Mexico League</i>	
Recorded a 38-13 record over two seasons with the Dukes, including a 19-4 record with a 3.15 ERA in 1951. Tied a league record in 1951 with 17 consecutive wins. Went 19-9 in 1952 with a 3.06 ERA.	

Jesse Priest on E-Book

Interview available at the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum site.



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