



Pervis Atkins

Pervis Atkins didn't unearth a ton of luck on his amazing, improbable road to the Albuquerque/New Mexico Sports Hall of Fame. He did, however, mine his own good fortune.

Hard work, a hard head and a hearty zest for life brought Atkins to this place – the cap on an athletic career that took him from a walk-on in the New Mexico State football program to the National Football League to a Hollywood insider.

As he looks back on how he got here – 51 years after a fateful trip to Las Cruces – Atkins says he's struck by how far he has come.

"It is," he says. "very exciting."

Atkins, 74, is one of the greatest college players ever to compete in the state. He was an All-American for the Aggies in 1960 and led NMSU to a Sun Bowl victory and a perfect 11-0 record.

The Aggies haven't seen days like those since, but then, there aren't many Pervis Atkins-types anymore.

Which is actually the funny part. Nobody – maybe not even Atkins – knew he was a Pervis Atkins-type when the skinny Californian drove his friend Bob Gathers to Las Cruces in 1959.

Atkins provided the transportation to be friendly – and maybe, to take a chance. Once he arrived in Las Cruces, Atkins asked Aggies head coach Warren Woodson if he could take a shot at making the team.

"It was maybe, maybe, maybe," Atkins recalls. "But after he got to know me, I think he figured I could help the team."

Atkins' kind of help is the stuff of dreams. He still holds school records for yards-per-carry in a career (8.1 yards) plus career punt return average and single-season punt return average. He also led the nation in all-purpose yards in both 1959 and 1960.

You'd think that would've been enough for Woodson, the father of Aggie football. But the coach liked Atkins so much that he summoned the student to attend church with his family every Sunday. Those mornings remain some of Atkins' favorite memories.

After leaving New Mexico State, Atkins was selected in the third round of the NFL draft, and played seven seasons for the Rams, Washington Redskins and Oakland Raiders.

When football was over, Atkins became friends with a man named Alden Schwimmer, a Hollywood agent. Atkins listened, learned, worked. He had a successful career in the industry – taking what he learned from football and applying it to real life.

Any time he saw a sliver of an opportunity, he jumped on it. And then he succeeded.