



Mr. Joe Olen Gilbert

November 5, 1932 - July 13, 2020

On Monday, July 13, 2020, Joe Gilbert passed away in Bartlesville, Ok. According to him, he was 87; but according to his baby sister, who has his birth certificate, he was actually 89.

Everyone agrees Joe Olen Gilbert was born on November 5, but whether that was in 1932 or 1930, we're not sure. He was born in Buffalo, Missouri, to Frank and Delphia (Shackelford) Gilbert.

Joe was preceded in death by his parents and two brothers, Fred Gilbert and Bill Gilbert. He is survived by his wife, Joyce Gilbert of Barnsdall, his sister, Jean Lockerby of Lusby, Maryland, and several nieces and nephews

The memorial service will be held on Saturday, July 18, 2020, at 10:00 a.m. on the Barnsdall

High School Football Field. He will be interred at Ethel Reece Cemetery. In lieu of flowers, the family requests contributions be sent to American Heritage Bank, PO Box 529 Barnsdall, OK 74002 to fund repairs and upkeep on his second home, the Joe Gilbert Fieldhouse.

Joe Gilbert lived a rich and active life. After graduating high school at sixteen Joe joined the Air Force. There is rumor that he altered his birth certificate to

be able to join which has led to the discrepancy of his true age. He served one year at Larson Air Force Base in Washington, which was originally named Moses Lake Army Air Base. Joe played baseball and football for the Air Force. He had never played football before because his high school in Buffalo didn't have football. When his year was completed, he signed a contract to play professional baseball for the Cleveland Indians. He visited with his mother before reporting to the Indians to tell her of this opportunity. Joe's mother had to quit school when she was in third or fourth grade to get a job after her family lost their house to a fire. She was a very intelligent woman who had missed the opportunity for an education. So, while she was very proud of Joe's athletic abilities, she encouraged him to go to school. Joe contacted the Indians and told them to tear the contract up, he was honoring his mother's wishes and would be accepting an athletic scholarship at Northeastern State University in Tahlequah, OK. While at Northeastern, Joe lettered in football, basketball, baseball, and track. He was one of very few students to ever accomplish this feat. Many times in his life he downplayed his academic abilities. Not only was he a four sport collegiate athlete, but he also earned a Bachelors of Science in Education Degree in 1954.

Some people say after hearing about a teaching/coaching position in Barnsdall, Joe hitchhiked from Tahlequah to Barnsdall for the interview. We find this easy to believe because his sister, Jean, said while in college he often would have to hitchhike from the Missouri state line to the campus in Tahlequah. They only had one car and if they both happened to be home at the same time, she'd drive him to the state line and he'd walk from there. There was an Oklahoma State Trooper that often picked him up and took him the whole way. While it was a form of transportation he frequently had to use, he told Jean never to hitchhike, and never pick up a hitchhiker. She never did. Barnsdall Public Schools hired Joe Gilbert in the fall of 1954 and he officially became "Coach Gilbert" or "Gilb" to the students of BHS for the next 66 years.

After a ten year courtship, Coach Gilbert married Joyce Infield, a player from his first team as a Panther Coach on June 4, 1964 in Nowata, Oklahoma. Coach Gilbert and Joyce made their lifetime home in Barnsdall, Oklahoma.

In 1973, Coach Gilbert went on to earn his Masters in Education from NSU as he continued to coach several sports at the varsity level. In addition to his coaching and teaching duties at Barnsdall Public Schools, Coach Gilbert was a fixture in the community. He spent quality time teaching kids to swim at the swimming pool where he was a lifeguard, taking kids to water ski at the lake, coaching little league baseball teams, and playing tennis where he could pretty well beat anyone.

Throughout his legendary career he amassed 3,912 wins as a high school coach in several different sports. He was proclaimed “high school sports winningest coach” with the most wins of any coach in national high school history. His teams earned state titles in baseball in 1980 and slow pitch softball in 2013. In baseball his teams were state runner ups in 1989, 1990, and 1991. The Barnsdall Panther softball teams were state runner ups eight different times. Coach Gilbert was inducted into Northeastern State University Athletics Hall of Fame, the Oklahoma Coaches Association Hall of Fame, the Oklahoma High School Softball Coaches Association Hall of Fame, the Oklahoma High School Baseball Coaches Association Hall of Fame, Oklahoma High School Basketball Coaches Association Hall of Fame, Oklahoma High School Girls Basketball Coaches Association Hall of Fame, Oklahoma High School Slow Pitch Softball Coaches Association Hall of Fame. In 2018 he was honored at the Tulsa World All World Awards with the Blue Cross Blue Shield Lifetime Achievement Award and in 2019 he was inducted into the National Federation of High School Associations National High School Hall of Fame.

If you asked Coach Gilbert how many games he had won in his career, he'd say "none...the kids did." He was a humble man who was embarrassed by the label The Legend. He would have preferred to be known as a man who loved his job, loved coaching, and loved the people and students of Barnsdall. What he achieved as a coach in the win/loss column was unheard of but the impact he had in the hearts and lives of his students and players was truly legendary. The world is a sadder place without him in it, but will forever be a better place because of the many lives he touched.

In lieu of flowers, the family suggests memorial donations be made to the Joe Gilbert Fieldhouse repair account at the American Heritage Bank in Barnsdall, Oklahoma.

Previous Events

Visitation

JUL 16. 9:00 AM - 8:00 PM (CT)

Stumpff-Barnsdall Chapel
108 S 7th
Barnsdall, OK 74002
<http://www.stumpff.org>

Visitation

JUL 17. 9:00 AM - 8:00 PM (CT)

Stumpff-Barnsdall Chapel
108 S 7th
Barnsdall, OK 74002
<http://www.stumpff.org>

Celebration of Life

JUL 18. 10:00 AM (CT)

Barnsdall School Football Field
Barnsdall , OK 74002

Tribute Wall



“ *Mr. Joe Olen Gilbert*

October 23, 2023 at 04:40 AM



“ *Mr. Joe Olen Gilbert*

October 06, 2023 at 03:15 PM



“ *I played on Gilbert's '72 and '73 varsity basketball and softball teams. Between my sophomore and junior year i developed serious health issues and could no longer participate in sports. I was devastated because I loved playing and my sister was coming up as a freshman and we were looking forward to playing two years together. Gilbert knew how devastated and disappointed I was about not being able to play and asked me if I would set on the bench and keep the shot chart for both the girls and boys teams. I kept it every game home or away my junior and senior years. It meant the world to me to be a small part of the teams and it meant everything to me that Gilbert asked me to do it. It is a gesture I will never forget and I am forever grateful to Gilbert for his kindness and concern. He was a wonderful man and will be greatly missed.*

Gilbert once told me he was afraid I would starve to death if anything ever happened to my right hand. I still can't dribble a basketball left handed. ❤️

Cindy (Gentry) Townley - July 19, 2020 at 10:09 PM

BD

“ My story began 61 years ago in June of 1959 when we moved to Barnsdall. I was 14 years old. I was standing on the steps of the Methodist Church with Lena Watkins when Gilbert ran by with several of his students. Lena, pointing to Gilbert, remarked what a young dynamic coach Barnsdall had recently hired. My only thought was WHAT A HUNK! Everyone was in love with Gilbert, and I quickly joined his fan club and summer program. My days consisted of playing full court basketball for 3 hours each morning, swimming in the afternoon where Gilbert was the lifeguard, and playing in a softball game in the evening. What a perfect life!

Gilbert decided that the jump shot was the future for women so he had me pioneer mine. The move proved rewarding. Dorothy Jane Moore was a valuable mentor plus my 50 lifts with an iron skillet each evening strengthened my wrist.

Of all the things I learned from Gilbert, the most important one was that you can always get better. Gilbert had a way of making you believe in yourself not with empty praise but by showing you your improvements after his rigorous drills. For the forwards at the end of each practice, we had to shoot 500 free throws with an 80% accuracy. Dividing my shots into groups of 10 made the time fly. (We actually beat a far superior team to ours in the regional playoffs one year. Gilbert had us stall the ball at the beginning of the second half. It worked. Their height advantage disappeared and our 90% free throw accuracy kept us ahead by the final buzzer.) For the guards there were grueling drills up and down stairs. For all of us, the screening out drills to control the boards were laced with promises to buy anyone a free milk shake who could knock her opponent to the floor. Gilbert's rules for winning were simple. Play your own game. (He liked to take the high percentage shot and not be a run and shoot team.) Have a free throw accuracy of 80%. And control the boards.

My final game my senior year ended in a bitter one point loss. As always, Gilbert had just the right words for me as we cried our way

home. He said most players who peak early never surpass that early peak. He thought that would prove to be my pattern. But I proved him wrong and just got better. Those words have gotten me through many disappointments. It's not the number of wins that satisfies but the journey or process and having fun along the way.

*Barbara (Wylie) Delaney
1963*

Barbara (Wylie) Delaney - July 19, 2020 at 06:01 PM

PS

“*Coach Gilbert was a great man. He taught me so much. I learned what respect, dedication and hard work can do. Not just in sports but in life. I talked to my daughters about “My Coach” while they were growing up, and still do about what an awesome coach and person he was!!! He’ll always be in my heart an memories. He was definitely my lifeline in high school and I’ll be forever great full to him for seeing me and accepting me and never giving up on me. I got to see him a few years ago and there he was still sweeping the old gym floor. Man, I love you coach Gilbert. Rest In Peace. You deserve it 🙏🙏. Paula Sorenson (Vickers)*

paula sorenson - July 18, 2020 at 11:28 AM

JM

“*Coach Gilbert had a tremendous impact in my life as a player and person. After my car wreck he and Joyce visited me and he told me I could keep stats for him when I got out of the hospital. The day I got out I went to Caney Valley and kept stats and did that for the season. I'm forever grateful he let me do that as I healed. It meant more to me than he realized. He was a great coach and man.*

Jerri Moore - July 18, 2020 at 11:01 AM

JD

“ John Delaney purchased the Peaceful White Lilies Basket for the family of Mr. Joe Olen Gilbert.



John Delaney - July 17, 2020 at 09:05 PM

BB

“ Joe will always be in our hearts. I always think of the fabulous 4 that came to Barnsdall in 1953 and 1954. Mr. Bake, Miss Logue, Mr. Vann and coach Gilbert. I think they came by . Vann and coach Gilbert. I think they they came to town in a Greyhound bus with only a one way ticket. The bus system went out of business and they were stuck here in town, much to our betterment of our school system. We say good-by to Gilbert Saturday. He will be missed but not forgotten.

Bill Bell - July 17, 2020 at 10:24 AM

C(

“ Great coach and a great person. I will always cherish the many years that I spent watching his teams compete. A classy man as well as a man of dignity and class.

C.J. Riley (Cecil) - July 17, 2020 at 09:41 AM

MM

“ A great coach and teacher. A good friend as we worked together. Joe was Barnsdall Athletics. Worked his own fields, refinished both gym floors, never ceasing to get the job done. His nicknames for kids were fun, his under his breath sayings hysterical. You just had to sit by him once on the bench to get a good dose of humor. Very seldom did he question a call by umpires or referees and if he did it was a bad bad one. Never loud though. There aren't words to say what this man did for Barnsdall athletics. He will be missed.

mary mason - July 15, 2020 at 04:57 PM

DB

A great coach and long time friend. He will be greatly missed. Don Brisbin

Don Brisbin - July 16, 2020 at 07:19 PM

BS

I remember the first time I met Gilbert. We had just moved to Barnsdall and I was at the old tennis courts playing basketball when who walked up but Joe Gilbert. We talked for a while and played a bit of basketball and I was hooked. I had the opportunity/ priviledge to play basketball and softball for three years as a Barnsdall Panther. I know without a doubt that Gilbert helped me receive a scholarship to play ball at Seminole Junior College and then at Wayland Baptist College. Upon graduation from college I was able to do my intern teaching at Barnsdall and helped Gilbert Coach Softball and Basketball. I learned a lot about coaching and life from this great man. Thanks Gilbert! You are a legend and no one will ever be able to match the accomplishments you have achieved. Joyce thanks for sharing him with us all these years. I am proud to say that you and Gilbert are my friends!

Becky Shaw-Cole

Becky Shaw-Cole - July 19, 2020 at 11:02 AM



“ *Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum was purchased for the family of Mr. Joe Olen Gilbert.*



July 15, 2020 at 04:54 PM



“ *Love's Journey was purchased for the family of Mr. Joe Olen Gilbert.*



July 15, 2020 at 04:36 PM



“ *Heaven gained an Angel this morning. COACH JOE GILBERT My heart ❤️ is just broken. We meet people in our lives that just become a part of our hearts. Joe Gilbert was that guy that was always one that could make you laugh, smile and just feel good even when he was beating you at your own game on the field or off Gilbert was a man that earned his wings long ago. However today you took your Journey Home. Joe was Barnsdall athletics. He wore every hat including just cleaning gym floor. Your Gilbertisms will remain with me always. You sir FLY HIGH NOW! Hall of Fame coach and Hall of Fame Guy. Prayer to his family and all of us that coached against him or watched his teams pulling for Joe to win. You were a great friend and mentor. This coach will miss you.*

Ronda Williams - July 15, 2020 at 12:25 AM

RC

I remember my 10 years teaching in Barnsdall and Joe Gilbert was such a part of those memories. He live just 2 houses up the hill from the teach rage in which I lived. My fondest Gilbert ism was when I passed through the gym during girls' basketball practice when one of the girls complained about being cold. His response..."If you're cold, you're not running fast enough". Fly high and spread those wings my frl end

Rose Coon - July 17, 2020 at 12:56 AM

CB

I'm not from Barnsdall, but I know I can speak for all coaches who ever shared a field or court with Coach Gilbert, he was a highly respected man, a real legend in his own time. Coach Gilbert set a standard that few will ever reach ... any state in America! Joe finished the good race.

Coach - East of Barnadall - August 03, 2020 at 06:37 PM