



John R. Johnson Class of 2009

John R. Johnson possessed many above average attributes. It is difficult to say which one was his best. He was a consummate authority in many areas. He was a professional ball player, teacher, administrator, coach and father. He and his wife, Mary, had six children, all of whom graduated from Oroville High School.

John completed high school at Shasta in Redding. He enrolled at Chico State College, and graduated in '48 with a teaching degree in Physical Education. He also garnered counseling and administrative credentials at Chico.

His athletic endeavors at CSU included football, baseball, basketball and track. He spent a summer in AAA baseball with the San Francisco Seals of the Pacific Coast League.

He came to Oroville High School in '49. He spent two years in the Army Air Force. John quickly became an inspirational leader at the campus he loved. His dedication to OHS lasted for 34 working years. He became the Principal, and he strove constantly to better the school environment.

During his first years at OHS, John coached Junior Varsity Football. After Joe Felipe stopped coaching Tiger football, John took over the Varsity duties. Accompanying him to the Varsity were players he had coached as JV's. All told, John coached that group of players four consecutive years. According to Don Selby of the San Francisco Examiner, by the end of the '55 schedule of games, the record was spotless. They never lost. Coach Johnson's Tiger teams for those four seasons won 36 and lost none. The '55 Tiger Varsity was ranked atop the Class AA standings that featured teams from Berkeley, Santa Rosa, Sacramento, Palo Alto, Modesto and more. The Tigers were the top team among Northern California large schools.

In '59, John was given the highest honor for a high school football coach when he was chosen to lead two Northern California all-star high school teams. He coached the Shrine game in Los Angeles and the Optimist game in Sacramento.

As the Tiger varsity baseball coach, John had great success. He mentored future professional ball players Tommy Brown, Dean Andoe and four time World Series participant Gary Nolan.

Nolan said, "You know I loved John. I looked up to him even back when he was playing first base for the Oroville Olives. What he did for players like Larry Heath, Dean Andoe, Danny Wilson and me, you just can't measure that."

OHS Counselor Barbara Little said, "John R. Johnson knew about all of the programs at his school, Special Education, Title I, and Indian Education. John took an interest in all students, and knew most of them by name. As a Principal he did whatever was needed to take care of students, parents, and staff."

Among those John hired was Charlotte Ross. She worked for OHS for over 33 years and said, "Johnny was always available to help anyone that needed help. I was blessed to have known him and called him my friend and boss."

For his final year at OHS, Principal Johnson wrote a touching piece for the Class of '83 graduation ceremony that included the words, "While I am not a graduate of Oroville High School, I am honored and proud to have had the opportunity to work here for the past 34 years."