

John Edward Dykstra

1939–2021

John Edward Dykstra, a 1959 graduate of the South Dakota School for the Deaf and a member of the South Dakota Association of the Deaf Hall of Fame, passed away in 2021. His life included a career in printing, a lasting involvement in deaf sports, and family ties that took him from South Dakota to Missouri and the southeastern United States.



John was born on April 7, 1939, in Garretson, South Dakota, where he was raised. He attended the South Dakota School for the Deaf from 1946 to 1959, distinguishing himself in basketball and track. On the basketball court, he became known for his scoring ability, thoughtful playmaking, and leadership. As team captain, he earned his teammates' respect and encouraged the cooperation and determination that helped his teams succeed.



1957-1958 SDSD Basketball season

Standing from L to R: James Still, Russ O'Neill, Arnold Fonder, Dennis Hoppe, Ken Merrill, Coach Henry Bjorlie Jr., John Dykstra, Ken Herrick, Arnold Stevens, Darrell White Eagle, and Dennis Smith.
Kneeling: Robert Carl, manager.

In 1957, John helped SDSD reach the District 18 basketball championship final under Coach Clyde Ketchum. He earned recognition on the Silent News All-American second team in 1958 and advanced to the first team in 1959, becoming the second SDSD player to receive that honor. During his final season, he scored 440 points and averaged 23.2 points per game, the third-highest average among schools and programs for the deaf nationwide. That year, SDSD also brought home a fourth-place trophy from the District 18 tournament.

John also excelled in track. In 1957, he joined Harvey Hofwalt, Dean Reefe, and Rusty O'Neill to win the Class C 880-yard relay title at the Howard Wood Dakota Relays at Viking Stadium. The foursome also helped bring the Little Sioux Conference track championship home to SDSD.



1957 Relay Champions

Left to right: Harvey Hofwalt, John Dykstra, Dean Reefe, and Rusty O'Neill.

Class C 880-yard relay winners at the 1957 Howard Wood Dakota Relays.

Photo: Argus-Leader

After graduation, John began his printing career in Bryant, South Dakota. He later worked briefly in Springfield before spending about three years in Elk Point. His career eventually took him to a federal agency in the St. Louis area during the 1970s and 1980s. He later worked for 3M until his retirement.

John married Ruth Ann Griggs on August 8, 1964, and the couple made their home in Hallsville, Missouri. Together, they raised three children: Samuel, Joyce, and David. In the early 2000s, they moved to Georgia and later South Carolina because of Ruth's health needs. Through their years away, they maintained friendships and connections with their South Dakota community.

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John's interest in athletics continued into adulthood. He played for the Columbia deaf team for years and served as a Midwest Association of the Deaf softball tournament chairman when the tournament was held in Columbia, Missouri.

In 2000, John was inducted into the South Dakota Association of the Deaf Hall of Fame in recognition of his outstanding basketball career. The honor celebrated both his individual achievements and the leadership that made him an important part of SDSD's athletic history.

John was survived by his wife, Ruth, and their children, Samuel, Joyce, and David. His story holds a lasting place in the SDSD alumni community—as a talented athlete, a respected team captain, and an alumnus whose connections to South Dakota endured across the years.



SDSD STUDENTS LEARN TRADE WHILE PRINTING NEWSPAPER
Argus Leader - Sunday October 26, 1958 page 34
Arnold Fonder, Sissteon, (background) and John Dykstra, Sioux Falls, set type on the school's two linotype machines.