

[https://www.waxahachiesun.com/obituaries/john-j-d-centilli-1929-2024/article\\_60993fb4-a1de-11ef-b553-c3be8c7beb47.html](https://www.waxahachiesun.com/obituaries/john-j-d-centilli-1929-2024/article_60993fb4-a1de-11ef-b553-c3be8c7beb47.html)

## John "J.D." Centilli : 1929-2024

Nov 13, 2024



**John "J.D." Centilli**

**Oct. 31, 1929-Nov. 7, 2024**

On Nov. 7, 2024, J. D. Centilli departed for his eternal home surrounded by his loving family. He made an extraordinary difference in the lives of others as a husband, father, friend, coach, teacher, mentor, community leader, and transformative thinker. J.D. will be remembered by everyone who knows him for his unfailing commitment to the service of others.

Athletics, particularly the game of football, was a great part of J.D. Centilli's life since childhood. He coached football for a total of 17 seasons and was an innovator in every aspect of the sport. He was a pioneer in areas such as strength training, speed and agility training, and on-the-field clock management. Coach Centilli engineered and built his own training equipment, including weights and weight machines, either because they didn't yet exist or because the school couldn't afford to buy them.

Throughout his career, he has coached football, track, baseball, and basketball. Coach Centilli was universally loved by his players, respected by his peers, and feared by his opponents. The Corpus Christie Caller-Times once said of him – "Centilli is one of those coaches that parents of impressionable youngsters dream about- With principles so high they are possibly only exceeded by those of his minister."

J.D. was born in Del Rio, Texas, to F.L. and Mary Centilli on Oct. 31, 1929, just two days after the Great Depression began. He grew up a child of the Depression, working on the family farm with his parents, his sister Florine, and his five brothers: Bill, Junior, Frank, Gerald, and Pat. His love for athletics started early. J.D. ran track and played basketball and football, where he was a four-year letterman and all-district fullback and linebacker. J.D. received the VFW award for outstanding ability and fine sportsmanship, as well as the K.D.L.K. Watch award given annually to Del Rio's outstanding athlete.

After graduation, J.D. attended Texas A&M University, where he was a member of the Corps of Cadets and E-1 Athletics and was a member of the Aggie football team for 4 years, playing end under A&M coaches Harry Stitler and Ray George. He also played competitive handball at A&M with his favorite doubles partner, longtime friend, and Aggie teammate and quarterback, Dick Gardemal.

After receiving his degree in Physical Education in 1952, J.D. served two years as an Officer in the United States Air Force with the 646th Air Squadron at The Highlands Air Force Station in New Jersey, for which he received the National Defense Service Medal. After his discharge in 1956, he Returned to A&M, where he obtained a master's degree in education and met his bride-to-be, Pauline Malazzo.

After graduation, J. D. began his twin vocations of family man and educator, roles that would define the rest of his life. He entered the world of high school coaching as an assistant line coach at Hearne for two years, where he also coached baseball and junior high basketball, as well as taught history and physical education. In 1959, J.D.'s longtime friend from college, Billy Bates, hired him as an assistant coach for the George West Longhorns.

Centilli was promoted to head coach in 1960 when Coach Bates left for the head job at Cameron High School. Coach Centilli burst on the scene in his debut season, taking his team to the State Quarter Finals with a 12-1 record. Not satisfied with his gridiron achievements, he married the love of his life, Pauline, on June 18th of that year.

Before he finished at George West, Coach Centilli compiled a record of 45-10-2 and had led the Longhorns to multiple district championships, the Quarter Finals in 1960 and the State Finals in 1963, and had two new sons, Doug and Jeff.

At the end of the 1964 season, J.D. accepted the position of head football coach and athletic director in Weslaco, Texas, where he worked to build a sense of loyalty and tradition that turned the Panthers into a perennial Rio Grande Valley powerhouse that won multiple district championships. He and Pauline also saw the birth of their third son, Greg.

In 1973, J.D. and Pauline moved their family to Alvin, Texas, where J.D. was named the new Yellowjacket Head Football Coach. He Coached the Yellowjackets for two seasons when he again got the call from his longtime friend Billy Bates to hang up his whistle to become Assistant Superintendent of Schools at Waxahachie ISD, where, among other things, he oversaw the design and construction of many new school campuses to meet the demand of a rapidly growing population. J.D. would hold this position until he retired in 1991.

After retirement, he worked on his land outside of Waxahachie, spending many hours on his tractor or in the barn welding whatever invention was on his mind that day. He loved taking care of his peach orchard. Always an avid woodworker, J.D.'s favorite projects were building fine furniture, mantle clocks, and thousands of crosses, which he would give to everyone he met.

Coach Centilli was a Member of the Board of the Texas High School Football Coaches Association, unanimously named Coach of the Year by the Rio Grande Valley Sportswriters in 1970, and Inducted into the Coastal Bend Coaches Association Hall of Honor in 2000.

He was a long-time member of The Knights of Columbus, a member of St Joseph's Catholic Church in Waxahachie since 1975, and was also a long-time member of the Lions Club, serving as president of the Waxahachie Lions Club in 1986. Above all else, J.D. was most proud of Pauline, his wife of 64 years, and their three sons.

J.D. is survived by his loving wife of nearly 65 years, Pauline Centilli, and his three devoted sons, Doug Centilli, Jeff Centilli, and Greg Centilli, his brother Pat Centilli and his wife Martha, his sister-in-law Tim Centilli, and numerous nieces and nephews from both the Centilli and Malazzo families.

The visitation will be Thursday, Nov. 14, at the Boze Mitchell McKibbin Funeral Home, located at 511 W. Main Street, Waxahachie, Texas 75165, from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 pm. Visitation will be preceded by a rosary at 5:30 pm. A Mass of Christian burial will be held at the St Joseph's Catholic Church at 600 W. Marvin, Waxahachie, Texas 75165, on Friday, Nov. 15, at 2:00 pm. Interment will follow at the Waxahachie City Cemetery. A reception will follow the graveside service at the Knight of Columbus Hall located at 325 Broadhead Road, Waxahachie, Texas 75165.

In lieu of flowers, please donate to either the Alzheimer's Foundation of America or the Saint Joseph's Waxahachie building fund.