

John A. Pfitsch

6-21-2012



John A. Pfitsch, 92, died surrounded by his loving family on Friday, June 15, 2012, at the Mayflower Community Health Care Center in Grinnell, Iowa.

A celebration of John's life will be held at 11:00 am on Saturday, June 30, 2012, at Herrick Chapel on the Grinnell College Campus in Grinnell. Interment was in Hazelwood Cemetery in Grinnell.

Memorial contributions may be sent to Grinnell College in memory of John A. Pfitsch. Memories and condolences may be shared with his family on the Grinnell College web page: www.grinnell.edu or at www.smithfh.com.

John's twin passions for people and Grinnell College along with his fearless approach to life and to sports, built a loyal network of friends throughout the world. He loved pitting himself and his teams against all odds, and he succeeded regularly in every arena he entered. He delighted in organizing teams (varsity, intramural, and community) like the Pflugerville Pflashes, which he created in every place he lived. His lath art creations of his favorite Grinnell buildings can be found throughout the city, and his ability as a teller of the tales of his life is legendary.

One of John's favorite stories of his life begins, "I was born in India." His father, Dr. Alfred Pfitsch Jr. and mother, Eva Margaret (Williams) Pfitsch, were missionaries of the Lutheran church. John was born in Miraj, India, on October 28, 1919, and raised in Texas: San Antonio, Fort Davis, and Pflugerville, where he played every sport and learned to swim at the YMCA. YMCA camp was his home in the summer. As a counselor, he learned the basics of coaching and physical education on which he relied throughout his life.

He graduated from Pflugerville High School in 1936 and attended Texas Lutheran College before transferring to the University of Texas at Austin in 1938 where he organized the first Pflugerville Pflashes intramural team. After graduating from Texas in 1940, he went to the University of Kansas and as a graduate student coached freshman basketball among other teaching responsibilities under legendary Phog Allen. He received his Masters Degree in Physical Education before being drafted into the U.S. Army in March of 1942. He served in the 35th Division in France where he reached the rank of captain. World War II experiences formed the core of many of his favorite stories. In the fall of 1945, John returned to the University of Kansas where he served as Phog Allen's first assistant coach in the '45-'46 basketball season. While he was at Kansas University, he met his life partner, Emily Hollis. They were married on August 3, 1946, and moved to Fremont, Nebraska, where John had been hired as coach of all sports at Midland College.

In September 1948, John had the very good fortune to be hired as head basketball and tennis coach and assistant football coach at Grinnell College. Over the years, he coached almost every sport and his name became synonymous with Grinnell athletics. He became athletic director in 1953, started the baseball program in 1957, and ended his long career by coaching soccer for 23 years. In addition to many seasons, records, and championships in basketball and soccer, John was justifiably proud of his role in instituting women's sports during his long tenure as athletic director.

John's contributions helped shape the Grinnell community as well. In the early 1970s, he was county chair of the Democratic Party. He started the Grinnell Country Club swim program and taught countless young people to swim. He was on the Parks and Recreation board and recently served on the steering committee for the new Grinnell aquatic center. For many years, he ran Pfitsch's Pfishes, a water aerobics program for both women and men in the community.

John is survived by his wife of 65 years, Emily A. Pfitsch of Grinnell; his children, Jack Pfitsch of Gays Mills, Wisconsin, Connie Vanderhyden of Viroqua, Wisconsin, and Bill Pfitsch of Clinton, New York; and 7 grandchildren, Hollis Pfitsch, Woody Pfitsch, Sam Vanderhyden, Jane Pfitsch, Will Vanderhyden, Max Vanderhyden, and Jacob Pfitsch. He was preceded in death by his parents and his sister, Adele Hamilton.

Obituaries



Record 6-21-2012

JOHN PFITSCH

Long-time Grinnell College coach and faculty member, John Pfitsch, 92, passed away June 15 at the Mayflower Care Center, Grinnell. John was born Oct. 28, 1919.

Beginning in 1948, John and Pioneer athletics were synonymous. He coached in virtually every sport during a 50-year career and even in retirement directed the men's soccer program and his beloved Pfitsch's Pfishes. In addition to many seasons, records, and championships in basketball and soccer John also was justifiably proud of his role in instituting women's sports during his long tenure as athletic director.

After graduating from the University of Texas, Pfitsch earned his M.A. in physical education and assisted famous Coach Phog Allen at the University of Kansas before and after service in World War II. At Grinnell he helped obtain a \$2.2 million federal loan and headed the planning committee for construction of the former Physical Education Complex, where the fieldhouse was named in his honor.

A memorial service for John Pfitsch will be held June 30, at 11 a.m. in Herrick Chapel.

John A. Pfitsch

John A. Pfitsch, 92, of Grinnell, died on Friday, June 15, 2012, at the Mayflower Community Health Care Center.

A memorial service will be held 11 a.m., Saturday, June 30, at Herrick Chapel on the Grinnell College campus.

Memories and condolences may be shared with his family at www.smithfh.com.

6-18-2012