



## Mr. John Joseph Iribarren

June 22, 1939 - January 19, 2026

John J. Iribarren, former coach and educator at Mission College Preparatory Catholic High School and baseball, basketball, and football official, died at his home in San Luis Obispo on January 19, 2026. He was 86.

Born to John T. and Shirley (Nealon) Iribarren in Marysville, Calif. in 1939, John picked prunes and hauled hay for Spangler Brothers before graduating from East Nicolaus High School in 1957. He then moved to San Luis Obispo to study soil science at Cal Poly, where he was a member of Kappa Chi and played trumpet in the Collegians, the university's dance band.

John dedicated his career to Mission Prep from 1962 to 2012. From his days as a bat boy for his father's fastpitch softball team, through to his time as a guard and defensive end for his high school basketball and football teams, John embarked on a 28-year career as a collegiate football official, primarily in the Western Athletic Conference. He was also selected 15 times to call NCAA Division I bowl games. He realized a lifelong dream in 1996 when he officiated a game at Notre Dame, working the sideline in front of Irish head coach Lou Holtz.

John retired from active officiating in 2019 at the age of 80, but, never able to rest, continued as an observer of local officials afterwards. He was an assigner for several high school sports for the Northern Channel Coast

Officials Association (now Los Padres Officials Association) for more than 20 years and received a Distinguished Service Award from the CIF-Southern Section in 2009 for his lifetime of work.

One of John's final games was a freshman football contest between Righetti and Paso Robles high schools in October 2019. The seven-man crew from the Los Padres Football Officials Association had over 280 years of experience combined on the field. Working that day with John, the line judge, were Jerry Mrozek (referee), Mike Ostini (umpire), Tom Lake (head linesman), Garold Shaffer (side judge), Jim Gin (back judge) and Bobby Kennedy (field judge).

John coached the Day Lions to a pair of San Luis Obispo Babe Ruth League city championships and served as league president in the early 1970s. He also served on numerous tournament committees charged with conducting state and regional all-star tournaments held in SLO Stadium and assigned the umpires. John coached baseball at both Mission Prep and Laguna Middle School for many years.

In 2024, John was honored as the California Coaches Association Official of the Year. "I wanted to stay in sports. I wanted to keep working with the kids. I got my start officiating Sunday fraternity flag football games at Cal Poly," he said a month prior to the ceremony in Fresno. "We have all lost a great friend and better person," said fellow football official Cal Evans. "I always referred to him as 'Mr. Integrity.'"

John married his wife, Thelma, in 1982, joining a loving family as a caring stepfather. Some knew him as "coach," "JJJ," or "sir," but to two he was simply "grandpa," eminently proud and a dutiful chauffeur to piano lessons and observer of basketball games. He sought to be honorable and to do his best always, but he did not yearn endlessly for more. He built a deep community in

San Luis Obispo, earning others' respect effortlessly along the way. As he put it when inducted into the Mission College Prep Hall of Fame in 2022, he strove for three things — to be firm, fair, and consistent.

John was predeceased by his parents, his sister and brother-in-law Sandra and Tony Ott, and his stepson Vernon Wise. He is survived by his wife, Thelma; stepchildren Kendra Allison (Denzel) and Daren Wise (Missy); grandchildren, Zachary O'Hagan and Kelsey O'Hagan; step-grandson, Andrew Allison; and siblings Sharon Thoming (Jim) and Michael Iribarren (Jane).

Any and all who knew John are warmly welcome to attend a memorial service in his honor on Friday, February 20, 2026 at 3:30 p.m. in the Mission Prep gymnasium. A barbecue at the school will follow the service.

# Previous Events

## Celebration of Life

FEB **20**. 3:30 PM - 6:30 PM (PT)

Mission College Preparatory  
682 Palm St.  
San Luis Obispo, CA 93401

# Tribute Wall

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“ *Mission Athletic Foundation (Boosters) purchased the Ocean Breeze Spray for the family of Mr. John Joseph Iribarren.*



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**Mission Athletic Foundation (Boosters)** - February 10 at 08:59 PM

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“ *Mission Athletic Foundation (Boosters) planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Mr. John Joseph Iribarren.*

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**Mission Athletic Foundation (Boosters)** - February 10 at 08:59 PM