

Longtime educator, John Rivas, dies at 77

Former coach, administrator driven to excellence by hard work, commitment.

By **GAYLE PEREZ**
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

Hard work and a commitment to excellence are what drove John Rivas as an athlete, educator, coach, administrator and strong family man.

"He knew from the onset that you had to work for what you wanted," said Rivas' sister, Hilda Gallegos. "He knew you could reach for the sky and be a risk-taker, but if you really wanted to get things done, you had to set your goals and never give up. That's something our mom and dad taught us early on and that's how JR lived his life."

Rivas died Sunday after a sudden illness. He was 77.

The youngest of three children born to immigrant parents, Lorenzo from Mexico and Marie from Italy, Rivas grew up in the ethnically rich, blue-collar Bessemer neighborhood.

"He was the youngest, so he could have his way in whatever he wanted," Gallegos said. "But he also knew the value of hard work. That was something that was instilled in all of us by our parents."

"Everything he did, he did his best," Gallegos said. "JR was always striving for excellence."

Rivas took that same work ethic with him to Central High School where, despite his small stature, he was a highly regarded football player and wrestler for the Wildcats.

"For being such a little guy, John had a reputation of being an outstanding football player at Central," said Edmund Vallejo,

retired District 60 superintendent.

After he graduated from Central in 1952, Rivas went to attend Pueblo Junior College and graduated from Colorado State College.

He taught social studies at Central and coached football and wrestling for the Wildcats.

"He was tough as a coach. He didn't like to lose and he was a very strong disciplinarian. He was also a great motivator," said Fred Rodriguez, who wrestled under Rivas and later worked with him at Central.

Retired longtime Central coach and administrator Pete Falletta said as a coach and teacher, Rivas had a reputation of being tough, but compassionate.

"As a coach, even for his stature, he was tough. Even the big guys, the linemen, listened to him and had a lot of respect for him," said Falletta. "But he also had a big heart and would do anything to help kids."

Vallejo said Rivas was a loyal man who cared deeply about his students and his athletes.

"At times, he could be tough, but he was committed to the success of all kids," said Vallejo. "Yet, he also had a compassionate heart."

Rivas later would move into administration as principal at Central and finished his 36-year career as executive director of student activities for the district.



John Rivas

As the district's athletic director, Rivas played a major part in convincing the Colorado High School Activities Association to bring several state championship events to Pueblo, including track and field, cross country, tennis, basketball, baseball and golf.

"Those guys (CHSAA) knew that with John in charge, it would be a good event," said Falletta. "He took a lot of pride in putting on the events, and he did it well."

Vallejo said "anytime John put on an event, you knew it was going to be a well-organized, professionally-done event. Whatever he did, he did with class."

Rivas also was a highly respected softball player who was known for his toughness on the field.

This summer, he was inducted in the Pueblo Softball Hall of Fame. He also is a member of the Greater Pueblo Sports Hall of Fame and the Colorado High School Hall of Fame.

Although his heart was in education and coaching, Rivas also dabbled in business. In 1976, he partnered with Falletta and Bobby Diaz to open Los Tres Mexican food restaurant in

the Pueblo Mall.

Rivas' son runs the restaurant today.

Family also was a center of Rivas' life. He and his wife of 56 years, Clara, raised five children.

Gallegos said her brother instilled his work ethic, drive and compassion in his children as well as his grandchildren, nieces, nephews and other relatives.

Following his retirement, Rivas remained committed to Central High School.

He was instrumental in getting the Central Foundation started and played a key part in fundraising and supporting his alma mater any way he could.

"John was Mr. Central," said Rodriguez. "He lived for the blue and white. He's going to be sadly missed."

Rivas is survived by his wife, five children, Louise, John Jr., Ronald, Gary and Gerald, numerous grandchildren and his siblings Carmen Rivas and Hilda Gallegos.

A funeral Mass is scheduled at 10 a.m. Friday at Holy Family Catholic Church. Angelus Chapel is handling the funeral services.

gperez@chieftain.com

PARTY AMERICA 4430 Dillon Dr. 546-8690

IT'S LOU LOU TIME!

QUALITY IS A BIG DEAL

Kubota Summer Sales Event

\$0 DOWN AND 0% FINANCING FOR 5 YEARS*

Quality is always a big deal at Kubota. This summer take advantage of our big deal financing on the top quality Kubota TLB Series. Hurry! Offer ends September 30, 2010.

Rusler Implement

Edgemoor 948-3338 Rocky Ford 254-7842

Kubota