



## James "Jim" Milton Miller

November 29, 1931 - July 1, 2021

James Milton "Jim" Miller was born November 29, 1931, in Hichita, Oklahoma, to William Hamlin and Mary Leona Lamb Miller. Hichita is located between Henryetta and Checotah in McIntosh County. The Millers had their own farm operation for many years, and Jim was the second oldest of six children. He was a quiet, shy, tall, lanky kid, but a hard worker on the farm, and grew to be 6-feet and 7-inches tall! He only played one year of high school basketball, and that wasn't anything to "write home about," as he was a late bloomer, but he actually achieved a lot of success in high school as a baseball player, and was said to be a pretty amazing hitter. So, when it came to the future that he was soon to have in basketball, he was somewhat of a late bloomer, and quite the unexpected success story. After graduating from Hichita High School in 1949, Jim Miller attended Oklahoma A&M College in Stillwater for a semester, with designs on playing basketball for legendary Coach Henry Iba and his nationally-ranked program. The fit was not quite perfect for the shy country boy from McIntosh County, and he was eventually lured away from "big city life" to Connors Junior College in Warner, Oklahoma, where he would play basketball for two years under Iba disciple Bobby Jack Rogers. What followed was a five-year reign of hoops dominance for a group of Oklahoma country boys that would become legendary on its own. The Connors squad made very deep runs in the National Junior College Tournament in both years at Warner, not quite winning the championship, but coming very close and making a significant mark from 1950-1952. So much so, that East Texas State University in Commerce, Texas (now Texas A&M Commerce), came seeking Coach Rogers and some of his boys, as well as a couple of other Oklahoma JUCO players, to infuse some life into the Lions' program, and they did just that. Along with JUCO teammates Clarence Lynch, Wayne Mulkey, and Glynn Stevens, as well as Okmulgee Tech star and future Texas A&M coach Shelby Metcalf, Miller was able to shine under Coach Rogers for three years at the Lone Star Conference school. JUCO transfers had three years of eligibility in the Lone Star in those days, and the group took full advantage. After quarterfinal and semi-final appearances in 1953 and 1954, the Lions won the NAIA National Championship in Kansas City in 1955, steamrolling the competition the entire way, and defeating Southeastern Oklahoma in the championship game 71-54. Jim Miller scored 29 points in that game, and was named the tournament MVP. In spite of that high-

scoring game, his calling card was defense and rebounding, staples of the Iba "system." His name continues to dot the record books both at Commerce and in the national tournament archives in rebounding statistics, averaging 14 of those per game for his career, and if they had tallied blocked shots in those days, he might still remain at the top of that statistic. He was named to the NAIA All-America team multiple times, and was one of the original inductees into the East Texas State University Athletic Hall of Fame. He was a Helms Foundation All-American and in 1972 was named as one of the 10 "first-team" members of the All-Time NAIA Team for the years of 1950-1970. His induction in Kansas City came about with NBA stars Willis Reed, Lucious Jackson, and Dick Barnett at his side. Jim Miller flirted with thoughts of the NBA, and there was certainly interest in him as well. George Mikan of the Minneapolis Lakers and Red Auerbach of the Boston Celtics were keyed in on his talents, but the NBA was not a "behemoth" in those days, as it has become today, with less than 10 teams and a brutal travel schedule, and Miller decided not to pursue any draft rights that anyone might have had by signing a contract. In his words, he could make more money farming cotton in Arizona than playing basketball in Minneapolis, and so that's what he did! After he began school at Connors, most of the Miller and Lamb families were moving to southeastern Arizona to farm cotton, and that is where he went during summers and after receiving his master's degree in Agriculture Education from East Texas in 1955. The entire decade of the 50s was devoted to the Arizona sun and a prosperous farm life, and then the family moved to the Stratford, Oklahoma, area in 1960. In this time, Miller began raising beef cattle at the home place one mile north of Gaar Corner, where he lived with his parents. He and his father, Bill Miller, also began a custom Bermuda grass sprigging business that saw great success around south-central Oklahoma for over 30 years. For several years, his cousin, Walt Lamb, was a partner in the sprigging business, and the family employed Norman Bolin and his sons Dean and Boyd Bolin during a great majority of that time. It has been said that hardly a sprig of Bermuda grass within a 60-mile radius of Ada was not planted by those men! During this time, he also spent a few years in the early-mid 60s working for the Ada office of the Soil Conservation Service, working on projects in the area that would maximize use of farmland while controlling erosion and other environmental factors that would hamper area soil. This went hand-in-hand with the development of his and his father's Bermuda grass sprigging business. Many times they worked government contracts, planting grass on new highway construction as well as flood control structures. During the 1960s, Miller not only took up team roping, but he also met his future wife, the former Hazel Marie Biggs, of Pickett, Oklahoma, and they were married June 13, 1967, in Kingston, Oklahoma. In between her careers of teaching and working for DHS, Hazel was a stay-at-home Mom to their children James Alan, born in 1968, and Marianne, born in 1974. Hazel Miller passed away on Oct. 30, 2018. His team roping prowess almost equaled that of the basketball days for a solid 15-20 year period. Miller roped in the

International Pro Rodeo Association, and qualified at the International Finals Rodeo in Tulsa for the first 10 years of the organization's existence, which, at the time in 1980 when Miller retired from the rodeo circuit, was the all-time record for consecutive appearances. He finished runner-up in the final year standings on two occasions (1972 and 1974), and was a partner and friend to so many legendary Oklahoma cowboys, first and foremost Jim and Rick Rutherford, who won multiple championships between them and lived just a few miles away in Center, Oklahoma. In the early 1980s, while oil was busting and tennis was booming, the Millers built a new home one mile north of Gaar Corner, next to the house where his parents lived. Before the home could be completed, a tennis court was built, with lights and everything, and a basketball goal on one end. Jim Miller had taken up tennis in his 50s, and he was able to scratch the "competitive itch" in that way after retiring from full-time rodeo, entering the Hard Rock tournaments in Ada on several occasions, and playing doubles with local friends for several years. He continued to enter into jackpot team roping events and kept up some of his cowboy ways up through his early 70s, before finally selling all of his cattle and settling into "some form" of retirement. (Although, he did continue to sell a few sprigs of Bermuda grass by the pickup bed load for a few more years!) The tennis and basketball court at his house served as not only a focal point for athletic enjoyment for his kids, their friends, and other family, but also as a "community center" of sorts for local kids that lived up and down the road in the Gaar Corner area. Jim Miller was always ready, willing and able to lend a dollar, lend an ear, lend a court, or lend a hand to someone who had any sort of need. He spent his final years sitting side by side with his wife, Hazel, in the recliner in their living room doing crossword puzzles, reading the newspaper, and travelling slowly around the western side of Pontotoc County in his old pickups, checking up on everyone, and making sure everything was still right with his little corner of the world. He even did a little vegetable gardening until the last two years. He loved watching sports, especially tennis, basketball, football, and golf, and loved the OU Sooners in football the OSU Cowboys in basketball, as well as the Dallas Cowboys and OKC Thunder.

Funeral Services for James Milton Miller will be held at 1:00 PM on Friday, July 9, 2021 at Center Freewill Church in Ada. Interment to follow at McGee Cemetery. Visitation will be held from 5:00 - 7:00 PM on Thursday, July 8.

# Cemetery

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# Events

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**McGee**

Stratford, OK,

**JUL Visitation 05:00PM - 07:00PM**

**8**

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DeArman Pickard Funeral Home  
305 West Smith, Stratford, OK, US, 74872

**JUL Funeral Service 01:00PM**

**9**

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Center Freewill Church  
OK, US

# Comments

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“ The “West family” sends their condolences to the Miller family  
Jim was a giant, humble man and an admired horse mentor to me. He was so unassuming and always willing to help his neighbors and I was lucky enough to be one of them. Jim, I will miss our catch-up chats, when I was home visiting my parents. Another great man has left this earth, you will be missed!  
Terry Ann West-Rich

terry ann west-rich - July 10 at 05:53 PM

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“ My dad idolized Jim in a sense, we grew up fishing with him, in one of the many ponds on his land, playing basketball in the ever so famous basketball court in Jim's yard. He seemed to always be there for everyone that needed him! Rest in piece Jim.

CJ Bolin - July 09 at 02:07 PM

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“ 47 files added to the album LifeTributes



DeArman Funeral Home - July 07 at 05:40 PM



“ Jim Miller was a good man. My sympathies to the family.

Whitney Allen - July 09 at 03:36 PM

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“ Words escape me. My family and I have spent countless hours with the Miller family. There are so many memories to cherish forever.

**Norma** - July 07 at 03:53 PM



“ Jim always came to our basketball games. He was a good man. Prayers for his family.

**Donna Isaacs Fowler** - July 09 at 04:18 PM