

Dakota Images

Joseph (“Joe”) Robbie, politician, philanthropist, and professional football team owner, was born in Sisseton, South Dakota, on 7 July 1916. As a boy, Robbie put down yard lines on the Sisseton football field and, in high school, wrote for the *Sisseton Courier* sports section. He dropped out of school to work for the Civilian Conservation Corps in 1934, returning the following year to graduate. Robbie was elected student body president at Northern State Teachers College in Aberdeen, where he studied journalism, before transferring to the University of South Dakota (USD) to study politics. He married Elizabeth Lyle, whom he met at USD, and they eventually had eleven children.

Within a day of the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Robbie enlisted in the United States Navy, going on to serve in the Pacific and earning a Bronze Star. After World War II, he entered law school at USD, where he was again elected student body president before graduating in 1946. Robbie entered state politics as a legislator from Mitchell and served as house minority leader and chairman of the state Democratic Party. He made a bid for governor in 1950 but was defeated by Sigurd Anderson. The following year, with encouragement from Hubert H. Humphrey, he moved his family to Minneapolis, where he became a successful trial lawyer.

In 1965, former South Dakota governor Joe Foss, Robbie’s friend and then-commissioner of the American Football League, convinced Robbie to begin the Miami Dolphins franchise with the help of comedian Danny Thomas. After a rocky start, the Dolphins went on to win their first Super Bowl title in 1973. When the building of a new Dolphin’s stadium was stalled by the Miami City Council, Robbie decided to build the stadium with private funds. The Joe Robbie Stadium opened in 1987. Among his many philanthropic efforts, Robbie established college scholarships for American Indian students in South Dakota and led a fundraising effort to complete the Dakota Dome stadium at USD.

Robbie was inducted into the South Dakota Sports Hall of Fame in 1975 and won numerous other awards and honors throughout his lifetime, including the Horatio Alger Award acknowledging success through personal perseverance. Joe Robbie died 7 January 1990.

—Jennifer E. McIntyre



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