

Joe Barnes was voted the most outstanding male athlete at Belton High School in 1932 and in 1935 was named the most outstanding football player of the Texas Conference and first team all-conference for Southwestern University where he is enshrined in the college's Athletic Hall of Fame. He was a teacher/administrator for 35 years and ended his career in Belton where he retired.

Joseph Cullen ("Joe") Barnes was born in Bell County in 1913 to Solomon S. Barnes and Susan Amanda Cook and was the youngest of seven brothers and one sister. He and his siblings were raised in Belton. When Joe won the Rylander Cup (for the most outstanding male athlete at Belton H.S.) in 1932 he was carrying on a family tradition as his older brothers, Orin and T.F., were stars on the Tiger teams of the 1920's and Orin won the cup in 1927. Joe was on the Tiger football teams of 1928 (with a season record of 3-5), 1929 (6-4), 1930 (3-5-1) and 1931 (0-4-1) coached by Bob Safley and Ed Franklin and was captain in his sr. year of 1931 as a 140 lb. QB. Though a "star" player, he received little recognition since he played on mostly losing teams and since there were no all-district or all-state teams for smaller schools like Belton in that era.

Barnes was also a 5'10" G on the 1932 Tiger basketball team coached by Bob Safley, played on the 1929 and 1930 baseball teams (he was offered a contract by the Houston Buffaloes in 1936 & later played semi-pro baseball for Rosenberg Gulf Oil), and was on the 1932 track team (winning the 120-yd high hurdles & running on the winning mile relay team at the County Track Meet).

Joe played football and basketball for four years at Southwestern University and was captain of the Pirate football team in his sr. year as a 170 lb. back. He was voted 1st team all-conference and the most outstanding player of the Texas Conference in football for the 1935 season even though he played on a losing team. He was honorable mention Little All-American in football and honorable mention all-conference in basketball in his sr. year of 1935-1936.

Joe Barnes is in the Southwestern University Athletic Hall of Fame and a plaque describing his feats is permanently displayed at the Athletic Dept. The plaque reads: Joe C. "Clonny" Barnes, Captain of the Southwestern University 1932 freshman football team and captain of the 1935 varsity football team, was ranked one of the state's best linebackers and halfbacks. At the close of his senior season, he was voted the "Most Valuable Player" in the Texas Conference and received "honorable mention" for "Little All American" honors. He was also a three year letterman in basketball. Joe Barnes became a popular school administrator, serving as a teacher, coach, principal and superintendent in Texas public schools until his retirement.

Joe Barnes joined the U.S. Navy in 1942. He served first in the Navy's physical fitness program before being assigned to the Navy's Armed Guard for the merchant ships (e.g., tankers) in the Pacific and Atlantic. After the war he returned to his career of coaching and teaching (he had been a coach/teacher at Little River-Academy, Hearne and San Augustine before the war) and served

as a principal and superintendent in Georgetown (1947-1963), Aransas Pass, Lockhart, and Belton (1969-1977). His final job in a 35-year teaching career was in 1977 as principal of the Belton Middle School. In 2001 Joe and his wife of 63 years, Lilla (Bessonette), still lived in Belton and attended the dedication of the Belton Wall of Honor. At 88 Joe won several medals in golf at the Texas State Senior Olympics held each October in Temple. He made a hole-in-one at the 119-yard 17th hole at Leon Valley Golf Course on April 19, 2001. Joe's dream of pitching in the pros was realized when he was handed the ball at the beginning of the Astros-Reds game to celebrate his 85th birthday. Wearing a jersey specially made for him by Astros owner Drayton McLane with his name and age on the back, Joe's pitch from the mound in the Astrodome made it to home plate.

Joseph Cullen Barnes, 89, died on April 1, 2003, and was buried at the Ft. Sam Houston National Cemetery in San Antonio. In 2009 his widow, Lilla (Bessonette) Barnes, 93, lived in Temple. Their two daughters are Bettie Liebszeit (Jim) of Hendersonville NC and Joelle ("Joey") Barnes (Alan Foley) of Houston. Their granddaughter is Amanda Bird (Richard) of Leander TX.