

Edward H. Ackley "Mr. Norwich", '53

On a late fall Sunday morning in 1952, readers of the *Syracuse Herald-American* opened their papers, peeled their way through to find the Sports Section, and read the headline proclaiming:

ACKLEY OF NORWICH RATED STANDOUT SCHOLASTIC GRIDDER

The sub headline read, "Back Named Captain of All Star '11'" and the sub headline read, "Set New Offense Pace for Team." The first paragraph of the article read: "Amazing Ed Ackley of Norwich was the outstanding high school football player of the 1952 season in Central, Northern and Southern New York. So the classy back is honored with the captaincy of the Herald-American all star eleven chosen annually."

Ed Ackley was a terrific all around athlete for Norwich High. He made the varsity football team as a freshman, but did not play enough to earn a letter on a team that wound up their season at 6-1.

The next three years saw Ed earn three varsity letters in each year. He was a good basketball player, leading the Tornado in scoring in both his sophomore and junior years and was a large factor in Norwich winning a Section 3 basketball title his senior year. As a track athlete, Ed competed in the high jump, 220, 440 and 880 in various meets. In those days, stringent NYS rules prohibited an athlete from competing in more than one race of 440 yards or more. Further, one could only compete in two individual events. Thus, Kurt Beyer would usually have Ed run an event and do the high jump. This strategy met with great success as Ack won many events in both dual meets and Zone meets. After lettering in Track as a sophomore and junior, Ed switched to baseball his senior year.

But, above all other sports, it was within the world of football that Ed Ackley is revered in Purple and White sports history. As a sophomore, as the season evolved, Ed became a starter at offensive end and played some in the defensive backfield. The Tornado only went 2-5 that year, and Coach Beyer began to rethink his offensive strategy. Since coming to Norwich in 1930, Kurt Beyer's teams had always run the Single Wing offense. Sensing it was time for a change, Coach decided to make a dramatic shift. The Norwich Purple Tornado would run the new-fangled Oklahoma Split T Formation with a superb athlete in the form of rising junior Ed Ackley being the first T Formation quarterback in the history of NHS Football.

With the combination of Beyer's strategy, Ackley's play, and a wonderful team effort, NHS compiled a 5-2 record in 1951 with the only losses to Binghamton Central, 6-0, and to Ilion, 18-6, in a game that was tied, 6-6, at halftime. Ed led all Norwich scorers with nine touchdowns for 54 points. The second leading scorer had 19 points. Playing at a linebacker spot, Ed also led the team in tackles. Most importantly, the feeling was that the groundwork had been prepared for a spectacular season in 1952.

Ed was the consummate player, quarterback, leader and teammate. Those were the days when the quarterback called the plays and set the tone for the attitude and confidence level of the squad. Friday night skull sessions with Coach Beyer had Ack prepared to distribute the ball to the right guy at the right time, and when to call his own number. Ed had a deep appreciation for coach Beyer and assistant coach Frank Giltner, Sports Writer Bob VanTine, players like Skip Schibeci, John Stewart and Howie Ryan, but most of all for his classmates, such as Ronnie Tyler, Jack Stone, Don Chirlin, and Jim Golden.

The 1952 season opener was against a Whitesboro squad that had won 37 of their previous 40 games. No one expected an easy game, especially on the road. In a huge win led by Ed's two touchdowns rushing and one touchdown passing, NHS prevailed by the surprising score of 39-0. Week two was Norwich at Vestal. The Golden Bears were in the early years of the Dick Hoover era. The Binghamton paper had a story lamenting that Vestal and Binghamton Central would have to waste a week playing the likes of Norwich when there were so many other more worthy foes in the Southern Tier. Norwich thumped Vestal, 20-7, as Ack (another of VanTine's many monikers for Ed) rushed for all three NHS touchdowns. The Binghamton paper had changed its tune a little and the headline read, "Too Much Ackley Brings 20-7 Loss to Vestal Bears."

The game against Binghamton Central was huge for a few reasons. First, both teams were undefeated at 2-0, and many thought the winner of the game could 'go all the way' to an 8-0 record. Second, one of only two losses the year before was to Central. Last, and perhaps most important from a community standpoint, the game

would mark the first Homecoming Game in NHS history. The Student Council, with ample suggestion from Coach Beyer, sponsored the event. To prepare for the big game, there was a parade, bon fire at Alumni Field and a huge pep rally featuring speakers from years past. The group honored that week was the 1937 Dream Team—the famous Undefeated, Untied and Unscored upon team of Toots Mirabito and his marvelous teammates. Captain Ackley, by now dubbed Mr. Norwich by Bob VanTine, did not disappoint the huge crowd on Saturday afternoon, pacing Norwich to a hard fought 14-6 win. Ed scored the only offensive touchdown for NHS and Ernie Schraft scored on an interception. Sophomore Tony Vellake, who would go on to captain the 1954 team, kicked two crucial PATs to clinch the win.

Oneonta was the next to fall, 40-0, in a game where the subs played over half the game. Ack only scored one touchdown as this was a game for the non-starters to play a lot. Next up was Ilion, the only other blemish on the 1951 team's record. Ack led the Tornado to a 45-18 romp with two rushing touchdowns and two more passing. Week six brought always tough rival Cortland to town and the Purple and White ground out a 27-7 win with Captain Ackley scoring two more touchdowns. A weak Syracuse Vocational team came to Norwich to be victim number seven. The second and third stringers had a field day, with the starters playing less than half the game. This was the only game of the year that Ed did not score a touchdown, his only scoring contribution in the 53-7 romp being a touchdown pass.

The "Scheduling Gods" had struck gold with the match-up for week eight. The high scoring undefeated Norwich Purple Tornado would invade Oneida for a battle of 7-0 teams. Oneida had only given up three touchdowns all year, so even if Norwich were to win, it was unlikely that they could score the 31 points needed to break the scoring record set by the 1924 undefeated Norwich team.

The Western Union telegram was addressed, "Ed Ackley*Captain Norwich High School Football Team," with instructions to deliver at one PM to the Oneida High School Gymnasium Oneida NY. The telegram read: "Best wishes to you and team for that undefeated season," and it was signed, Marcia Stewart.

The outcome was never in doubt. Captain Ackley led the Tornado to a resounding 33-0 win with great performances by John Stewart and Don Chirlin, who each caught touchdown passes from Ack. The last touchdown, which set the scoring record for most points scored by a Norwich Eleven, fittingly was scored by Mr. Norwich.

Ed finished the season with twelve touchdowns rushing for 72 points. The second high scorers on the squad had 31 points each. Ack also threw six touchdown passes. He did not lead the team in tackles as a senior, but he was near the top. One could reasonably conclude that teams decided not to run at his side of the field as often.

Ed went on to Syracuse University, where he lettered in his Junior and Senior years. In that era Freshmen could not play on the Varsity and he suffered a shoulder injury as a sophomore which limited his playing time. Following graduation he joined Bennett-Ireland, did a six month stint in the army, married Marylee Palmatier on June 21, 1958 (with Don Chirlin as his Best Man), and progressed up the corporate ladder at B-I, first in the Chicago area where he resided from 1959 until 1968. At that point, he and Lee moved back to Norwich. In the years that followed, he became National Sales Manager and then Vice President of Sales. In 1984, Ed left Bennett-Ireland to form his own sales agency, and retired in 2006 after 49 years in the Hearsh Industry. He and Lee raised two daughters and they have four grandchildren. Ed's mom, Dorothy, is still going strong at the age of 96 at the Chenango Valley Home

