

1993-94 NYSPHSAA CLASS B CHAMPIONS



Front row: Charlie Wightman; middle row (left to right): Paul Mackmer, Kevin Pole, Mike Abbott, Lee Skillin, Chris Maynard, Joey Alger, Jason James, Jim Gorski, Jim Boyer, Andy Genung; back row (left to right): Coach Bob Branham, Coach Doug Costin, Head Coach Mark Abbott, Josh Morris, Glenn Van Houten, Peter Burton, Jason Lawrence, Bob Lazor, Kenny King, Destin Santacrose

Coming off of an undefeated season that was capped by a state championship, with ten returning players that included four starters, expectations were very high for the 1993-94 Norwich High School boys varsity basketball team, and rightfully so according to head coach Mark Abbott. "Sure, a lot was expected of us," reflected Abbott, "but no more than we expected of ourselves. Our goal, as always, was to get better every single day as individuals and as a team. If we did that then everything else (the wins) would take care of themselves." "I think most people would have been disappointed with anything less than another state championship, that's a lot of pressure to put on a high school athlete. I remember during one of the parades last year, probably after the Federation championship, someone was holding up a sign that said, 'Let's do this again next year', and my first thought was that we should be allowed to enjoy this one for quite a while before we had to worry about winning another one."

Both Peter Burton and Josh Morris suffered knee injuries during the football season so they started the season as spectators, putting the Purple down two starters. But, if there was one thing this team it was depth, and the 92-93 team had it. As a matter of fact there was so much depth that junior guard Matt Foote, who would be the 94-95 team's Most Valuable Player, spent the year playing on the junior varsity.

Joining returning three year starters 6'8" Class B Player of the Year Bob Lazor and sharpshooter Charlie Wightman were fellow seniors Jason James, another three year varsity player, 6'6" Glenn Van Houten who is easily the team's most improved player and football quarterback Chris Maynard. Burton would end up missing three full games while Morris missed one full game and the first half of a second game. Both players returned to the starting lineup for the season's eighth game, replacing James and Maynard.

Norwich opened the season, in front of what was now a regular sellout crowd at NHS, with an 89-41 thumping of Chenango Forks. They then defended their tipoff tournament championship by topping Whitney Point 77-40, in what was a much closer game at halftime, 31-24, than the final score would indicate. Seeing his team struggling in the first half, Morris approached Coach Abbott at halftime and told him that he was good to go. "Josh had been medically released," said Abbott, "and he was still trying to work his way back into game shape. Apparently he had seen enough."

Morris sparked a 32-11 third quarter for Norwich as they ended up cruising to the victory. Wightman and Lazor led Norwich with 22 and 19 points respectively while Van Houten added 10. Maynard had six assists and James five. That same trio had also led the semifinal scoring charts as Lazor had a game high 27 points, Wightman 12 and Van Houten 11, with Kevin Pole adding another nine. Norwich also had three double figure rebounders in Lazor (14), Jim Boyer (13) and Van Houten (11). Maynard again led the team in assists with five.

A 50 point first half paced Norwich to a 90-68 win in their STAC opener at Susquehanna Valley as Lazor was virtually unstoppable with 33 points and 13

rebounds. Wightman added 16 points and Morris 10 more while Maynard had six assists and seven steals.

Up next were two old rivals, Seton Catholic Central and Chenango Valley, but both clubs had been heavily depleted by graduation. It was 47-13 at the half against Seton and 67-15 heading into the final eight minutes, ending up 91-29 as Wightman had a game high 23 points and Lazor had another double double with 17 and 11. Norwich was up 42-8 against CV at the half on their way to an easy 84-33 win. Lazor led the way with 21 points, James had 13 and Boyer 10. "A lot of guys have been getting a lot of minutes early on and that can only help us as the season wears on," said Abbott. "CV and Seton were both hit hard by graduation but we've got a tough stretch coming up with Johnson City, the STOP-DWI and Maine-Endwell where we will need to be sharp."

Norwich, 5-0 now, was riding a 34 game winning streak heading into their matchup with the Wildcats and their talented trio of Ryan Brenner, Eric Moschak and Mike Zarzycki. The aforementioned trio combined for 61 points but the inside trio of Burton, Lazor and van Houten were the story of this game as Norwich prevailed 98-83. Lazor had 26 points and 13 rebounds, Burton 22 and 14 and Van Houten added 15 points. The Tornado guards also played well as Wightman had 13 points while James and Morris evenly split another 18 points along with having six and five assists respectively. James also had five of his team's 25 steals and Morris another four.

The year before, the Broome County STOP-DWI Program started the STOP-DWI Holiday Classic basketball tournament at the Broome County Veteran's Memorial Arena held over the Christmas vacation but Norwich was unable to compete in it because they already had a full schedule. This year there was no way the event's organizers were going to have the tournament without the Purple participating. "The tournament directors (Jim May and Rick Westfall) were adamant about having us in the tournament and they wanted us in the National Division as opposed to the Regional Division," explained Abbott. "But I told them that the only way we could play in the National Division (three games as opposed to two) was if we were matched up with a STAC team in the opening round and have it count as a league game as well."

"Mr. May and Mr. Westfall told myself and Mr. Jones (Norwich Athletic Director Jack Jones) they could make that happen if we would give up a home game (where we had won 26 straight games) and play Binghamton in the Arena, which was basically a home game for them, but it was too good of an opportunity to pass up so we agreed to do it." The Norwich home winning streak, which covered four full seasons, would eventually reach 43 games without a loss. In front of a sold-out Arena, and a very partisan Binghamton crowd, the Patriots, behind the play of Adrian Boyer had a 37-31 lead at halftime. But it was simply a case of too much Lazor in the second half as he poured in 24 of his career high 34 points to lead Norwich past Binghamton 72-57, Norwich's third straight victory over the

powerhouse Patriots. Norwich outscored Binghamton 41-20 in the second half on their way to the semifinals.

Lazor also pulled down 10 rebounds in another double-double effort where he was joined by Burton who had 14 of each. Wightman had nine of his 11 points in the second half and Morris contributed 10 assists, seven rebounds and four steals.

Round two found Norwich matched up with Andrew Jackson High School of New York City with the winner advancing to the next night's championship game. It was a back and forth game through the first three quarters with Norwich leading 42-40 with eight minutes to play. It was a racehorse eight minutes of basketball that saw Norwich outscoring Andrew Jackson 36-29 to win 78-69. Lazor scored 15 of his 31 points in the fourth quarter and also pulled down 16 rebounds. Andrew Jackson's Paul Roddick scored 19 of his 31 points in the fourth quarter to keep his team within striking distance. Wightman added 14 points and Burton nine.

The championship game paired Norwich with nationally acclaimed Gonzaga Collegiate (Washington, DC) and their 6'6" Division I recruit Kenny McFarland. What a game it was! Norwich led 20-13 after the first quarter as Wightman was white-hot with four trifectas and 14 total points. Tightening the screws defensively, Gonzaga got to within 32-31 at the half but Norwich stretched the lead to four points, 47-43, after three quarters. McFarland got himself going with 10 third quarter points after having only six in the first half. He then added nine more points in the fourth to finish with a team high 25 points. McFarland was greatly assisted by Aaron Moody, who scored 10 of his 12 points in the last quarter. Lazor had 11 final quarter points but it wasn't enough as Gonzaga ended Norwich's 37 game winning streak with a 74-69 win. "Sure we were disappointed with the loss, reminisced Abbott, "but we gave it our best effort and we got beat by a very good team. We walked out of there with our heads high."

"To me and the players what was more disappointing was the number of Binghamton area people that were rooting for us to get beat," said Abbott, who was then in his eighth year as head coach. "The Binghamton area schools had beaten us pretty regularly for a few years but now that we had turned the program around they didn't like that very much. Oh well, I guess we will just have to start a new winning streak and keep beating them." "Before we left the building to board the bus we gathered at center court and vowed that this would not be our last game of the year here at the Arena, and in order for that to happen we would have to qualify for the STAC playoffs and then, hopefully, reach the sectional championship game." Lazor (93 points in the three games) and Wightman (52 points) were both named to the All Tournament Team as Gonzaga's McFarland was chosen the Most Valuable Player. The 1993 STOP-DWI Holiday Classic is still the leader in total attendance for the tournament, predominantly because of Norwich's participation.

If Norwich was experiencing any frustration over their first loss in almost two calendar years they would have to wait almost two weeks before the next game. But when they finally did take the court again they took no prisoners! The Purple rolled to their third straight division championship virtually unscathed as their next nine opponents were pummeled with no game being closer than a final margin of 16 points, those being the two Maine-Endwell games. "You might say that we wanted to send a message to the rest of the league that just because a national power got us that it didn't mean anyone in STAC was good enough to," said Abbott.

Left in the path of the Tornado's destruction were Owego (93-65), Maine-Endwell (69-53) in a game Norwich played without Lazor, Vestal (84-62), Ithaca (53-31), Chenango Forks (100-58), Union-Endicott (89-27), Owego again (101-57), Johnson City (76-56) and Maine-Endwell again (85-69).

Two games of particular note were the Ithaca and the second Maine-Endwell games. As there was no shot clock Ithaca tried to take the air out of the ball and limit Norwich's possessions but they trailed 36-12 after three quarters and never really stood a chance. The second Maine-Endwell game was senior night but the Spartans came more than ready to play and led 25-18 after the opening eight minutes. "Our first group was not playing particularly well and we needed to make some changes to see if we could get a spark," recalled Abbott as to why he made wholesale substitutions that night. "And boy did it ever pay off!"

Behind the play of Boyer, James, Jason "Pistol" Lawrence, Maynard and Pole

Norwich took a 38-34 lead into the locker room on their way to a ninth straight win. Lazor (22 points, 14 in the second half), Burton (16), Morris (12), Maynard (a career high 11) and Wightman (10) all finished in double figures after the slow start.

Looking to defend their initial STAC championship, Norwich took on Vestal in one semifinal contest. They beat the Golden Bears at home during the regular season 84-62 as they built a 22 point halftime lead behind Burton's 15 points. Burton finished with a team high 21 points and was joined in double figures by Lazor (18), Morris (14) and Van Houten (12). Morris also had a team high 10 rebounds and seven assists while Van Houten had seven blocked shots and four steals.

In the rematch at the Broome County Arena Vestal trailed 18-12 after the first quarter when they decided, like Ithaca did, to take the air out of the ball. After a 3-3 second quarter and a 2-2 third quarter Norwich led 23-17 with one quarter to play. "I guess you have to take a team that stalls against you as a sign of respect," surmised Abbott. "They are telling you that they can't beat you in a regular game but at the same time they are telling their own players that they are not good enough to win. Plus, it is awfully tough to all of a sudden start scoring after you decide not to stall anymore." "Some may question why we didn't come out and chase to try and pick up the pace but we were ahead. If they don't try and score how are they ever going to catch up?" When Vestal did finally try and score they only managed six points the entire fourth quarter while Wightman notched 10 of his game high 16 points in a 41-23 victory.

Ahead lay Binghamton but old man winter put the game off for one extra day. The two clubs met almost two months earlier in the STOP-DWI first round and Binghamton held a six point lead at the half before Norwich pulled away to win 72-57. This time Norwich led from wire to wire to claim their second straight STAC championship. Lazor and Morris each scored nine third quarter points to extend a five point halftime lead to eighteen as Norwich win 68-52. Lazor finished with a team high 20 points, Morris had a career high 17 and Burton added 14. The ten Norwich seniors would next be playing their final home game against Maine-Endwell in a sectional quarterfinal game. Maine-Endwell lost both regular season meetings by 16 point margins. Lazor's 25 points and 13 rebounds and Wightman's 17 points and 10 assists led the way as the seniors went out in style with an 80-57 win.

Sectional semifinal opponent Waverly was no match as Lazor, in front of his future coach, Syracuse University's Jim Boeheim, was unstoppable in a 77-45 Purple pounding. The big guy totaled 32 points and 15 rebounds.

Dispatching of Johnson City in the Section IV Class B championship game was a mere formality as the dynamic duo of Lazor and Wightman scored 23 and 24 points respectively to lead Norwich to an easy 83-51 victory. Wightman made six of the winners' 11 three-balls, Van Houten and Burton had 14 and 13 rebounds respectively and Morris doled out nine helpers. Last year's regional final victim, Monticello, put up much more of a fight in this year's opening round regional game. It started out like a repeat of last year's romp as Norwich raced out to a 20-8 advantage. Monticello gamely fought back and had the lead trimmed to a mere three points, 40-37, with one quarter to play. Wightman's eight points, which featured two trifectas, helped Norwich to a 55-51 win. Lazor had another double-double with 24 points and 12 rebounds, Van Houten had 10 and eight, Wightman scored 14 points and Morris handed out 11 assists.

In the regional championship game against Nyack, at Marist College, Norwich literally shot the lights out in the first half as they raced to a 44-17 halftime lead. Lazor himself had 23 first half points, including two thunderous dunks, and a power failure caused a brief stoppage of play, most likely due to Norwich's offensive onslaught. Norwich cruised in the second half to a 72-55 win as Lazor finished with 32 points while Morris and Wightman added 13 and 12 respectively.

NHS was heading back to Glens Falls to defend its NYSPHSAA Class B state championship. But a very game Westbury club was waiting for them and almost ended the quest for a repeat by the Purple Tornado. Things looked good early as Norwich led 19-13 but by halftime that six point advantage had turned into a six point deficit. Lazor was saddled with three fouls and the halftime conversations were

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pretty animated. "We were just getting outworked. Loose balls, offensive rebounds, dribble penetration, it didn't matter, they (Westbury) were just kicking our butts and we weren't doing anything about it. I wasn't very happy about that and I let the players know how I felt," recanted a now much calmer Abbott.

Lazor was inserted back into the lineup midway through the third quarter and his seven point spurt helped Norwich to a 47-45 lead after three quarters. The fourth quarter belonged to Wightman, who had 11 points, and Burton, who had nine, as Norwich pulled away to win 75-62. Lazor finished with 21 points, Burton 19 and Wightman 18. Lazor pulled down 14 rebounds while Morris added eight points and seven assists.

On to tomorrow's championship game against Central Square, a team that Norwich clobbered 84-56 in last year's state semifinals. But this next game would have a MUCH different pace. While not completely stalling, Central Square played at a very deliberate pace. Norwich led 11-6 after the first quarter, 23-14 at the half, and just 27-24 with eight minutes to play. But, when it came to winning time, it was all Purple as Wightman scored eight points and Lazor seven, giving both a game high 16 points, and Norwich won its second straight championship, 49-29. Juniors Andy Genung, Jim Gorski, Kenny King and Destin Santacrose, along with senior reserve guard Paul Mackmer played the final couple of minutes and both Genung and Santacrose found their way into the scoring column with one field goal and two free throws respectively.

"This win puts us in some pretty elite company," said Abbott. "Only 12 schools in state history have won more than one championship and we are just the second Class B team to ever repeat!" LET'S GO HOME AND CELEBRATE WITH ANOTHER VICTORY PARADE!

The following weekend brought the Purple Tornado back to Glens Falls looking to repeat their Federation championship of the previous year. Paul Robeson High School, the PSAL champion, from New York City would be their semifinal opponent.

"The Paul Robeson game is, without a doubt, my favorite game of all time," said Abbott. "To think that we could beat a team that had a 6'5" shooting guard that went to West Virginia (Todd Myles), a 6'2" point guard that went to Syracuse (Allen Griffin), a 6'9" power forward that went to Seton Hall (Shamel Jones) and a 6'10" center that went to Georgetown (Jameel Watkins) just blows my mind." And what a game it was as the Norwich guards (Morris, Wightman, James and Maynard) raced up and down the court with Myles, Griffin and company while the inside quartet of Lazor, Burton, Van Houten and Lawrence stood toe to toe with Jones and Watkins from opening tip to final buzzer, never backing down an inch. Myles was virtually unstoppable through three quarters as he had 29 of his game high 31 points by then but Norwich held a slim 53-49 lead.

Enter Tornado depth and will to win. Wightman scored 10 of his team high 28 points in the fourth quarter and Lazor nine of his 21 as Norwich pulled away for a 76-67 victory. Burton had 15 points and 12 rebounds, Van Houten had six points and 10 rebounds and Morris had a game high nine assists.

"Not only was it my favorite game but it also contained my favorite play. There was one sequence in the fourth quarter that will always be with me," elaborated a smiling Abbott, who would go on to be named the 1994 New York State Boys High School Coach of the Year. "Charlie missed a three in transition and the long rebound allowed Paul Robeson a fast break opportunity going the other way. Glenn ran the play down and blocked the shot attempt off the backboard which Pete recovered in the corner and outlet the ball to Josh. Josh skipped the ball to Charlie at half court where he took a couple dribbles and threw an alley oop pass to Bobby who caught the ball and threw it down with two hands. 94 feet of action and all five Norwich guys on the floor had a hand in it!"

Alas, Norwich's season, and its current 19 game winning streak, would end with a loud thud the next day as they lost the Federation championship game to Long Island Lutheran, the AIS (Independent Schools) champion. The victors started five Division I recruits including 6'9" Vasco Evtimov, a North Carolina recruit from Bulgaria, and future NCAA assists leader, point guard Jamar Smiley.

"No excuses, they just flat out beat us," reflected Abbott. "We didn't shoot the ball well and they were extremely athletic. We lost two games in two years, both to schools that recruit. That's okay though, because even if we were able to recruit I would recruit our guys first anyway."

Lazor finished his NHS career with a game high 22 points as he was the only Purple Tornado to reach double figures.

Norwich Tipoff Tournament champions, STAC Division champions, STAC champions, Section IV Class B champions, Region I champions and NYSPHSAA champions; all for at least the second year in a row. NYS Federation runner-ups and the #2 ranked Class B team in New York State---another impressive haul of hardware!

The year before, Norwich High School was just the second team in the NYSPHSAA history to finish an undefeated season at 29-0 and, coupled with this year's 27 wins, their 56 combined wins represent the highest consecutive two year win total in state history.

Norwich set new team records for largest points per game differential (+ 23.9, surpassing last year's + 22.4) and most three point field goals made in a season (195, up from last year's 131).

Individual records set include most points in a season (Lazor-615), most three point field goals made in a season (Wightman-87), highest single season scoring average (Lazor-22.0), most free throws attempted in a season (Lazor-192), most steals in a game (Morris-9) and most steals in a season (Wightman-93).

Lazor finished his career as the school record holder in points (1,442), two point field goals made (496), rebounds (720) and blocked shots (172). Wightman is the school record holder in three point field goals made (186) and steals (also 186), is number two in assists (324, trailing Brian Collier) and number three in points (1,145, trailing Lazor and Nick Bruniek). Lazor was named to the Class B First Team for the second straight year and was also the Class B Co-Player of the Year while Wightman was again named to the Fourth Team.

Norwich High School again won the New York State Scholar Team Award with the recipients being Boyer, Lawrence, Lazor, Mackmer, Maynard, Pole and Santacrose. Boyer was selected the team's Scholar Athlete and Pole was named to the New York State All Academic Team.

"The last two seasons have created a lifetime of memories for a lot of people," closed Abbott. Yes they have Coach, yes, they have.