

Glenn "Tommy" Manning, '25



In the early 1920s, Norwich High School began to get serious about football. In 1921, it hired the first coach who was paid by the school. Before that time, local businessmen were solicited for funds to pay a Colgate student to come down and teach the rudiments of football to the boys of Norwich who wanted to play.

Superintendent Frank Wassung was determined that Norwich would become a football power in central New York. Before the 1922 season, in a talk at an assembly of all the students, he urged the girls of the school to have nothing to do with any boys who did not report for football.

The first paid coach was named Lewis P. Andreas, and he had just finished a successful career as an end on the Syracuse University football team. He not only coached football at Norwich, he was the basketball coach, the baseball coach, and in his third and final year, 1923, he was also the high school principal!

But this is not about Lew Andreas — it is about the Norwich boy who starred on three of those football teams of the early '20s, Glenn Manning. Tommy, as he was known to everyone, was the quarterback on the teams of 1922, 1923, and 1924. Those three teams had a combined record of 19 wins and 3 losses. They beat teams from Syracuse, Utica, Cortland, Johnson City, and, in 1924, for the first time in a dozen years, they beat Binghamton.

As the 1922 team was whipped into shape by Coach Andreas, a great athlete named Clarence "Jock" Taylor was slated to start at quarterback. Tommy Manning had won a letter the year before, and his talents shown so brightly that Taylor was moved to halfback to make room for the "heady" and "diminutive" Manning. Those two adjectives were used frequently to describe Norwich's quarterback. He started every game, and played all of every game, during his three years as quarterback. He scored in almost every game, running, passing, kicking, intercepting — and he called all the plays.

The 1922 team, captained by "Red" Rogers, father of Walt, finished the season with a record of 6-2, beating Utica, Syracuse North, Hamilton, Cortland, Johnson City, and CBA, while losing to Oneida and Binghamton. During the season, Walton, Greene, and the Morrisville Aggies cancelled scheduled games, forcing Norwich to look for more powerful competition. After the last game, his teammates elected Tommy Manning captain for 1923.

In 1923, the season was shortened to six games because of cancellations by the Hamilton College freshmen and Oneida. The latter had so many men injured, one with a broken neck, after playing Binghamton, that they were unable to field a team. Forced to sit out two Saturdays without a game, Coach Andreas added several passing plays to the offense, and against Utica, Tommy Manning completed a dozen passes to Herb Lewis, Jesse Ferris, and Luke White, two of them for touchdowns. The next Saturday, following a week of unprecedented hype by the Norwich Sun, with pep rallies and speeches by former Norwich athletes, the Purple endured its only loss, that at Binghamton, by a score of 14-10. Those 14 points were the only points scored

against Norwich in 1923. Although losers, the Norwich players and fans received praise from the Binghamton folks for their spirit and sportsmanship. It was Norwich Spirit, forerunner of Purple Pride.

When Lew Andreas left Norwich, superintendent Frank Wassung hired another just-graduated Syracuse star, Reeves Baysinger, to coach Norwich in 1924. "Ribs" Baysinger brought two boys from his hometown of Akron, Ohio, to play for Norwich. They were his brother, Harold "Skinny" Baysinger, and Lawton "Tubby" Fontaine. With the former at halfback and the latter at end, Tommy Manning led the Purple to an undefeated season.

As the 1924 season progressed and Norwich whipped first Cortland, then Oneida, Syracuse Central, Auburn, Susquehanna, Hamilton, and Utica Free Academy, the last game, against Binghamton Central, loomed large. Norwich had not beaten Bingo since 1912, and the blue and white were not only unbeaten but unscored-upon as well, and would have the home advantage. They were heavy favorites. As the game unfolded, Bingo scored and appeared to be headed for victory. Norwich fought back, however, and scored on a pass from Manning to Fontaine. With the game tied at 7, Tommy Manning drop-kicked a field goal to give Norwich a 10-7 lead in the fourth quarter. Still, it was anyone's game, and Binghamton launched a passing attack in an effort to take back the lead. On one of those pass plays, a purple streak that was Tommy Manning snared the ball and took it back 40 yards for a touchdown. Time expired soon after. Norwich had finally beaten Bingo, gone undefeated, and was acknowledged as the top team in southern and central New York. The 1924 team had tallied 268 points to its opponents' 33. Although the two imports, Baysinger and Fontaine, bolstered the offense, Manning himself scored 7 touchdowns rushing, 9 passing, and his drop-kicking toe provided 13 points.

Tommy Manning also played basketball, and was captain in the same year that he was captain of football. Never a big man, he was a four-year starter at guard on teams that had a combined record of 59 and 18. The 1922-23 team, with a record of 17 and 3, were champions of the Southern Tier League. In 1923-24, Manning was the high scorer, and in 1924-25, his last year, he scored half of the team's points.

A scholar as well as an athlete, Manning was president of the Boys Athletic Council and president of Chi Alpha, the Norwich chapter of the National Honor Society. He went on to play football at Syracuse under his old mentor, Lew Andreas, and had a career as a school administrator, teaching and coaching at Lake Placid, and retiring as superintendent of the Millbrook schools in 1971. He married his college sweetheart, but never had any children. One of his colleagues at Millbrook, a lady who taught phys-ed, said that as superintendent, Manning would come by the gym, watch her class, remove his coat and join the students in a game of basketball for a few minutes, then return to his duties. She said, "He loved sports, and he loved children." Tommy Manning died in 1994 at the age of 88.