

Charles "Doc" Ulrichs, '45



Charlie "Doc" Ulrichs graduated from Norwich High School in 1945. In his senior year, he was captain of both football and basketball, only the second in Norwich's history to be so honored. In those days, captains were chosen by their teammates, and co-captains were a rarity. Ulrichs also lettered in baseball, starting at third base, but it was as a football player that he was most renowned.

Just as Glenn Manning was called "Tommy" after his father, Charlie's nickname came from his father, Dr. Frank Ulrichs, who was a dentist. "Doc" Ulrichs was the epitome of the All-American Boy: handsome, smart, humble, and athletically talented. Many younger Norwich kids (alas, now old) remember him from the Cortland Street swimming pool or the old Y Camp, where he served as head life guard and head counselor respectively, and where he set an example for many to emulate. He and his younger brother, "Inky," were excellent divers, and put on exhibitions, doing "1 ½ gainers" into the dammed-up Canasawacta Creek.

The football teams of 1943 and 1944 had a combined record of 13 and 2, each losing only its last game. The '43 team, captained by John Kelly, who was injured for most of the season, won 7 games before losing to The Manlius School, 7-6. Despite the last-minute loss, Norwich was named the Southern Tier champion as a result of its win the previous week over unbeaten Johnson City. In that game, Charlie Ulrichs played a major role, scoring half of the Norwich points in a 28-14 triumph. For the season, Norwich scored 186 points against 34 for the opposition.

On a team loaded with senior stars such as Kelly, Hal McNitt, Bob Crittenden, Dick VanDeusen, John Pierson, Dick Carnrike, Bob Conron, and Bill Crawley, junior halfback Charlie Ulrichs was the leading ground-gainer, carrying the ball over 100 times and scoring an average of more than a touchdown a game. He and his quarterback, "Percy" Crittenden, were chosen on two Southern Tier all-opponent teams. At the season-ending banquet, which featured the presentation of gold footballs, obtained through public donations and the ultimate emblem of the day for a championship team, it was announced that Doc Ulrichs had been elected captain of the 1944 team.

With so many veterans lost to graduation, prospects for 1944 were not bright. Ulrichs moved to the quarterback position, and passing and punting were added to his duties. Several reserves from the prior year moved up to starting positions, and under Doc's leadership, the '44 team won its first 6 games, beating Vestal, Rome, Oxford, Binghamton Central, Oneonta, and Utica Free Academy. The final game against Johnson City was a disaster. In its first six games, Norwich had permitted the opposition to score a combined total of 28 points. Johnson City scored 39.

The week before, Utica had been considered the chief obstacle standing in the way of an undefeated season for Norwich. But the Purple were up to the challenge, with Ulrichs scoring 3 touchdowns, the last on a run described by Perry Browne as "... a brilliant display of ball carrying. No less than three potential tacklers wrapped their arms around Ulrichs but his aggressiveness forced each of them to slide earthward..." Norwich won, 27-7. That success, so arduously and enthusiastically

prepared for, apparently caused Norwich to let down, lose its focus, and forfeit an undefeated season for the second straight year, as Johnson City, which had lost its last three games, blew them out 39-12.

In the 7-game season, Ulrichs ran for 12 touchdowns and passed to Frank Benenati for 3 more. The Ulrichs-to-Benenati passing combination produced many yards for the Purple. Doc carried the ball 93 times, averaging nearly 7 yards per carry. He was selected to the Southern Tier All-star team.

In basketball, Charlie Ulrichs had the good fortune to play for Coach Hal Bradley, who was the varsity mentor at Norwich from 1941 through 1947, and later coached at Hartwick, Duke, and Texas. Doc was a starting guard on the '43-'44 team, which won 17 and lost 6, and was led in scoring by Captain Dick Carnrike. That team won at Oneonta for the first time in 15 years, and exacted some revenge for the football loss to Manlius by beating them twice. They also upset Binghamton Central in the sectionals, before losing to Johnson City the next night.

The '44-'45 basketball team, with Doc Ulrichs as captain, finished with a record of 12 and 9, and was led in scoring by Frank Benenati. Ulrichs was chosen on the second team of the County All-stars.

Charlie Ulrichs was the salutatorian of the class of 1945, and was chosen by his classmates for the prestigious McMullen award, given to the senior who had done the most for his school. He served in leadership positions in most of the major organizations of the school.

Ulrichs and Benenati both matriculated at Princeton, where they played football until injuries ended their careers. Fred Mirabito, who played in the line for Syracuse, tells the story of Syracuse preparing to play Cornell. The assistant coach who had scouted the Cornell-Princeton game was reporting on Cornell's strengths and weaknesses. The head coach asked about Cornell's famous defensive tackle, Frank Wydo. The scout said, "Wydo didn't do much, because Princeton had this halfback named Ulrichs who took him out of almost every play."

At Princeton, from which he received his degree in 1950, he was elected president of the prestigious Tiger Inn, and his marks got him accepted to Harvard Medical School. He received the M.D. degree in 1954, and became Dr. Charles M. Ulrichs. While at Harvard, he was president of his class and of an honorary medical fraternity.

That same year, he began an internship at the hospital of the University of Michigan Medical School. It was at this time that he was afflicted with a mental illness, from which he never recovered. He died in 1978 at the age of 51.

In 1981, the new football field at Norwich High School was named in his honor. The plaque at the base of the flagpole reads, in part, "...in memory of Charles (Doc) Ulrichs, who from 1941 to 1945 exemplified the spirit of Norwich athletes. It is dedicated to him and to all other Norwich athletes who have performed and will perform with dedication, spirit and loyalty."