

## Frank Benenati, '45



Frank Benenati was a three-sport athlete, playing football, basketball and track, in one of the Golden Eras of Norwich High School sports, 1942-1945.

Frank was coached by legendary N.H.S. coaches Kurt Beyer, Hal Bradley and Frank Giltner.

In this era, we were at war, high school sports were of great interest to the community, and school spirit was at an all-time high, probably never matched.

Hundreds of local men were in the armed forces, and they followed the high school teams, which were well covered, by sports editor Perry Browne, in the *Norwich Sun*.

Crowds of hundreds attended basketball games at the new gym at the West Main Street high school, while Perry Browne estimated crowds of up to 3,000 at Alumni Field for football—crowds seldom equaled in Purple history.

Football was king, and Frank played Varsity football in '43, 44 and 45. In 1943, Frank played end on the "Wonder Team," the 7-1 Norwich High School squad. The Purple won the first seven games of the season over Oxford, Utica Proctor, Oneonta (twice), Binghamton Central and Utica Free Academy.

The seventh game pitted undefeated teams Norwich and Johnson City. In the battle of the undefeated, there was great interest in the Southern Tier as game time approached. Johnson City was viewed as invincible by the Binghamton papers. The Tornado prevailed 28-14, and were acknowledged as the Southern Tier champions.

Norwich lost the last game of the year 6-7 against Manlius Prep, with Manlius scoring with 1:40 left in the game, and converting the P.A.T. (point after touchdown) to spoil the Purple's bid for an undefeated season.



In 1944, 50 players turned out for another football season, with N.H.S. "Hall of Famer" Chuck Ulrich as

captain and quarterback. Also during that season, a public address system was installed by Handy Sound for the first time at Alumni Field. Hal Bradley was the announcer.

Frank Benenati was the right end on offense, and on the receiving end of the "Ulrich to Benenati" pass combo. On defense, Frank played end and defensive back.

Norwich opened with Vestal and prevailed 33-6, with Frank scoring on a 50-yard pass reception from Ulrich. The Purple followed with wins over Rome Free Academy (13-0) and Oxford (31-8), with Frank having TD receptions of 12 and 45 yards. Frank also had key receptions against Binghamton Central (14-0), and Oneonta (33-7). Frank reached pay dirt on a 10-yard reception against Utica Proctor, where the game was won by Norwich, 27-7.

Frank also gained big yardage in several games on the end-around.

Norwich won the first six games and again faced a strong Johnson City team. The Wildcats were out for revenge after the Norwich win in '43. Johnson City prevailed 39-12 to spoil the Tornado bid for an undefeated season. Frank had 13 receptions for four touchdowns on the 6-1 1944 team.

Perry Browne described the 6'1", 175-pound Benenati's pass reception talents as "sky-skilled" and the "the ball into the leaping, outstretched hands of Benenati."

The war was over; peace was at hand. The 1945 football season found Frank at QB, with the "Professor of Gridology," Kurt Beyer (as labeled by Perry Browne), again as coach. Sam DiNoto was the Captain of the 1945 edition of Purple Football.

The season opened with Benenati calling signals, before 1800 fans, at Randall Field in Cortland. Frank scored the team's first touchdown of the year on a run, and followed with a 27-yard TD pass to Don McGraw for a 37-6 Purple win.

The Purple and Utica Proctor fought to a 0-0 tie the next game at Alumni. Norwich downed Hamilton 26-6, with Frank scoring on a 22-yard sweep and a 14-yard TD toss to Ed Nelson.

The Tornado fell 13-14 to the Binghamton Central Bulldogs, with Frank scoring on a 17-yard run.

Frank had two touchdowns of 2 and 5 yards in the first half against Oneonta. In the second quarter, Frank injured his back, sustaining a fracture of the third vertebrae, and was placed in a body cast under the care of T.F. Manley.

The season was over for Frank, who did everything for the Tornado—he kicked off, punted, and played big "D" with many key stops and interceptions.

He was the leading scorer on the team, with six TDs in five games. The Tornados finished with a record of 5-2-1,

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with wins over Utica Free (15-0), Rome Free (27-14) and a loss to Johnson City. The Beyermen had a three year record of 18-4-1 during Frank's football career—with two, 1-point losses in that record.

The Oneonta game injury kept Frank from playing college football at Princeton with his great friend, Charlie Ulrich.

Frank played basketball under NCAA Hall of Fame coach, Hal Bradley, in '43-'44, and '44-'45, with Charlie Ulrich as Captain in '44-'45. Frank was center and leading scorer on the '44-'45 12-9 team, which won the Iroquois League championship with 158 points. Frank was chosen 2nd team Section IV, and was on the all-county team.



In the '44-'45 season, a game between the League champs, Norwich, and the League All-Star team was held before 800 fans in Norwich. With the score tied 40-40, and with little time remaining, Frank sank two free throws for a 42-40 Norwich win. Frank was also the game high scorer.

In 1945-'46, Frank was the second leading scorer, with 198 points on the 17-6 Purple Edition. Norwich placed second in the Section IV tournament and tied for first in the Iroquois League. Benenati was a second team, Section IV all-star.



Frank was a track and field athlete under Norwich High School Sports Hall of Fame Coach, Kurt Beyer, and was track captain in '45. Track meets were held at the 1/5 mile cinder oval at Cortland Street Park (currently the Kurt Beyer pool area). Frank competed in the 440, shot-put and discus.

In 1945, Frank was second in the shot at the Utica Invitational. He was Eastern Zone sectional champ in the shot, and 3rd in the overall sectional championship.

Frank was multi-faceted, and did not only excel in athletics. Frank was Student Council President, Senior Class President in 1945, and graduated from Princeton in 1951.

Frank has been a lifetime contributor and supporter of Norwich sports. He undoubtedly has attended more events at N.H.S. than anyone. He was the voice of Tornado football for 25 years on WCHN, and also announced basketball for several years on WCHN.

Frank has been a supporter of all youth sports – as a volunteer, as president of the YMCA, as a coach, and as the voice of the Cyclones for 43 years. Frank was the recipient of the Citizen of the Year award by the Council of the Boy Scouts of America in 2008, and was awarded the Chenango County Youth Bureau Volunteer of the Year in 2009.

Join me in congratulations to Frank Benenati on his induction, next to his friend and teammate, Charlie Ulrich, in the Norwich High School Sports Hall of Fame.

—Jim Edwards