

## Charlie Townsend, '56



Imagine, if you will, that you have the athletic ability to pinpoint a baseball anywhere in the strike zone at speeds well in excess of 90 miles per hour. And contemplate, yet, that your sports talents allow you to use deft hand-eye coordination in tossing basketballs with regularity through the net. What sport do you think you'd choose as your

most proficient?

Well, if you are Charlie Townsend, one of the newest members of the Norwich High School Sports Hall of Fame, you would be most proud of your exploits on the football field as a punter. That's right, a punter! Even though Townsend was an All-Iroquois League tight end on the gridiron, too, it is the memory of his booming punts that immediately brings a smile to his face.

"Everything I did athletically came easy to me. Whether it was throwing a baseball, catching a football, shooting a basketball or even playing pool, I was good at it," recalled Townsend. "But, punting was something I had to work at. And when I became good at it, I was very proud."

Called upon his freshman year by then grid coach Kurt Beyer to start honing his punting skills, Townsend went on to produce 53 career punts that traveled 1,792 yards for a 33.8 yard per boot average. And, remember the punter stands 10-12 yards behind the line of scrimmage, from where the subsequent boots are measured. But, more on that later.

All that notwithstanding, Townsend's prowess in booting the pigskin a considerable distance is not what earned him enshrinement in this the fifth edition of elite Tornado athletes. As a three-year stalwart of the Purple mound corps, Townsend went 14-3 (.824) with four no-hitters, one combined no-no with fellow ace and Hall of Famer Fred Swertfager and two one-hitters. He lost out on a third one-hitter and another victory when his 16-strikeout effort in an 8-0 whitewashing of Walton on May 18, 1955 was ruled a forfeit because Norwich used an ineligible player. Over the course of three seasons, he compiled 207 strikeouts in 120 innings (1.73 per inning) and allowed only 47 hits, 26 of which were given up during his sophomore campaign.

In helping lead Norwich to at least a share of three consecutive Iroquois League titles, it's difficult to ascertain what was Townsend's most productive spring. He earned his first varsity victory on May 1, 1954 when he three-hit

Herkimer 4-2 in the second game of a twin bill, with nine strikeouts and two walks. All told, Townsend charted a 5-1 record his rookie season, which was Coach Frank Giltner's 23rd and last as the Purple laid sole claim to the league crown.

With Ray Borowicz taking over the skipper duties for Norwich in 1955, Townsend lost his only game, despite a four-hitter, when Little Falls won out 4-1, thanks to six Tornado errors. He was literally unhittable after that as Norwich tied Oneonta for Iroquois supremacy. That aforementioned combined no-hitter with Swertfager followed that same day, April 30, at Mohawk, and two more no-hitters were sandwiched around a one-hitter over the remainder of the spring. In that one-hitter, a 7-0 blanking of Ilion on May 28, Townsend retired the first 20 batters he faced before the Golden Bombers' Wayne Murphy slapped a two-strike single to center, thus preventing him of not only another no-hitter but a perfect game, too.



**1955 Iroquois League Co-Champs**

*Front: Fran Caravaglio, Ted Kerley, Ed Maricle, Bob Fierro, Denny Doyle; middle: Vince Shaver, Pat Quinn, Bruce Jones, Charlie Townsend, Frank Zaia; back: Evan MacEwen, Coach Ray Borowicz, Fred Swertfager, Bob Georgia*

"Coach Borowicz didn't like us fooling around with a lot of different pitches. He wanted Fred and I to just rare back and throw heat," noted Townsend. "In one game down at Veterans Park, he told me to throw the first pitch as hard as I could over (catcher) Bob Fierro's and the umpire's head. When it hit the backstop, it made this loud rattling bang, and no one dug in very much the rest of the game."

After no-hitting Little Falls in the final game of the 1955 season and the last game ever played at Alumni Field, because of the construction of Perry Browne School, Townsend opened his senior campaign with two straight no-hit gems of Walton (1-0, with 11 strikeouts) and Mohawk (2-0, with

15 whiffs). A pair of four-hit victories followed, the latter of which saw Townsend yield his first earned run in 57 innings over a two-year span. He closed out his NHS career on June 2, 1956 with a 5-0 one-hitter against Little Falls. For the year, he compiled a 5-1 record over 40 innings of work. In addition to striking out 75, he walked 18 and gave up only 15 hits and seven runs, four of which were unearned in his lone loss to Ilion. The Tornado co-captain closed with a microscopic 0.53 ERA.

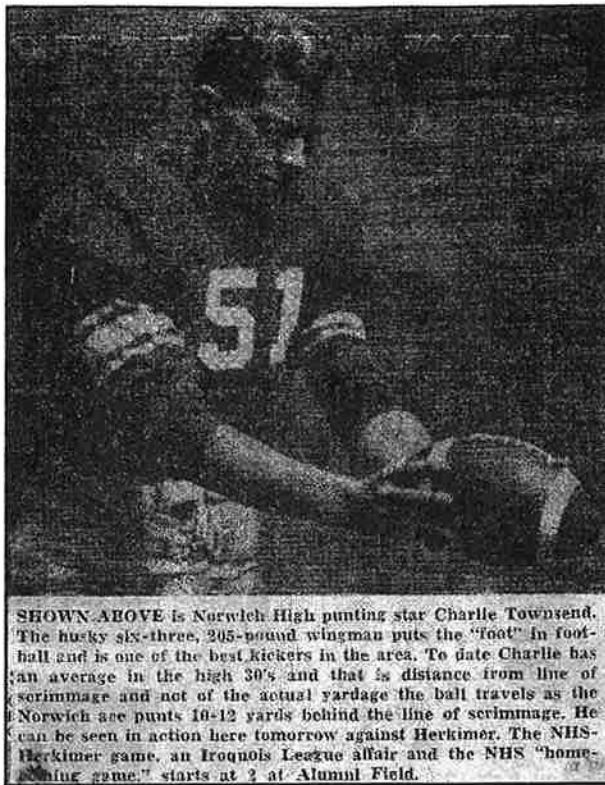
All this success was somewhat shrouded when the 1955-56 basketball campaign began as Townsend was forced to sit out the team's initial five games due

to a concussion suffered during the latter part of the football season. When he did finally take the court, Norwich stood at 2-3 and continued to struggle most of the season, eventually winding up at 9-8 heading into Section 3 play. That's when the 6-foot-3, 205-pound power forward took charge. Over the course of the Purple's improbable seven-game run to the sectional crown, he led all scorers with 98 points (14 per game average), with highs of 28 and 21 being recorded versus Richfield Springs (72-53) and Watertown (60-58), respectively.

"At the beginning of the season I felt fine, but the doctor wouldn't release me," recalled Townsend. "When he finally let me play again, it took a while to get back in shape, both with my shooting and my stamina."

Despite missing those first five games, Townsend wound up with 202 points (10.6 ppg) in 19 games, hitting double digits in 12 of them. All told, he amassed 418 career markers in 39 games (10.7 ppg) as he tabulated 216 markers (10.8 ppg) his junior year, with a high of 19 coming in a 71-69 loss to Hamilton. In addition, he pulled 18 and 17 rebounds in respective contests against New Hartford and Cazenovia.

Like Arlo Guthrie in his immortal "Alice's Restaurant Massacre," we're coming back around to that long-ago mentioned punting ability. Except for the game in which he suffered his first-quarter concussion, a 25-7 loss at Cortland on Oct. 28, 1955 when he was playing middle linebacker, Townsend saw punting activity in each of the other 13 contests.



SHOWN ABOVE is Norwich High punting star Charlie Townsend. The husky six-three, 205-pound wingman puts the "foot" in football and is one of the best kickers in the area. To date Charlie has an average in the high 30's and that is distance from line of scrimmage and not of the actual yardage the ball travels as the Norwich ace punts 10-12 yards behind the line of scrimmage. He can be seen in action here tomorrow against Herkimer. The NHS-Herkimer game, an Iroquois League affair and the NHS "homecoming game," starts at 2 at Alumni Field.

"Coach Beyer would have me punt on third down and even second down, if we were deep in our own territory," said Townsend. "It was a common practice back then, especially since we always stressed defense."

Besides punting, Townsend was also responsible for extra point kicks as well as manning his tight end position. In a 19-7 victory over Vestal on Oct. 1, 1955 at Alumni Field, he punted five times for a 34.2 average, caught a touchdown pass from quarterback Ken Stewart and kicked an extra point. The following game, a 35-6 shellacking of Little Falls, saw Townsend chart a perfect five extra points in addition

to booming a 56-yard punt in the first quarter. By now, his punting performances were highly visible to all as is evidenced in Norwich Sun Sports Editor Bob Van Tine's reporting of the Tornado's shutout of Herkimer in the Monday, Oct. 17 edition of the paper. The paper's headline and subsequent opening paragraph follows.

#### **TOWNSEND'S PUNTS BRING 14-0 WIN OVER HERKIMER**

"The Purple Tornado's football ship-of-state, steered by the toe of Charlie Townsend, sailed up mud alley at Alumni Field here Saturday and into Victory port, carrying a 14-0 decision over scrappy Herkimer. The 205-pound wingman booted the pigskin seven times and his long bombs kept the Magicians bottled up, and took the sting out of a fine Herkimer running attack."

On another note that embodies a local twist, Townsend got off a blast of 60 yards during second-quarter action in a 7-6 heartbreaking loss to Mohawk back on Nov. 6, 1954. Despite averaging 45.5 yards for his three boots that day, including the one that set Mohawk back on its heels at the 19-yard line, the Mohicans commandeered an 81-yard scoring drive, that featured future NHS head football coach and Athletic Director Dan Chrisman producing the winning points on a 45-yard sweep just before halftime.

With an athletic arsenal that featured a blazing fastball, a booming right foot and an accurate touch from the hardwoods, Townsend had many options after donning the robes of graduation. As one might expect, he opted for the former.

"After graduation, I was headed to Ithaca College on a baseball/basketball scholarship," noted Townsend. "However, two weeks before meeting with the Athletic Director and coaches for the official signing, I signed instead a bonus contract with the Milwaukee Braves."

Shortly thereafter, he began his professional career with the McCook Braves in the Nebraska State League, going 2-3 that first summer. He made an immediate good impression on manager Bill Steinecke, especially after striking out the league's home run king, Deron Johnson, twice in one game. Johnson went on to play 13 years in the majors, clubbing a career 213 home runs for six different squads.

"Charlie's seriousness, study of hitters and close watch of other pitchers will help him go a long way in the professional game," said Steinecke. "He's one of the best prospects in the Nebraska State League and I'm recommending him to our parent Braves front office."

Less than six months later, he was heading south to his first stint of spring training in Bradenton, FL. And along for the ride was another right-handed hurler—this one a knuckleballer—by the name of Phil Niekro. Niekro, of course, would go on to pitch 24 years in the major leagues, eventually winning a spot in the Hall of Fame in Cooperstown. After breaking camp, Townsend was assigned to the Waycross Braves of the Georgia-Florida League, where he went 1-0 before being elevated to the Panama City Fliers of the Alabama-Florida League. It was there that Townsend turned in a stellar record of 13-7 and an ERA of 2.70.

"I had a Triple-A contract to begin my third year (1958), but I hurt my elbow during spring training. It was in a game against the Southern Association's all-stars. It was a cool spring day with temperatures in the low 50s, and I had a shutout going through four innings," remembered Townsend. "I let loose with a slider and I could feel something snap in my elbow. Team doctors diagnosed it as acute tendonitis."

So, instead of Triple-A ball, Townsend opened the '58 season with the Boise Braves of the Pioneer League. With rest doing little to aid his injured wing, he was sent back down to Waycross. There he charted a record of 2-4 with an ERA of 4.21, but the proverbial writing was on the wall.

"Most of the guys there (Waycross) were young rookies, so I was able to get by with breaking balls and change of speeds, because of my experience," said Townsend. "But my fastball was gone, and I was eventually released."

A well-rounded athlete whose abilities have spanned from high school to the present day, you could always rely on Charlie Townsend to come through in the clutch. His high school and professional numbers have been previously

scrutinized, but after leaving the competitive playing fields he continues to excel in lifetime sports. Townsend has carded four holes-in-one on the links, eight 700 series on the bowling alleys and ran billiard tables to the tune of 28 balls one-handed and 58 with both hands in straight pool. As a kegler, he once competed in a pro-am tournament in Atlanta with Hall of Famers Dick Weber and Earl Anthony as well as highly-regarded Dick Battista.

Today the retired banker, who spent 35 years in a variety of credit loan positions, lives with his wife, the former Barbara Lewis of Bainbridge, in Mount Upton. Most of the sports we've discussed are history, but Townsend can still shoot his age, 77, on the golf course. And that you can "bank" on.

—Tom Rowe