

Don McGraw, '46



The McGraw story: "AS STABLE AS TENNYSON'S BROOK"

Perry Browne, sports editor of *The Norwich Sun* in 1946, described Don McGraw in an article written at the beginning of the 1946-47 sports year. Browne was attributing the characteristics of stability and permanence to the career of Don McGraw. This

praise supported the tale that became legend of the athletic career of the 1946 graduate and 1947 post-graduate of Norwich High School.

*"For men may come and men may go,
But I go on forever."*

In 1946 Don McGraw was described as one of the outstanding athletes of recent years. He was a stereotypical three-sport Norwich athlete. He had the ability to participate thoroughly relaxed. His talent appeared effortless. He had the knack of coming through "in the pinch." This appearance in football, basketball, and especially baseball, had been created by years of playing in the sand lots of the northeast side of Norwich. In the early days athletes grew up and competed in neighborhoods. He was of Irish extraction, and he had the "baseball genes" of the Truxton, New York baseball family of McGraws.

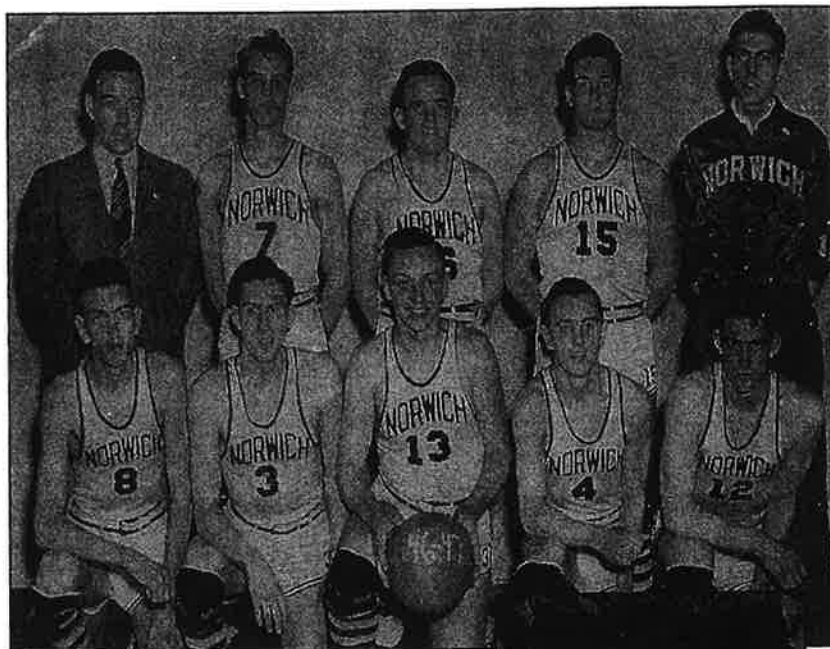
Don's father, Art, was the first cousin of the immortal hall of fame manager of the New York Giants, John McGraw. His older brother Jack was a talented first baseman and manager of the local Norwich Blue Jays. Younger sister, Barb was a fine athlete in an era that had few sports programs for females. Youngest brother Gerry, "Butch" was a football and baseball player in the 1950's. Barb married Mike LaCava, another talented Norwich athlete.

Don was the leading scorer and winner of the Stanford Gibson MVP award on the 1946-47 basketball team that lost to Binghamton Central at Barton Hall, Cornell's famous basketball arena. Central's program was considered by the polls to be one of the best in upstate New York. Don led his team into the championship game as a point scoring guard. But a larger and more talented Binghamton team led by two players who would continue their careers at Cornell University stopped Norwich. This Norwich basketball

team, coached by the popular Hal Bradley, who moved on to coach basketball at Hartwick, Duke, and Texas, must be considered one of the better Norwich teams in a long history of great Norwich teams.

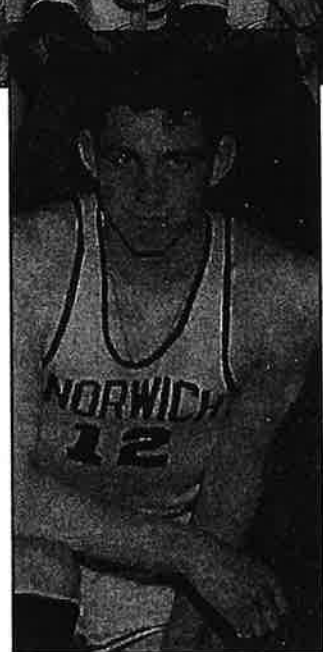
The 1946 football season was tragically ended because of a polio epidemic. Three Norwich players were stricken with this terrible disease. Odell Ray, Dick Archer and Bill Houman were members of the '46 team that saw the season ended after only three games.

Perry Browne best describes McGraw's talents in an article about a Norwich football loss to Binghamton Central during his postgraduate year in 1947. "In spite of the fact that Haskins turned in a great performance, actually



the outstanding player on the field was Norwich's Don McGraw. Playing all the way, the rangy purple and white end performed brilliantly, making spectacular catches and turning in a stellar defensive job. The purple was a constant scoring threat while McGraw was on hand, as he made seemingly impossible catches, snaring the ball away from two or three Blue defenders several

times. His performance unquestionably was one of the greatest individual showings of a Norwich High player."



McGraw went on to play for the Y Giants and was considered "king of the southern tier pass receivers." His history is well chronicled by Jim Dunne in his book *The Y Giants, Norwich's Semi-Pro Football Team*.

McGraw would hurt his knee, and the ensuing infection would not only end his football career, but also interfere with his tryout with the New York Giants baseball team. He had lost his quickness and outright speed that was needed to play major league baseball. Jim Dunne correctly acknowledges that football had interfered with his potential. He had played these games all his twenty years. His versatility and competitive spirit got in the way of his advancing to a higher level in his namesake's sport—baseball.

Don pitched and some say he had a great knuckle ball. He also played first base and the outfield. At the plate he struck a pose that resembled the hall of famer and Yankee great, Joe DiMaggio. He was a clutch hitter and shared the captaincy with another great Norwich athlete, Harold "Mouse" Purdy.

I remember Don McGraw as the picture-perfect high school athlete. Varsity athletes are often idolized by young elementary and junior high "wanna be's," and Don surely fit the model of a three sport Norwich legend. At his commencement he was elected by his teammates to receive the 1946-47 David Lee award for athletic supremacy.

Don McGraw died at the age of 65. He had served two years in Korea during that war. He had been a Vice President of the Chenango and Unadilla Telephone Company. But he is probably always going to be best remembered as one of Norwich's top athletes whose charisma and "brook-like" stability would place him in history as one of Norwich's finest.

—Don Chirlin