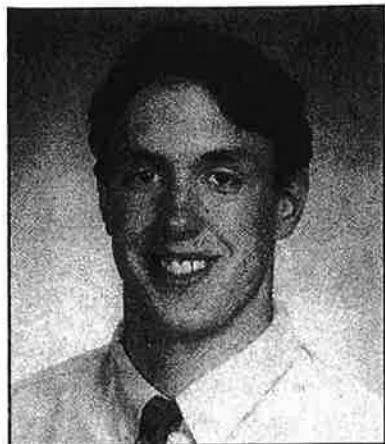


## Peter Burton '94



was O'Neill who was the heart and soul of the team that captured four World Series titles in five years as the baseball dynasty of the 1990s.

Much like O'Neill, Peter Burton was the backbone of the championship Norwich football and basketball teams that won statewide acclaim a few years before the Yankees began their streak. Over the course of three seasons, Burton earned nine varsity letters, three each in football, basketball and baseball, thus earning him a spot in the Norwich High School Sports Hall of Fame.

"He was a great leader both on and off the playing field or court," remembered former NHS grid coach John Pluta. "He hated to lose, and pushed himself every minute. He really was a true warrior."

Although he was a STAC all-star three straight years in baseball at a variety of positions, Burton is best remembered as the fearless tight end on the grid iron and the relentless power forward on the hardwoods. While Burton solidified the Purple offensive line, Norwich compiled an impressive 27-4-1 (.871) log, and as that inside anchor on the Tornado cage unit, the locals posted a record of 72-7 (.911).

"I really feel baseball was my best sport, even though a lot of people never even knew I played it," said Burton. "As a freshman, I started at third base and made the STAC All-Division team. The other two years, I received All-Division and All-Conference honors at first base and designated hitter, respectively. My junior year, I played all nine positions, even catching when no one else wanted to catch Jason James, who was both fast and wild."

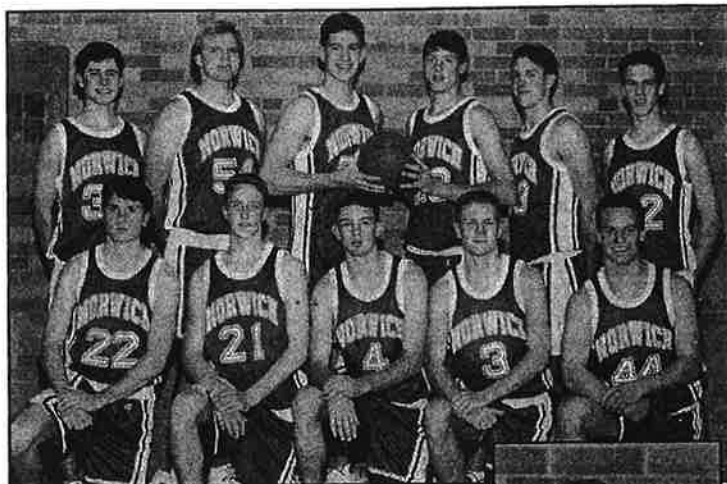
Burton, who hit .361, .333 and .343 during his three-year varsity career, was the Norwich MVP during his sophomore season.

A lot of people may very well have missed Burton's baseball days but few never heard of his exploits as a football and basketball player. The recipient of All-State, All-Metro and All-County honors in each of the aforementioned sports, Burton was the impregnable rock and the solidifying

glue that enabled both NHS squads to reach never-before-seen heights.

Much has been written about the storied 1992-93 and 1993-94 Tornado basketball teams, both of which are enshrined in the NHSSHOF, but without Burton much less would have been transcribed not to mention much less might have been achieved. During that two-year span, the 6-foot-4 forward scored 604 points (11.0 ppg) as the Purple went 56-2 in capturing two straight New York State Public High School Athletic Association Class B championships and one Federation crown.

During his junior year, Burton reached double digits 18 times as Norwich completed an undefeated 29-0 season with a 75-69 victory over Buffalo St. Joseph's in the



Federation title tilt. It was there that Burton saved his best performance for last as he tickled the twines for 26 markers. And, even though his senior year began with him riding the bench the first three games due to a football injury, he finished in twin numbers 11 times, 22 in a 98-83 triumph over Johnson City in just his third game back from the disabled list. His scoring abilities, notwithstanding, it was Burton's presence on defense where he really earned his stripes. All told, he grabbed 490 rebounds while always taking on the responsibility of quelling the opposition's best man.

"I would have liked to score more, but I didn't have to," said Burton. "I took great pride in the fact they relied on me to stop the other team's best player. My mindset was to never let them score, and I took it personally. If I could accomplish something close to that, then we had a 4-on-4 game, and I had a lot of confidence in the rest of our team."

All told, Burton scored 754 points in his NHS career



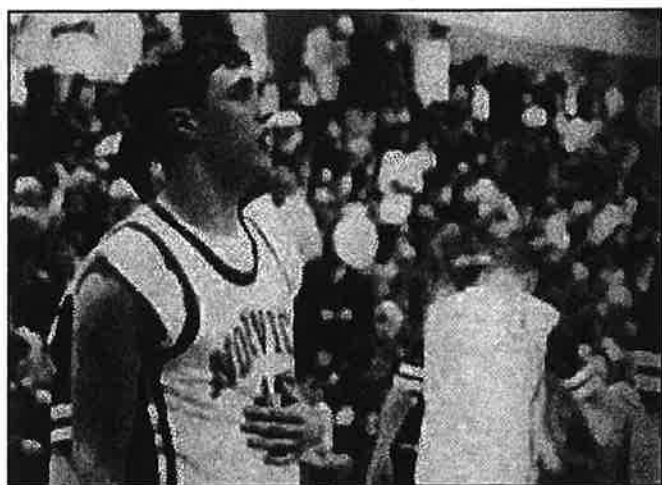
(10th all-time in school history), was a two-time All-County and All-Metro selection and was named to the All-State fourth team following his junior season.



"Peter was our unsung hero. He didn't get the headlines but he was very important to our success," pointed out former Norwich cage coach Mark Abbott. "He did all the dirty work – screens, rebounds and tough defense. He was always

matched up with our opponent's best scoring forward and he always responded to the challenge.

"He came to play every day. Offensively, he was a tough matchup. He had the power and strength to bang inside but could step outside and nail the jumper with a feathery touch. He was a unique combination of power and finesse," added Abbott. "He was a solid performer all three years, and was our team leader, both in performance and attitude.



If you'd want one guy to go to war with you, it would be Peter because he was all business and got the job done."

Nowhere was Burton's value more evident than on the football field. For following a season-ending knee injury in a 20-0 sectional semifinal victory over Owego, Norwich squeaked by Elmira Free Academy 16-14 in the Section IV championship tilt at Vestal before losing for the first time to Chittenango 21-20 on Nov. 13, 1993 in a New York State Class B quarterfinal tilt at Rome Free Academy. In fact, that loss to Chittenango was the first defeat tasted by the Purple since an opening-day setback to Binghamton back on Sept. 12, 1992, a string of 20 consecutive triumphs.

Despite missing the final two games of his senior season to a partial tear of his medial collateral, Burton still produced numbers that earned him a spot on the first team New York State Class B squad in addition to his third straight selection to the Section IV Division III and All-County teams. In the eight contests he competed in, he caught 16

passes for 305 yards (19.1 ave.) and five touchdowns. His most prolific outing came in Norwich's 26-0 blanking of Owego in the year's regular-season finale when he corralled four aerials for 129 yards and one touchdown. Not bad for a guy who didn't touch a pigskin for three years.

"I played all the way through Pop Warner, but then didn't go out for anything for three years - modified or junior varsity," noted Burton. "As a sophomore, all my friends were playing, so I decided to go back out."

With the likes of the Morris brothers – Jason and Josh – and Jason James in the Tornado backfield, Norwich didn't rely on the pass too much. As a junior, Burton grabbed 12 passes for 149 yards (12.4 ave.), three TDs and four extra points. And during his rookie sophomore year, he pulled in six spirals for 86 yards (14.3 ave.), five touchdowns and two extra points as the Purple completed only 23 passes all season. For his career, Burton caught 34 passes for 540 yards, 13 touchdowns, 12 extra points and 90 points as the Tornado produced a gaudy 27-4-1 record while he sported No. 42 on the gridiron.

"I would have liked them to split it out more with me as a wide receiver," admitted Burton. "I had good size, hands and speed."

Although then head football coach Pluta used him sparingly, he agreed with Burton's assessment of himself. "He had all the tools, great size and speed and a tremendous pair of hands, but he was most valuable to us because of his blocking. That blocking ability, especially on the perimeter, was a large measure why we were able to get outside with so much success. When we did throw the ball near him, he'd catch it. He was the best tight end in Section IV."

Following his tenure at Norwich, Burton played three years on the Binghamton University basketball team, graduating with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Studio Art. He is presently employed by Circulars Unlimited as its head graphic artist.

Like his days as a storied athlete, Burton still possesses the keen eye and great hands needed to produce a quality product. But as good as those productions may be, they pale when compared to the quality of life that Peter Burton exudes. Not only was he a force, who hated to lose and who pushed himself every minute, on the Norwich athletic fields, but he's an example of how one should conduct themselves throughout life – with the utmost graciousness, humility and class whether a victor or a loser. Those attributes are the epitome of a true "Warrior."

—Tom Rowe