

Coach Harold "Hal" Bradley, 1940-47



"I never had more fun than in Norwich," said Harold Bradley who, in his time, became a legendary coach at Duke and Texas.

The chaplain at Duke in the 1950s was asked if he'd known Bradley. "Ah," he said, "our gentleman coach."

At Texas, Longhorn coaches wore Stetsons. "Bradley doesn't wear ten-gallon hats," an Austin columnist wrote, "because he doesn't have a ten-gallon head."

Fred Shabel was Bradley's assistant at Duke. He was later head coach at UConn and athletic director at Penn. "Nobody in America," he once said, "knows more basketball than Hal Bradley."

Bradley came to Norwich from the small central school at Georgetown, NY. He had been a science teacher there when the school needed a coach. His Georgetown teams compiled a 78-29 record in four years, 1935-39. His boys' teams won 46, lost 18. His girls' teams won 32, lost 11, going unbeaten in the final season, enroute to the Tri-County League title. Bradley instantly transplanted his winning ways at Georgetown, coaching the Norwich junior varsity to a 13-3 record in 1939-40, his first season on the Chenango.

Over-worked Kurt Beyer was coaching three major sports, serving as athletic director and teaching men's physical education. His basketball teams had won only three games in two years, and the record for the previous ten years was 44-116. Bradley relieved Beyer in 1940-41, winning 12, losing 6. He followed with 14-4, 11-4, seasons in 1941-42, 1942-43. He was building. There were to follow three 17-win seasons, in 1943-44, 1945-46, 1946-47. His teams lost more than six games only once.

Bradley basketball at NHS began on an auditorium stage. When a gymnasium was being built, his Purple Tornado team played one season at the YMCA. Despite hardship, the sport grew large. The gym housed new enthusiasm and support. It was an exciting time. Underdog NHS teams, playing Southern Tier schedules, became sectional contenders, advancing to the championship tournament at Cornell University.

Hall-of-Famer Frank Benenati, who played three years of varsity ball under Bradley, recalls that, "Coach Brad was a teacher, counselor, disciplinarian, idol, and friend. He was thorough in his preparation for the next game, and reserved space on his biology homeroom blackboard to diagram plays." The 1945 Archive contains a picture of Bradley and Benenati going over a play on that blackboard.

The Bradley teams were Chenango County champions in 1943-44, Iroquois League champions 1944-45, Iroquois League co-champions, Chenango County champions and Section IV finalists in 1945-46, and sectional finalists in 1946-47. His record as Norwich varsity coach was 100-41 in seven years.

During his Norwich years, Bradley also contributed to and participated in a legion of community programs and activities. Most notably, he began the first Red Cross water safety program in Chenango County, under the leadership of Al Foster. Not in itself, a minor achievement.

In a column in the 1947 Norwich football program, athletic director Kurt Beyer reviewed Bradley's tenure at Norwich, stating, "Not since the early twenties have Norwich teams been so consistently good as under the



Hal Bradley with fellow teachers at a reunion of a 1940s NHS class. Front: Charlie Miers, Marcia Stewart, Hal Bradley, Jane Bell, Betty Natoli, back: Sam Elia, Kurt Beyer, Frank Giltner.

Bradley coaching. Purple teams have also been noted for their fine sportsmanship and court behavior under his leadership."

Bradley left to become head coach and athletic director at Hartwick, his alma mater, in 1947. Hartwick had won only five games the previous season against non-descript opponents. His first Iroquois Warrior team won 14, the launch of a 47-18 record in three years against inter-sectional and formidable eastern opponents, that included St. Bonaventure, Siena, and Long Island University, then the No. 1 team in the nation.

Bradley was looking for a challenge at a major school. He found one, Duke, mired in the middle of the old Southern Conference. His first Duke team went 20-13, finished runner-up in the conference and a tournament finalist. A year later, his Blue Devils won more games, 24, than any in Duke history, losing only six and advancing, again, to the tournament final. Bradley's Atlantic Coast Conference teams won the regular season championship twice, in 1953-54 and 1957-58.

His 1954-55 team, a 20-game winner, was the first Duke team to advance to the NCAA tournament. The 1950-51 team holds the NCAA record for the largest deficit overcome, 32 points, to win a game. It tied with Kentucky for the largest second-half deficit to be overcome, 31 points. The former Norwich coach attended the birth of the ACC, dominated archrival UNC, beat Case, McGuire, Rupp. His Duke record was 167-78 in nine seasons.

At Texas, Bradley inherited a program whose coach had been hung in effigy twice. The Longhorns had gone 4-20 the previous season, last in the Southwest Conference. His first team there, 1959-60, won the Southwest Conference championship and went to the NCAA tournament, advancing to the regional semi-finals. The 1962-63 Texas team, 20-7, was conference champion and, again, an NCAA regional semi-finalist – now known as the Sweet Sixteen. His 1964-65 team won Bradley's third conference title. His record at Texas was 125-73 in eight years.

Hal Bradley was coach-of-the-year twice in both the ACC, 1956, 1959, and the SWC, 1960 and 1967. He was voted coach-of-the-year three times by *Athlete Magazine*. He retired in 1967 at the age of 55, with an overall record as head coach of 517-239. In 32 seasons, he never had a losing team.

At the 1969 NCAA championship, he received the Award of Merit for Distinguished Coaching, and the Honor Award for over 500 victories, both from the National Association of Basketball Coaches. In 1975, he was elected to the Helms College Basketball Hall of Fame in Los Angeles. One sportswriter wrote that "victories he won doubled the adjectives we used." Another wrote that he "coupled dignity with basketball genius."

The popular Bradley served on the UPI Coaches' Board, the US Olympic Basketball Selection Committee; was vice-president of the National Association of Basketball Coaches. He was inducted into the Hartwick College Athletic Hall of Fame in 1998, the New York State Basketball Hall of Fame in 2006, the Oneonta High School Wall of Distinction in 2009.

For Brad and wife Dora, Norwich was never far away. They did not leave their Norwich friends behind. They came back unflinchingly for class reunions and special occasions – of note the 50th Wedding Anniversary of Kurt and Edith Beyer. Brad's feelings for Norwich were evidenced in a boys' basketball novel he was writing before his death. His characters had Norwich names: Purdy, Miles, Benenati, and Mirabito.

He loved Norwich. To be remembered now, so many years later, would have made him very proud.

—Ray Davis