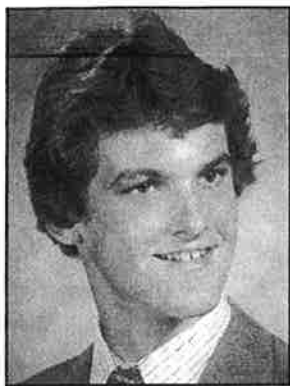


Graeme Tosh, '82



Throughout musical history there have been scores of songs that used the word kick in their titles or was incorporated as a primary theme in the body of that work. And even a few artists have used the word to define their act, such as Alive And Kicking, who recorded "Tighter, Tighter" in 1970.

Paul Revere & The Raiders reached Top 10 heights with their 1966 anti-drug anthem "Kicks", and a few years later in 1969 The MC 5, who hailed from Detroit but with no Motown ties, recorded the heavy metal classic "Kick Out The Jams." Even Chuck Berry, the Poet Laureate of Rock 'N' Roll, crooned "I have no 'kick' against modern jazz unless they play it too darn fast" in his immortal Chess disc "Rock And Roll Music" in 1957.

The list goes on and on with Big Band tunes meeting folk endeavors which in time came head to head with British Invasion recordings – all using that most adaptive word kick. And, during the "Disco Era" the City of Norwich was abuzz with a special air never before heard as a young British lad by the name Graeme Tosh 'kick-started' its high school's fledgling soccer program to never before dreamed of heights.

The Tosh family arrived on the Norwich scene during the summer of 1977, when Graeme's father, Ian, was transferred here as an employee of Norwich-Eaton Pharmaceuticals. Although well-suited to play on the Norwich varsity soccer team, Tosh was not allowed to as New York State Public High School Athletic Association rules denied junior high school students from partaking in varsity sports. And, since Norwich did not sport a junior varsity squad at that time, Tornado head coach John McCumiskey petitioned the Norwich Board of Education to grant Graeme permission to participate under the Exceptional Student Athlete Classification, but to no avail.

"I first met Graeme in July (1977) when he came to Gibson School to join the summer soccer program," recalled McCumiskey. "At first I had him join in with his own age group, but his skill level was so much higher that he began to dominate the games."

Asked if he would like to play in the adult league, he jumped at the opportunity. Playing with and against players from 16-29 years of age, he excelled at the demanding position of center halfback, ultimately being voted by the league as his team's Most Valuable Player. Later that summer, Tosh participated in a four-team tournament, consisting

mainly of 15- and 16-year-olds, in Downsville along with Mount Markham and Oneonta. Again after showcasing his talents, Downsville coach Jim Campbell summed it up best, "That boy is one of the most gifted 16-year-olds I have seen in this tournament." He became even more amazed when informed that he was only 13.

So, in the fall of 1977, having just come off a 4-5 losing season during its inaugural year (1976) as a varsity sport, Norwich, with Tosh acting no more than a ball boy/team manager, was forced to watch its most talented and gifted player ever to grace its presence relegated to the bench during game time. That season, the Purple's first in the Southern Tier Athletic Conference (STAC), resulted in a 5-11 record. And, maybe because of lack of playing time



The Start of it All—In the fall of 1973 Norwich High School fielded its first soccer team. This group of trailblazers played a club schedule for three years until the sport was given varsity status in 1976. Picture are front: Dan Peck, Chris Halom; second: Eric Meier, Lou Callea, Stu Lowenstein, Tim Borfitz, Dennis Esslinger, Bruce Gever (Assistant Coach); third: Mike Sheehan, Don Nash, Marty Perry, Steve Landry, Charlie Foster, John McCumiskey (Head Coach); fourth: Matt Nelson, Norm Lyster, Mike Stewart, Jeff Abbott, Bernie Brunza

as an eighth grader, Tosh and his fellow freshmen players suffered through a 2-14-1 result in 1978 as he accounted for four goals and two assists.

"It was the first time in my life that I wasn't a part of a team," said Tosh of that 1977 season. "It wasn't like sitting out a game due to an injury, because then you knew you were going to play sometime again. I played some on the weekends, but I didn't practice or have much contact with the team.

"The next year, though, I think it was just a case of maturation process," continued Tosh. "We were still ninth graders and had no junior varsity experience. Our core players were not the team yet."

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With Tosh at the forefront, though, the next three years would prove to be the greatest run in the history of Norwich soccer. From 1978 through 1981, the Tornado strikers produced a gaudy 38-17-3 record (.691) with two STAC Division II crowns. Tosh, who was voted to the league's All-Division First Team all three seasons, chalked up 69 goals and 11 assists during that three-year span.

"After going 2-14-1 in 1978, nobody expected us to do well," noted McCumiskey of his team's coming of age. "But we started to get more scoring, especially from Graeme, and it was a lot like Leicester (City Football Club) winning the Premier League in England recently."

Leicester, which ironically is where Tosh and his brother Steve were born, had never won a top-division league in the club's 132-year history before pulling off the unexpected championship last April as a 5,000-to-1 underdog. In fact, the team finished in 14th place during the 2014-15 season, and hadn't placed better than second since back in 1928-29.

After netting 17 goals during his sophomore and Norwich's breakout season of 1979, which resulted in the first of those two aforementioned STAC Division II crowns, Tosh really heated up for his final two Purple campaigns. He charted 26 goals in each of his junior and senior seasons, accounting for 62 percent of the Tornado's 42 scores in 1980 and 52 percent of Norwich's tallies in 1981. During those two fall campaigns, NHS outscored its adversaries 42-31 and 50-20, respectively.

As a junior, Tosh scored in 15 of his team's 20 games, with a high of four tallies being recorded in a 5-2 victory over Chenango Forks in the opening round of Section IV Class B action. On two other occasions he netted three goals, the first in a 5-2 season-opening triumph at Susquehanna Valley and the other in a 4-0 non-league victory versus Oxford. But, the best was yet to come.

"During the summer in between my junior and senior years, I played in the Empire State Games with (goalie) Jim Kilgore. We both came to realize that it just wasn't fun, but that people had heard about you outside of Norwich," recalled Tosh. "Our team as a whole wanted to win STAC our senior year, so we worked very hard, especially to beat Oneonta and Vestal."

Although with a caveat attached, that goal was accomplished. During the regular season, Norwich knocked off undefeated Vestal 3-2 and lost to Oneonta 1-0, with Tosh out due to illness. The Golden Bears gained revenge in the overall STAC championship game 2-1 by virtue of a 3-1 edge in shootout goals, but the Tornado turned the tables on the Yellowjackets 1-0 to win the Division II crown a week earlier. In that Oneonta triumph, Tosh accounted for the lone goal, a trick he previously accomplished twice in victories versus Johnson City and Binghamton.

"That victory against Oneonta to win the Division II title was special, not only because I missed the first game but because it was in front of a massive crowd estimated at over 500," noted Tosh. "Late in the first half I got hit and I don't even remember scoring as I played the rest of the game with something like a concussion."

For his final go-round, Tosh matched his previous game-high performance of four goals in a 4-1 victory over Ithaca on Oct. 19, 1981 in what coach McCumiskey called "the best game of his career." Scoring in 15 of his 18 outings, Tosh struck for the three-goal hat trick thrice – in a 6-2 season-opening win at Chenango Valley, with a 4-1 victory at Seton Catholic and in another 4-1 triumph versus Maine-Endwell.

"Graeme was a power as a soccer player. He was keyed on every game. At least one player shadowed him all over the field, sometimes two – one fronting and one trailing him," explained McCumiskey. "He in one word was a whippet – thin, wiry and very agile. He never sustained an injury, and I attribute that to his quickness and his knowledge of the game's situations. When sizing up a player you've never seen, the old adage is to make him go left. Well, Graeme is a lefty and he just blew by people. He was fast as well as talented – the whole package.

"He was always a gentleman on the field, never got angry even when 'hacked on' by opponents," continued the former long-time NHS striker coach. "Not only did he bring Norwich up to be a soccer power, because of his awesome scoring potential, during his four years, but he continued the same feat at Nazareth College in Rochester."

During Tosh's four years at Nazareth, he led the Golden Flyers to a 42-17-7 record (.712), which included a 12-4-1 log and a berth in the ECAC Division III Tournament his captain-led senior campaign. Upon graduation in 1986, he was the all-time leading scorer with 105 points on 43 goals and 19 assists. The only Nazareth player to score three goals in one game twice, Tosh was named to the New York State All-Star Team in 1985. Inducted as a member of Nazareth's first Hall of Fame class in 1995, he still holds records for career (43 in 69 games) and single season (18) goals.

So how did all this soccer success at Norwich and Nazareth begin?

Tosh began playing the sport when he first started school in England and continued when his family moved to New Zealand while he was between the ages of 8 and 10. They returned to England in 1974 where he continued to grow until his move to the United States and Norwich.

"In England soccer is very peer generated. You just try to keep up with everyone else," said Tosh. "Even though I

had been playing for quite a few years, I really started to take an interest during the 1974 World Cup when I was 10 years old. Guys like Franz Beckenbauer (West Germany) and Johan Cruyff (The Netherlands) were great to watch. And you can't forget Pele, either.

Beckenbauer and Cruyff hooked up as adversaries in the championship game won by West Germany 2-1, while Pele (Edson Arantes do Nascimento), who most soccer aficionados consider the greatest player in the sport's history, was winding up his 19-year career with the Brazilian club Santos, an industrial port city near Sao Paulo. Later that year, he signed on with the New York Cosmos, thus helping promote the sport in the United States.

Following in Pele's footsteps, Tosh arrived here three years later, and the rest is history.

Today, Tosh lives in Mason, Ohio, a northern suburb of Cincinnati with his wife of 30 years Amy (nee Perkins), a fellow 1982 NHS grad. They are the parents of two children - Kyle (26) of Indianapolis and Emily (23) of nearby Cincinnati. After graduating from Nazareth College with a degree in Business Administration and a minor in

Marketing, he initially worked for Mobil Chemical and Xerox in Atlanta. He is currently employed as Divisional Sales Director for EMC Corporation of Boston.

Now, 35 years removed from his final soccer season in Norwich, Tosh will become the first Tornado striker honored with enshrinement into the prestigious NHSSHOF. Just how good was he? Well consider after all this time; he still holds records for career goals (73), season goals (26 twice), game goals (4 twice), career points (158) and season points (57). During his senior season, the team's 15 wins, 50 goals and eight shutouts all are school records, too. The three years of double-digit victories (13, 10, 15) during his sophomore through senior years are the only such ones in NHS history, and only three times since he donned cap and gown has the Tornado sported a winning campaign - those being just a game over .500 in 1982 (9-8-2), 2000 (9-8-1) and 2005 (8-7).

As Dino, the late great Dean Martin, once warbled in the original "Ocean's 11" back in 1960, "Ain't That a Kick in the Head?"

—Tom Rowe