

Mike Conron, '77



The story of Mike Conron is one of family, character, respect and last but not least, a competitive and talented all-around athlete. He is the fourth of six children born to Etta and Bob "Diz" Conron. Mike and his twin sister Maureen tied for the fourth spot. The Conron family covered the athletic scene in Norwich during the 1940's

through the 1970's. Diz played center for the Syracuse University football team in 1944 and was the center and MVP on the Y Giants, Norwich's Semi-Pro Football team, from 1947-50. To understand Norwich athletics and its history, you should start with Jim Dunne's history of small town Norwich during the post war years (1947-51).

The Conron boys were all athletic like their father—quiet, soft spoken, but physically active and competitive. Bill played football and track. Bob played football and wrestled. Tim played football, basketball and track. Mike played football, basketball and baseball. All for the Purple. However, the spark that ignited the fiercely competitive family was Mike's mother Etta. While the father and children were playing and working, she was raising a family. She led her children through school and on into college. Mike was fortunate enough to inherit both his mother's and father's gifts.

Dan Chrisman, Mike's football coach for three years, gave Mike the "gentle giant" label. He was the type of player who would knock your socks off, pick you up and say, "nice play." Coach Chrisman also described Mike as respectful to his coaches, teammates and opponents. His play was spirited and competitive, as was his behavior on and off the field. He was a leader by behavior, not by noise.

These were the transition years from the Iroquois league of section three to STAC of section four. Norwich encountered a schedule that staggered some of our programs for a couple of years. Mike and his teammates brought some normalcy to the program. In 1974 Norwich lost to Susquehanna Valley 70-0. In 1975 the Susquehanna Valley coach would not shake hands with the Norwich coaches and players as they had lost to a Conron-led team by a score of 25-13. Mike was in on 17 tackles and was credited with playing a major part in sending three SV players to the hospital (literally). Mike Gibson, Norwich Sun sportswriter at the time, also mentioned that in the first game of the season, his hit on a Homer star running back ended his season. The Homer coach is quoted as

saying that "Mike Conron is one of the hardest, cleanest hitters I've seen."

Mike and his teammates provided a turning point for Norwich athletics, especially football, in STAC. The Purple became competitive in a league that looked at Norwich as "the little town that could not win." The 1976 football schedule was a turning point in modern Norwich athletic history.

The Purple had been removed from the 1976 STAC schedule. This premature move was corrected later in the summer, but not in time for the creation of a new schedule. Norwich went independent. It was tough but manageable. They were playing schools their own size. Led by Conron and Andy Schroer, the Purple retained its spot as one of Central New York's football powerhouses and regained its strong position in the Norwich athletic program. Their record was 6-2 and their last home game was a loss to Cortland 7-14.



Varsity Captains, Mike Conron and Andy Schroer

Tim Conron, Mike's younger brother, and a superb athlete in his own right, told the story of Mike leading the Purple to a win over arch-rival Oneonta, led by Mark May. May was 6'6" and 250 lbs. Mike was 5'10" and 200 lbs. According to Tim, Mike led a highly-spirited battle against May and his Oneonta teammates. Apparently Mark had told Tim, "You'd better tell your brother to dial it down." Tim had responded, "I'm not telling him. YOU tell him. He won't stop, so good luck with that!" Mike and the team beat Mark May and Oneonta that day! (May went on to win the Outland trophy for college football, and become a first round NFL draft pick as offensive lineman of the Washington Redskins.)

As a senior in football in 1976, Conron led the defense all season. He scored a touchdown with a recovered fumble, kicked a 29-yard field goal and made several extra

points. In the fifth game of the season, a 15-0 defeat of the undefeated Homer team, Conron was involved in 22 tackles, caused a fumble with a crushing hit, and was everywhere a Homer runner was.

Dave True, Mike's baseball coach for three years, described Mike as the kind of athlete that any coach loves to have -- very coachable and competitive. He was a team leader who hit in the clutch. He wasn't fast but a smart base runner. He was a catcher with a strong arm, and was also a very good first baseman. Mike, according to Coach True, is a Norwich Hall of Fame athlete.

As a junior in baseball, Mike batted .372 in STAC. He was chosen to the STAC Eastern Division All-Star first team as a first baseman. In a May 15-inning game against Binghamton North, he pitched 6 innings in relief and went 4 for 4 at the plate: Norwich won 9-8.

As a senior, Conron hit .350 playing first base in STAC. In a game against Chenango Valley, he went 4 for 5, with 4 RBIs, 3 runs scored, with a home run and a triple. Norwich won that game 15-13. He was again selected to the first team STAC Eastern Division All-Star team. He was Norwich's only representative.

Mike's athletic and academic career continued after his high school graduation from Norwich. He attended the Fork Union Military Academy where he continued his outstanding football and baseball career. Jackie Jensen, Mike's baseball coach, told Diz that as good as Mike was as a football player, he believed that Mike was an even better baseball player. He captained the baseball team in his second year.

Mike attended Marshall University and lettered in football as a walk-on in 1979.

Mike now works for Penn State University Bakery and Auxiliary Services. He is in his 37th year as a high school boys' basketball referee, president of the basketball officiating board and has worked high school championship games as well as numerous Penn State men and women's basketball scrimmages. On Saturdays during football season you will find Mike working as a spotter for the Beaver Stadium public address announcer.

Mike and Cindy, his wife of 32 years, have three daughters—Courtney, Kelly, and Kayla and one grandson Ryan. All three girls were athletes too. Courtney still holds pitching records for Slippery Rock University and Kelly joined her on the softball team as an outfielder. Kelly plans to run her second Boston Marathon this April. All three daughters are now teachers in the Atlanta Georgia area.

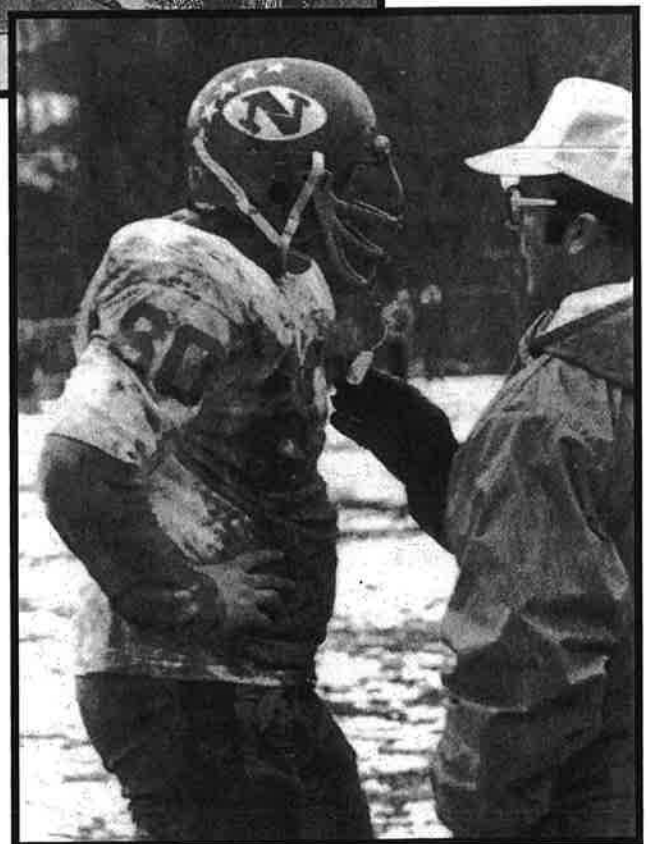
FOOTNOTE:

On a personal note—George Echentile and I were assistant coaches during the early 1970's, prior to Coach

Dan Chrisman's arrival. Our introduction into the STAC football schedule was handled poorly. Our football players at this time were as committed and dedicated as any before them. They suffered the consequences of a brutal schedule. They stayed committed and dedicated to the program nonetheless. Therefore the Norwich athletes sustained our position in Central New York athletics.

The 25-13 victory over Susquehanna Valley in 1975 was the beginning of payback for losses of 70-0 and 70-6. "It was unfortunate," Chrisman suggested, "that the Sus Valley coach had to pay back only the first installment."

—Don and Sally Chirlin



Conron getting instruction from Coach Dan Chrisman