

Perry Browne



Frank Pearsall Browne, born in Elmira in 1901, came to Norwich as a young boy when his father was appointed General Secretary of the Railroad YMCA, located on the corner of East Main and Midland.

Perry, as he was to be known, graduated from Norwich High School—but his heart never left. His interest in sports and his talent for writing were nurtured there.

From the first day that he set up shop at The Norwich Sun, Perry Browne was destined to become the heart and soul of Norwich High School athletics. Perry's typewriter spoke to his town every day he lived. The coaches, athletes, and parents of athletes in his time would remember and they would cheer his Hall of Fame election.

In 1935, a young Perry Browne gave Norwich High School his most endearing gift. In a story that October, leading up to the Binghamton game, he unwrapped it in print—this first reference to a "Purple Tornado!" It caught the fancy of school officials and became, to this day, the ever-popular nickname of all athletic teams here. This alone, many believe, earns him an enduring acknowledgement and a permanent recognition.

In Perry's time, sports coverage was very provincial. Although The Norwich Sun was a county-seat newspaper, it was not, then, a county newspaper. For Perry there was only Norwich High School, and he gave it his full heart and full voice. His style of writing may not have been taught in journalism school. It was more personal, more pictorial. Perry took you there—even if you had already been there! He brought to his desk a quiet passion, an unwavering devotion and personal concern for the well-being of the young people about whom he wrote.



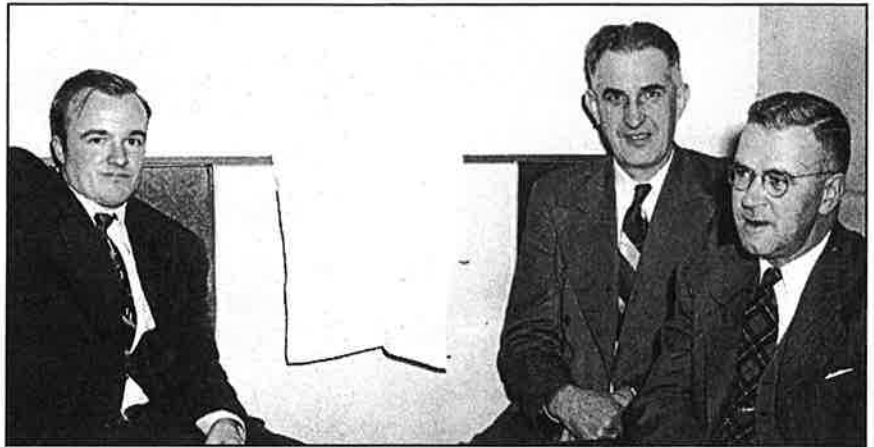
Few know how rigorous it can be to write a daily column, in addition to the long hours other duties entail. Perry's never-fail column, "Sport Slants," was informative, interpretive, entertaining; always interesting, always local. And always read. His game coverage was prolific, positive, upbeat. His sports pages were the spirit of the newspaper. It was as if Perry were a guest for dinner every evening.

Perry was committed to Norwich High and its betterment. The need was apparent for new facilities such as the purchase of Alumni Field, the construction of tennis courts, baseball diamonds, and stands for fans. All these improvements were made possible because of Perry Browne and his aid through the

daily sports column.

Norwich traditionally was a football town. Fans here got a swash-buckling bonus with the creation of the Norwich Y Giants, in the late 1940's and early 50's. As both an influential sports editor and a member of the Giants' Board of Control, Perry was a driving force behind this enormously popular and successful semi-pro team. It was a team that featured, primarily, former Tornado standouts. Perry beat the drum for its creation, and attended its life until his untimely death.

There are few military veterans still left to recall that Perry went to war with the sons and daughters of Norwich, writing and editing the famous "Y Newsletter" that made mail calls wherever the sons and daughters served. The six-page newsletter was the collaboration of Perry and Stan Georgia at the YMCA, who provided the financing and logistics. Perry was, as always, the



Bob VanTine, Stan Georgia, Perry Browne

tireless writer and editor, sharing local news and sports, and the station and duties of those in uniform. Letters home from places around the globe never failed to mention the morale-boosting value of the Y Newsletter, and how eagerly it was anticipated. One can only imagine a Norwich soldier, sitting on his helmet in a foxhole, reading, perhaps tearfully, of the Purple Tornado teams he left, half-a-world away.

Perry's deep involvement with Norwich schools had a wide reach and encompassed more than athletics. The naming of an elementary school was testimony of the esteem in which the community held him. And still does.

Perry Browne left, too soon, the teams, the school, the city he loved. He died in March, 1951, of a fatal heart attack while, ironically, attending an event at the high school where his illustrious journalistic career had begun. He was only 49. Kurt Beyer later told a friend, "He died in my arms."

Seldom has the passing of a man affected the community as did the premature death of Perry Browne. It was fortuitous that a year earlier, also in March, Perry was honored with a rather spontaneous testimonial dinner at the Norwich Club. Hundreds attended. Hundreds more sent fond messages of congratulations. The occasion was his promotion to editor and general manager of the Norwich Sun.

Continued on next page

Perry's son Bill (now living in Kansas) recalls his father's guiding principle: "Never criticize an individual player." The individual boy or girl is doing the very best he can or he would not be playing for the coaches at Norwich High. Bill also comments that before the days of press boxes and spotters, his dad would walk the sideline of Alumni Field with a friend and record every play and statistic. He used to quietly say "I've walked half-way around the earth reporting the exploits of NHS football teams."

Margaret Hannon (co-worker at the Sun) commented in a tribute to Perry, "As long as a boy plays baseball on Veterans Field diamond, for as many days as the thud of football resounds from a cleated shoe on Alumni Field, for as many years as boys gather in the YMCA for clean wholesome fun, so long will a part of Perry Browne continue in benediction on the home town he loved."

"His was a life," wrote E.H. Clark, owner of The Sun, "devoted to doing things for others. He was fair. He was kind. He was understanding. He stood up to every test and was found wanting in none." Bob VanTine, Perry's successor, struggled to find the words to express his grief at the loss of his mentor and idol. In his column the following day, he concluded his eulogy with the words, "Deep in Perry's heart, there was a Purple tinge."

Time now, soon enough, for Perry Browne to join the great coaches and the great athletes, so many whose lives he enhanced, in the Norwich High School Sports Hall of Fame

—Ray Davis and Frank Benenati



*Stan Georgia and Perry Browne
at work on the Y News Letter, which
went to all servicemen and
servicewomen during WWII.*