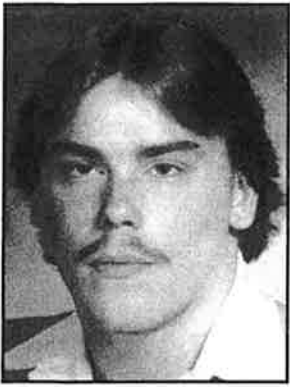


## Tim Whitney, '80



Unlike Gale Sayers who would juke his way around or vault over his would-be tacklers like a spirited steed on an open Western range, or a pirouetting Jerry Rice saving an errant aerial with a one-handed catch that was so soft to the touch you'd feel safe with your two-day-old baby in his hands, or Tony Dorsett displaying the grace of

a fast-charging cheetah en route to an antelope entrée – none of these gridiron visions would ever be confused for Tim Whitney.

And, on the hardwoods, you'd never mistake the 6-foot-1; 215-pound barrel-chested Whitney for a soaring Michael Jordan who donned butterfly wings whenever he needed to hover over the rim, or foolishly think that the pinpoint accuracy and deft ball handling of point guard John Stockton mirrored Whitney while he was playing the same position.

Whitney's style of play on the football field and the basketball court was more like the opening line in the 1971 Ike & Tina Turner classic "Proud Mary." There the St. Louis duo warbled "You know, every now and then I think you might like to hear something from us nice and easy. But there's just one thing you see, we never do nothing nice and easy. We always do it rough."

Whether you thought Whitney's athletic style was rough and tough or full of finesse, there's no mistaking that it was great enough to earn him a place among the inductees to the seventh annual Norwich High School Sports Hall of Fame.

"Tim was a big, strong quarterback. He was a great passer, but he reminds me most of Ben Roethlisberger (present day Pittsburgh Steelers quarterback) in both his physical stature and style of play," recalled former Norwich football coach Dan Chrisman, who mentored Whitney during his first season (1977) as the Tornado signal caller when he was only a sophomore.

And, if he mirrored Roethlisberger while on the gridiron, he was more than a carbon copy of Charles Barkley when he was tearing up the hardwoods. Sir Charles known predominantly for his bruising play under the nets, could also tickle the twines from the outer regions, too.

"Tim had a good jump shot, but he had the ability to put it on the floor and take it to the rim," noted Corey Wolford, who was the Norwich junior varsity coach when Whitney played varsity under the late Bill Carson and late

Ken Stewart Sr. for three seasons (1977-80). "On defense he had great anticipation and that enabled him to steal a lot of passes. He was just very athletic; a great competitor."

Tom Seary, who as a junior played with Whitney during his senior year and who tabulated 414 career points during his two varsity seasons, remembers his combativeness well. "Tim, known to many as 'Whit' or 'Moose' because of his large stature, had the uncanny ability to score even when being double teamed. Although traditional players of the shooting guard position are often shorter, leaner and quicker than forwards, he had the desire, determination and physical attributes to seemingly score at will. Whit was more than a shooter, he was a scorer. At times it seemed as if he was a man playing amongst boys. In an era before the three-point arc, opposing coaches often were of the mindset 'you know Whitney's going to get his 20-25 points, we just need to contain the rest of their team.'"

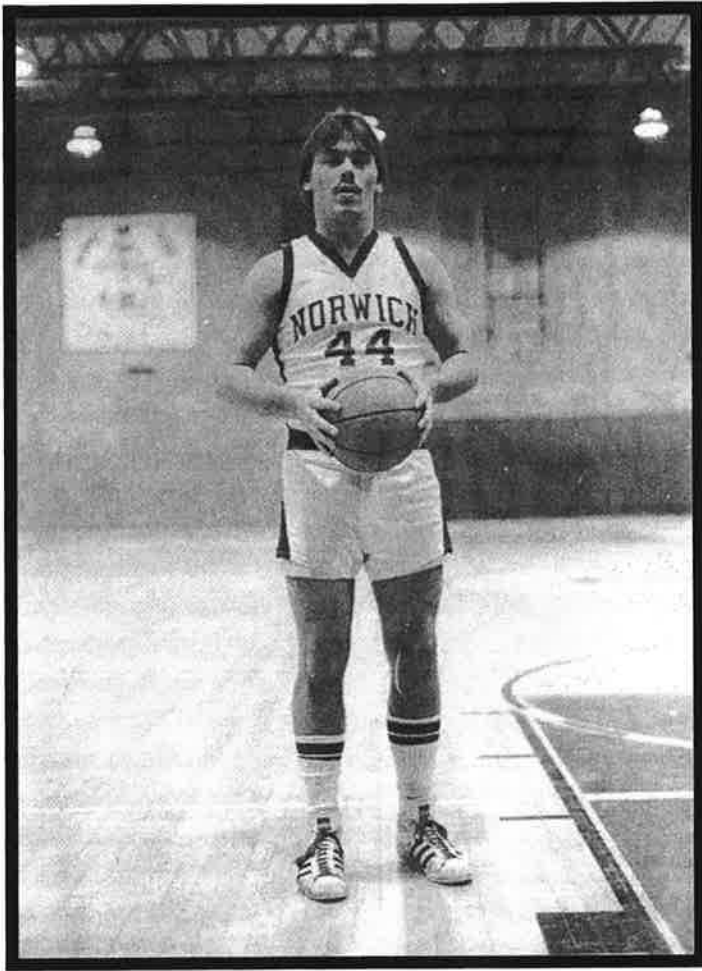
Whether it was his fierce competitiveness, God-given athleticism or keen anticipation, Whitney used a concentrated mixture of all three in becoming one of Norwich's greatest basketball players. Despite playing his last game seven years before the advent of the three-point field goal, he ranks in the top 10 in almost every pertinent Tornado cage category.

At the apex of that register is his 23.2 points per game average during his senior campaign of 1979-80, a figure more than a full point better than runner-up Bobby Lazor. That all-time best Norwich scoring average enabled Whitney, who was elected to the Section IV Hall of Fame in 2007, to lead the Southern Tier Athletic Conference (STAC) and all Chenango County cagers in scoring. Playing in all 20 of the Purple's outings, Whitney finished in double digits in each of those contests, with respective highs of 36 and 32 coming in a 63-52 victory at Oneonta on Dec. 29, 1979 and a 68-58 loss at Seton Catholic Central two days prior. In all, he topped 20 points or more 15 times, with a most-respectable low of 16 coming on two occasions. Those 36 markers versus the Yellowjackets rank ninth in game scoring as do his 14 free throws made in that same Oneonta fray.

"I remember that Oneonta game really well," recalled Whitney. "While we were warming up, the door to the gym opens and in walks Mark May. That kind of pumped me up and I had a pretty good game (11 field goals and 14-for-17 in free throws)."

May, who graduated from Oneonta in 1977, was probably home on Christmas break from the University of Pittsburgh, where he earned All-American status his senior year (1980). The recipient of the Outland Trophy,

signifying the top collegiate lineman in the country, following his senior year, May later went on to star as part of the "Hogs" on the Washington Redskins offensive line. He is a member of the College Football Hall of Fame.



Whitney's 463 points for the year rank fourth all-time in season scoring as he netted 162 field goals, while amassing a hefty 139-for-186 (.747) total from the charity stripe, a season-made sum that ranks third in NHS history. When added to his respective junior and sophomore totals of 385 and 99, Whitney finished his Tornado career with 947 points, which ranks fifth all-time. He also places fourth in career two-point field goals with 356, and is sixth and seventh, respectively, with 162 and 154 season two-point baskets in 1979-80 and 1978-79.

"Whit was a hard worker on the court. His points never came easy," noted 1977-78 teammate Denny Walker. "He was the hero of the three-point game – not the three-point line, because it didn't exist. He knew how to get the offensive rebound, put back the shot, get fouled and make the foul shot – the three-point game in the '70s.

"I only played one year of varsity ball with him. He was a sophomore my senior year. One game that season solidified that Whit knew his role with our team and could help us win a few more games," recalled Walker, who

was the NHS MVP in both 1977 and 1978 in addition to scoring 531 career points in his own right. "We were playing against a very good and big Binghamton North team (Feb. 8, 1978) at their gym, which was like playing in a medieval-type dungeon. Everything, including the odds of us winning the game, was against us. With nine seconds left in the game we were down by one point. Whit grabbed the rebound of a missed Binghamton shot and he and I took off for the other end of the court. Whit had the ball coming into a two-on-two situation, but knew his place on the court – being a sophomore – and dished it off to me – a senior – for the last 'do or die' shot. We won by one point (45-44), and as we ran directly to the bus through a hostile crowd, I could only think how unselfish his play was that night. Whit's time would definitely come."

As a three-year starter on the Norwich cage unit, Whitney played in 53 of the Tornado's 59 outings, a torn ligament injury in his ankle during his sophomore season necessitating him to miss six games. And, like Walker so aptly noted, Whitney's time did indeed come. All told, he finished with those aforementioned 947 points – fifth all-time – and a 17.9 ppg. average for his career. Twice named to both the STAC Division II and All-County first teams, he was a Norwich Christmas Tournament all-star as a sophomore and junior as scheduling conflicts negated the tourney his senior season.

"A lot of people said Coach Carson couldn't relate or he was past his prime years, but he was a big influence on me," pointed out Whitney, whose sophomore and junior seasons represented Carson's final two during his 15-year run. "He was always very direct and didn't expect any lofty expectations from any of us. He was a humble man."

Although Whitney produced historic numbers during his three-year Purple career, Norwich was mired in a vicious 15-44 slump during that same time frame as he and the Purple were forced to match up against some literally tall competition. As a junior, Whitney reached 30 points for the first time in his career during a 77-65 home loss to Susquehanna Valley on Jan. 9, 1979. In that game 6-foot-7 Rob Garbade – a 2009 Section IV Hall of Famer – scored 28 points, a feat he surpassed two months later when he tabulated 36 in a 90-71 triumph over the Tornado in a Section IV Class A quarterfinal on March 3. The Sabers went on to finish runner-up by two points to sectional champions Elmira Notre Dame.

"Norwich was a tough basketball town even before those two state titles, so losing was tough to swallow every day. No one likes to lose," admitted Whitney. "And, we not only went up against some pretty good teams but some really big guys, as well."

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In another David vs. Goliath standoff, Norwich more than held its own before succumbing to powerful Union-Endicott 80-63 in an away tilt on Jan. 8, 1980. There, Whitney produced 28 points on eight field goals and 12-for-13 free throw totals to offset the respective 27 and 26 sums rang up by the Tigers' 6-foot-6 sophomore Mike Sinicki and 6-foot-7 senior Sean Kerins, the latter of whom got into foul trouble because of Whitney's relentless drives to the basket. Kerins, like Garbade is a member of the Section IV Hall of Fame (1992). Norwich's 63 points were the most yielded by U-E, which later lost to Ward Melville in the New York State semifinals, during its entire season.

"I had a pretty good mid-range jump shot, but I drove the ball to the hoop a lot because I had to try and out quick the big guys and get them into foul trouble," explained Whitney, who went to the line 332 times during his career, being successful on 235 of his tries. "When I was 12 or 13, I used to go to the YMCA a lot, because that was the place to be. I learned how to play there, especially how to play inside by watching guys like Steve Benenati, Eddie George and John "Pencil" Swertfager (all of whom played for Norwich in the early 1970s).

"As a freshman on the junior varsity (1976-77), I learned how to play the game the right way from Mark Griffin (a senior at the time). He taught me not only how to play but how to act, as well. I also watched Gary Stewart (NHS '76) a little earlier. He was the Steve McQueen - 'The King of Cool' - of basketball. He taught me a lot about the game. He was one of the best."

While Whitney concluded his Norwich athletic career with the close of the 1979-80 basketball season - he opted not to compete in spring sports - his historic three-year varsity run commenced on Sept. 17, 1977 when, as only a sophomore, he assumed the signal calling role for the Tornado gridders. Prior to that season, Whitney played fullback and defensive tackle on the undefeated (8-0) NHS junior varsity.

As one of the youngest (15) players to start every game at quarterback, Whitney received second team All-County status as a 10th grader when he was the only sophomore on either the first or second teams, and later won first team accolades for his defensive back prowess in both county and STAC action.

So how did a fullback/defensive tackle become the Norwich quarterback at such a young age?

"He was a natural leader. The other kids followed him, listened to him and looked up to him," noted Chrisman, who not only coached him that first varsity season, but was the NHS Athletic Director during his entire Purple career. "He just had inherent qualities, and that's what you

look for in a player. Not only was he a leader, but he was a total team player, who was well liked by his coaches and teammates, as well as the teachers and students."

Whitney explained that Coach Chrisman allowed him to grow into his role as quarterback, giving him the opportunity to achieve whether success or failure followed him on the gridiron. "He told me he'd call the plays my first year, then we'll split them when you're a junior and finally I'd be my own man as a senior," noted Whitney. "But, Coach (Lou) Palazzi took over my junior year and he wanted to run an option offense. I wasn't an option quarterback, though."

Although Norwich sported only an 11-12-1 record during Whitney's reign, six victories and one tie were achieved with less than two minutes left or on last-possession drives. Two such triumphs occurred during his senior season when Norwich defeated Maine-Endwell 18-6 at Alumni Field and edged Seton Catholic Central 14-12 in Binghamton. In that initial home win, Whitney found Kurt Edwards on a 70-yard TD strike to knot the game at 6-6 just before halftime, and after he intercepted an errant Spartan aerial he led the Purple on a 76-yard, clock-eating drive that put the hosts in control when he scored from three yards out. Prior to the touchdown, Whitney kept the drive alive when he snuck for a first down on fourth-and-short at the M-E 21. Three weeks later, he rallied the Purple troops against the Saints when he connected with All-STAC split end Seary on a pair of scoring passes from 13 and 10 yards, respectively.

"Being a true leader, Tim led us to many comeback wins during his career," recalled Seary. "When the fourth quarter started, 'Moose' turned it up a notch. That contest against Seton was a perfect example. Down throughout the game, he led a fourth-quarter comeback with a pair of touchdown passes and a two-point conversion to pull out the victory.

"But, he was also a dual threat, because standing at 6-1; 215 pounds Tim was an imposing threat to defenses for when he took off running, the 'Moose' was on the loose. Many a defensive back cringed at the sight of 'Whit' running at them. As Chris Berman (ESPN sportscaster) said frequently, 'he was rumblin', bumblin' and stumblin.'"

Said Coach Palazzi at the time, "Tim Whitney was exceptional. I think that game versus Seton may have been his best game in three years here." For the record, Whitney was 8-for-15 in the air for 75 yards and those aforementioned two TDs and 10-for-30 on the ground.

A year before, Whitney thwarted the Saints again when late in the game he directed a 14-play, 65-yard drive that culminated with him scoring from one yard out to tie

the game at 6-6 with 39 seconds left on the clock. Twice Norwich kept that game-tying drive alive on fourth down when Whitney hit Pete Pogue with a 13-yard first-down strike on fourth and nine, and again when Lee Suspensky chalked up another first on fourth and two at the SCC 8-yard line.

Following that tie, Palazzi again touted his young signal caller. "I feel our quarterback, Tim Whitney, has gained maturity and poise. He's learning to read defenses, and because of it, we expect to pass more than in the past."

Suspensky, who gained notoriety as an All-County first team running back in 1978—Whitney's junior year—remembers well the athleticism of his teammate. "Tim possessed a unique combination of size and athletic ability. At 6-foot-1; 200-plus pounds he was bigger than most linemen of the day, yet he played quarterback and defensive back – positions typically reserved for smaller players. His agility, quickness and speed in conjunction with a tenacity and competitive nature made him dangerous running the option or making a tackle. His background in basketball made him a natural at defensive back, and incidentally that's where he may have been at his best."

Although no statistics exist for Whitney's defensive achievements, the All-County Football article of Nov. 24, 1978 by The Evening Sun Sports Editor Joe Mink mirrors Suspensky's comments. "The Tornado's Tim Whitney possesses unusual size for the secondary at 6-1; 200 pounds, and uses it to intimidate opposing players. Known primarily as Norwich's quarterback the past two seasons, Whitney's play on defense made the Tornado tough to pass against."

During Whitney's senior year, the Tornado gridders went 4-4, but began 0-2 following back-to-back losses to Owego and Union-Endicott. In that latter contest, the Tigers rolled into Norwich as the No. 1 high school team in the state and ranked in the Top 10 nationally. The valiant Purple defense, led by Whitney, held U-E to an 8-0 lead at halftime before succumbing 34-0. From his safety position, Whitney was everywhere, knocking down passes and making tackles. One of those tipped aerials completed a goal line stand for Norwich, the only such one versus the Tigers all year, who came in averaging 50-plus points per game.

"Fran Angeline (U-E's legendary coach) writes about this game in his book 'This Tiger's Tale,'" points out Suspensky. "Later in life, I became friends with Coach Angeline and that particular game came up many times in conversation, and Tim was the focal point. It was rare that Coach Angeline wouldn't reference Tim with admiration, citing him as one of the best players in Central New York."

Following graduation, Whitney attended Coastal Carolina University in Conway, SC for two years. He currently resides in Folsom, CA with his wife of 32 years, Melanie (nee Figary) – a 1981 NHS grad – and is an Operations Manager for an environmental firm. They are the parents of two adult children, Justin (30) and Ashley (26).

Although his legacy is built on his bruising style of play, it didn't begin quite that way. "My eyes were wide open as a sophomore who never quarterbacked," admitted Whitney. "Here I was following in the footsteps of Andy Schroer (1976 NHS captain), and now I'm teamed with guys like my brother Bob (1977 captain), Tim Conron, John Follett, Stan Foulds and Mark Wood – all seniors. They taught me a lot, both how to win on the field and how to act off of it. I learned discipline from those guys."

Being a year older, Suspensky saw things a little differently. "Tim's leadership qualities were evident from the moment he stepped into his first varsity huddle. He took over the offense as a sophomore and never gave it up, becoming a three-year starter. He earned the respect of coaches and players with his tenacity and never-quit style."

So, by being able to combine the ability to can the long-range jumper as well as bruising it up with the big guys underneath the basket (note his 332 career free throw attempts), or firing pinpoint aerials for touchdowns, powering his way on many a fourth-and-short situation and wreaking havoc on would-be receivers on defense; Tim Whitney proved Three Dog Night to be very prophetic in their 1969 remake of the "Hair" anthem as his style of play was, indeed, "Easy To Be Hard."

—Tom Rowe