

Coach Charles O. Miers, 1932-1963



On July 28, 1963, over 100 friends, colleagues, and former tennis team members gathered at the Canasawacta Country Club to honor Charles O. Miers on his retirement from coaching tennis at Norwich High School.

He had coached tennis for 32 years, from 1932 through 1963, and for 25

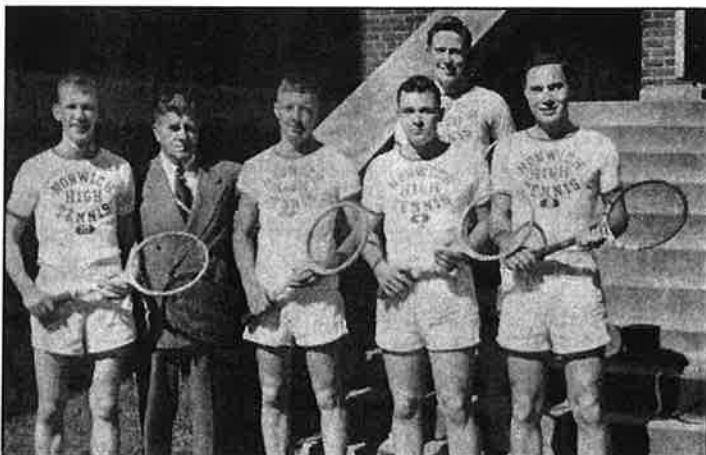
years, had run the Norwich summer tennis program. He was retiring from that position also.

Miers had arrived in Norwich as a rookie teacher at the same time as Kurt Beyer had arrived as athletic director. He was to teach English and Social Studies, but when Beyer needed a tennis coach, he donned that hat too.

It was a hat he was to wear for 32 consecutive years, longer than any coach had coached a sport in Norwich as of 1963, and a record that still stands today.

Charles O. Miers came to Norwich in 1930 from Muhlenberg College, whence he was to recruit his friend, Frank Giltner, two years later. He was born in Bangor, Pennsylvania, where his father was a chicken fancier (as distinguished from a chicken farmer). That is to say, he bred, raised, and sold prime quality chickens to farmers. He showed these birds at farm shows around the northeast, and there resides in the local Miers house a large silver trophy awarded to him at Madison Square Garden for first prize for the best "single-comb dark brown leghorn cockerel."

Miers's first three years at college were in preparation to become a Lutheran minister. When he changed his mind and opted for teaching, he expected to be asked to pay back the 3-year scholarship which the College had granted him for his first vocation, which would have been difficult – but he was not asked. In appreciation, he began a life-long passion to raise money for Muhlenberg from his classmates, setting an example himself.



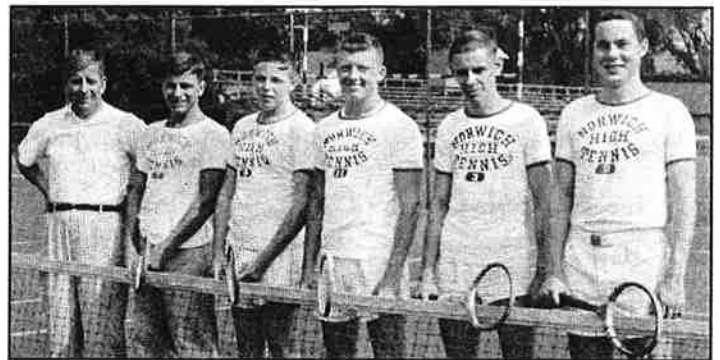
The 1953 tennis team, which had a record of 12-2. From left, Captain Gary Carpenter, Coach Miers, Wes Aldrich, Phil Bailey, Larry Owens, Dick Masterson (in back). Not pictured was John Stewart, who played #1 for most of the season and won the Section 3 singles title.

In the early years, the 1930s, just finding a tennis court was a challenge. Before the gymnasium was added to the high school on West Main Street, there was one clay court behind the school. Ted Bonney, an attorney who lived at 25 Francis Ave., had a court behind his house, which he generously made available for matches. In 1932, two high-maintenance clay courts were constructed at Alumni Field, and Coach Miers was the chief maintainer.

In 1931, Perry Browne reported that, "Tennis is fast becoming a major sport at the high school and there are as many students participating in that game as there are in baseball or even football in the fall. There is some fine material at NHS and before the curtain drops the team is expected to be a serious threat."

Miers's first team that engaged in interscholastic competition was in 1932. Its captain was Jack Snyder, son of Dr. J. Paul Snyder of Norwich Pharmacal. Others on that team were Tom Ivory, Joe Meyers, Hubert Tucker, and underclassmen Max Gustafson and George Stone. They played 4 matches, losing to Oneonta twice and splitting with Binghamton, for a record of 1-3.

Looking down through the succeeding years, Norwich's tennis fortunes mimicked other sports, with not only up and down years, but periods of several years when things went well



The 1954 tennis team, winners of the Iroquois League Championship by defeating Oneonta in the finals. Their record was 9-5. From left: Coach Miers, Dick Freed, Kenny Stewart, Captain Wes Aldrich, Bob Handy, Larry Owens.

for the Purple. The first was a two-year oasis during the 1930s, when the combined record was 11-1. In 1935, the Purple was undefeated in dual meets, 5-0, giving Miers his first undefeated season. In 1936, the record was 6-1, with the one loss to Ithaca. In both years, Norwich won the Southern Tier East title, and in 1935, the Section IV doubles champions were Norwich's George Stone and Bill Moulton.

From 1943 to 1948, all six teams had winning records, culminating in the 9-0 unbeaten season of 1948. In each of those years, Norwich did not finish without a sectional champion. Two players were primarily responsible for that remarkable run: Ed Nelson and Dick Mattice. Nelson won, in his freshman and sophomore years, the section IV doubles title, playing with Dave Charters. In his junior year, he did it again, with Bob Myles as a partner. Then, in his senior year, 1946, Nelson captured the singles crown, and Myles, playing now with sophomore Dick Mattice, took the doubles. This was the first time Norwich had swept the sectionals – but two years later, they did it again.



In 1947, Mattice took the doubles sectional crown again, playing with Charles "Stub" Stewart. Then, the following year, Miers entered Mattice in the sectional singles, and he did not disappoint. The doubles was swept by Stub Stewart and Ken Beckwith. So once again, in its undefeated year, Norwich was Section IV team champion, winning both singles and doubles.

Another run of winning seasons began in 1951, with a combined dual-meet record of 43-14 for the five years through 1955. This run began with a 5-2 record in 1951, with double thumpings of Cortland and Oneonta, and two losses to Binghamton North. A single meeting with Central resulted in the third all-time conquest by Norwich, when Ed Schofield and Gary Carpenter both won their singles matches and then teamed in doubles to win a thrilling three-set finale. These three points plus a doubles win by Captain Dick Flanagan and Jim Acenowr spelled victory and a successful season.

Purple providence improved the next year, 1952, with a 10-1 record. The only loss was to Bingo, 2-5, in the third match of the year. Later, vengeance was achieved by whipping the Bulldog not once, but twice, 7-0 and 6-0. Captain Ed Schofield was runner-up in the Sectional singles.

The 1953 team, captained by Gary Carpenter, produced another win-heavy record, 12-2, and a sectional singles champion in two-sport phenom John Stewart Sr.

Nineteen fifty-four and 1955 posted records of 9-5 and 7-4 respectively, led by captains Wes Aldrich and Kenny Stewart Sr., and including regulars Bob Handy, Larry Owens, Dick Fern and Gerry Zimmermann.

The overall match record for Miers's 32 years of coaching tennis was 155 wins and 124 losses. There were 20 winning seasons, with 12 having more losses than wins.

Sectional singles titles were brought home by Gordon Drake (1941), Ed Nelson (1946), Dick Mattice (1948 & 1949), and John Stewart (1953). Sectional doubles champions were George Stone & Bill Moulton (1935), Ed Nelson & Dave Charters (1943 & 1944), Ed Nelson & Bob Myles (1945), Bob Myles & Dick Mattice (1946), Charles Stewart & Dick Mattice (1947), Ken Beckwith & Charles Stewart (1948), and Joel Schnur & Stan Westover (1962).

In addition to coaching tennis, Miers taught an untold number of Norwich kids to play a game that many continued to enjoy for the rest of their lives. He founded and ran the City's summer tennis program for 25 years. From an average base of 80 students, he frequently chose 10 to 20 to compete in an invitational summer tournament at the Yahnundasis in Utica, the Sedgwick Farms in Syracuse, or another club in Binghamton or Oneonta. These tournaments involved boys and girls, and Miers found the requisite transportation for them. One year, according

to Coach Beyer, the Norwich players brought home all 9 winners trophies and 6 of the runners-up trophies from the Yahnundasis Invitational.

During his career, Miers also coached the cheerleaders for 8 years (he had been head cheerleader at Muhlenberg), bowling for 10, cross-country for 4, advisor to the Hi-Tribune for 18 years, advisor to the Boosters Club for 12 years, and founder and advisor of Quill & Scroll, a national journalism honorary, for 9 years. In those years, most extracurricular positions were unpaid.

Charlie Miers came to Norwich to teach, and for the first 12 years taught freshman and sophomore English. Then he switched to Social Studies for the next 12 years. During that time, he had taught Driver Training part-time. In 1954 until his final retirement in 1970, he was the full-time Driver Training instructor, and also the director of the Adult Education program at NHS.

In an interview with The Torch, one of the successors of The Hi-Tribune, upon his retirement in 1970, Charlie said, "Of the three subjects I have taught, Driver Education was the most rewarding." His stories of the adventures in the specially-equipped automobile are exceeded only by the stories told by his pupils.

The 1946 Archive was dedicated to him, with the inscription, "Our numerous and varied associations with him have found him to be a true friend to all. His willingness to serve and infinite interest in his students will long be remembered."

The event in 1963 honoring Miers on his retirement from coaching tennis was arranged by a committee composed of Bill Kepner, Ed Nelson, and Sam Elia. Kepner, local attorney and city judge, had captained a team of adults, including Miers, who played tennis against other local communities; Nelson, also an attorney, was a sectional champion for Norwich in the mid-1940s, and Elia was the current athletic director for NHS.

Letters were sent to former players, and many who were unable to attend sent telegrams or letters of appreciation:

"You introduced me to a sport that has been a constant source of enjoyment ever since. More important has been your influence...on good citizenship, mature behavior, and good sportsmanship." Dick Darling, MD, Capt. USAF, Chanute, IL.

"It is good to know that not only your ex-tennis players appreciate your many contributions to life in Norwich, but that the whole community is aware of their good fortune in having had you there." Ed Schofield, Toronto, Canada.

"I remember you as 'Mr. Tennis.' You organized the program, recruited the players, taught us how to play, provided transportation, and kept the old clay courts in condition." Bob McMann, Richmond, VA.

"They talk about your great coaching ability, but I remember you as an athlete and a character. I was present when you received your 'point-a-minute' nickname." Hal Bradley, Austin, TX.



"Best wishes from Ruth and me. And remember, there never was a day that Kepner and Nelson could beat us!" Bill Altmann, Ithaca, NY.

Bill and Ruth, or "Shim," Altmann were the parents of John Roberts, an Ithaca nemesis of Norwich's John Stewart Sr. in the 1950s. Shim was a Norwich native, niece of Marcia Stewart, long-time NHS guidance counselor.

Additional letters and telegrams were received from Bill Moulton, Ray Towner, Dr. Wilson Bailey, Jack Brodrick, Ensign Gerry Zimmermann, Andy McMullen, Jack Dickinson, Dick Pendell (former Norwich teacher), Morris Chirlin, Dank Giltner, Ed O'Hara, Gene Daily, Carl Fribley, Rev. Richardson, Father Festa, Esther Flanagan, and Patsy Smith.

Kurt Beyer was the featured speaker at Charlie's dinner. Charlie said that he thought most people came because they heard that Coach Beyer would be there, but it was easy to read between the lines that he was pleased and honored that Kurt, gone from Norwich for 6 years at that time, made the trip from Auburn.

Beyer had prepared well, and did not overlook any of Charlie's accomplishments. Charlie said, "When my turn came, I was not speechless."

After he wrapped up his 40-year teaching tenure at NHS in 1970, Miers stayed active in Norwich, serving eight years on the Board of Education and many years on the County and City Traffic Safety Commissions. He was an active member of the Norwich Rotary Club, and received its prestigious Paul Harris Fellowship. He received two awards from Muhlenberg recognizing his service as a fund raiser for the college.

Probably close to 100 boys from Norwich attended Muhlenberg on Miers's recommendation, including his twin sons. Dick Stott, naming off the top of his head men he knew who were among them, provided 15 names who graduated within a few years of his own class. The combined recommendations of Miers and Giltner were tough to ignore down in Allentown.

When Charlie Miers passed away in 1995 at the age of 89, both Jim Wright of the Binghamton Press and Kathy O'Hara of the Norwich Sun were moved to write eulogies, with the latter doing two. Filled with fond memories, they emphasized the personal qualities that made him one of the great teachers and coaches of the 1930-1970 era. He now joins his contemporaries, Kurt Beyer, Frank Giltner, Sam Elia, Hal Bradley, and George Echentile, as a member of the Norwich High School Sports Hall of Fame.

— Jim Dunne