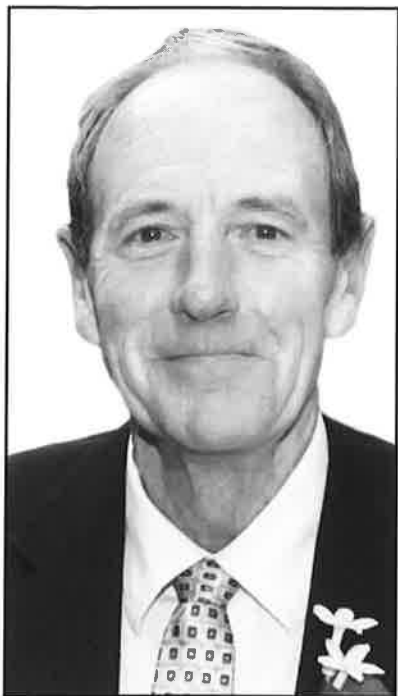


Superintendent of Norwich City Schools, Dr. Robert "Bob" Cleveland, 1980-2000



Norwich Athletics has long been that common bond that this community has rallied around for over 100 years. Many of us at one point competed at our peak as a Varsity athlete, and if you were lucky, you wore the color purple. For many, athletic participation at the Varsity level ultimately turns out to be the last time one will compete with as much intensity and veracity. When we turn that page and the aging process continues, we reflect on our experiences and realize just how YOUNG both

our bodies and minds truly were in our "competitive days".

You've heard the word legacy used in the context of how an athlete has left his or her mark on a sport, a team and even a community. We memorialize the accomplishments of these athletes by displaying trophies, plaques, banners and scrapbook memorabilia. Movies are made that support this very concept. What is truly most difficult however, is to try to quantify the value of one athlete, a single coach or a leader in terms of the IMPACT they have had on a community. This year's induction into the Norwich Sports Hall of Fame, will recognize impact; impact on a life, a team and a school that prides itself on toughness, competitive spirit and the development of young people.

Dr. Robert "Bob" Cleveland served the community of Norwich as Superintendent of Schools from 1980 - 2000. Contributors help to create and foster an environment and sense of community that rallies behind the cause of the TORNADO and promotes the drive to win. His mission and vision for NCSD bred success, both in the classroom and throughout Tornado Athletic Programming. His Athletic Director for 11 years of his tenure was a man named Jack Jones. Mr. Jones became the vehicle to which the ideals and values of the organization translated to athletics, for student-athletes, coaches and the Norwich community.

Dr. Cleveland's passion for athletics was born out of personal experience. He always joked that he was not known for his academic prowess, and that he struggled to stay focused in the classroom. For him sports were a means that enabled him to stay interested in school, and to ultimately pursue his lifelong passion of academic administration.

That experience with athletics left such an indelible mark on Bob that providing athletic opportunities to any and all students became a cornerstone of his administration. While there was great athletic success during his time as Superintendent, the records of teams and individuals meant very little to him. His hope and desire was for kids to discover the intangible benefits that sports offered. The list of these characteristics is lengthy, and may be cliché nowadays, but nonetheless true. There may be no better place to learn about accountability, discipline, teamwork, perseverance, overcoming adversity...and so much more.

The sports scene was an equalizer where all wore purple and white, if the kids believed it, they could achieve it with hard work and dedication. These are lessons shared by countless NHS athletes, who felt support and encouragement from Dr. Cleveland. He always found the time to support the athletes of NHS. Whether it was a student athlete trying volleyball for the first time or one destined for a Division 1 scholarship, the athletic experience of each was equally important. There were a lot of kids who found a place to belong, kids whose lives could have taken a very different path, for whom the team they belonged to provided so much more than a win. Being part of a team provided a place to belong, a place to be nurtured, to be challenged, to be held accountable and accepted. He made it his responsibility to get to know the athletes, to talk to them about the role athletics played in their lives. He held the role of district coaches in high regard and had high expectations for them. Long time secretary Cheri Ring recalls Bob's leadership. "Bob loved the Norwich Schools family. He was stern, yet compassionate to staff, parents and students". Whether paid or volunteer, names like Brahnam, Kovalchik, Pluta, Kaufman and James performed a very important role in district. Through coaches, relationships were built, students learned to communicate. Coaches encourage student athletes to strive for continuous improvement, to set their goals and work hard to achieve them. It was, after all, through his own coaches and his participation in athletics that Dr. Cleveland found his drive, his passion and purpose for school and ultimately both personal and professional success.

Bob loved the school sports scene and most importantly, loved the learning that occurred for all participants. As noted in the dedication in his memory of the Tornado Basketball Program for 2018-2019 season, this advice of Dr. Cleveland was quoted in the dedication: "Never forget the tradition of who you represent when you compete in a purple and white uniform!"

Go Purple!

—Scott Ryan