

Ken Stewart, Class of 1956



Ken Stewart spent over 40 years of his life as a Purple Tornado, first as a remarkable student-athlete, and then later as a beloved teacher and coach.

Throughout his Norwich High School career from 1952-56, Ken was awarded eight varsity letters for tennis (4), basketball (2) and football (2). During that time, he represented his school with hard work, dedication and a deep

sense of commitment. Because of those athletic attributes, Ken is being honored as one of the six newest inductees into the 11th annual class of the Norwich High School Sports Hall of Fame.

As captain of the 1956 basketball team, he led the Tornado to the Section III title, and was the starting point guard for both the 1955 and 1956 campaigns. On the tennis court, Ken claimed the Iroquois League singles and doubles titles, and was named captain of the 1955 squad. And on the football field, he was the starting quarterback both his junior and senior falls.

After graduating from college, Ken returned to NHS as a math teacher, dedicating 34 years of his life to the students of Norwich High School and the entire Purple Tornado community. During his time here, he coached over 30 varsity teams in both tennis and basketball, and truly left his mark on the school. His leadership, passion and determination will forever be remembered by the Norwich High School community.

Ken began high school in the fall of 1952 as a young 13-year-old freshman, and throughout his four years at NHS he was a good student, eventually graduating in the top 10 percent of his class. In the spring of 1953, he began his varsity career as the youngest player on the Tornado tennis team, making his way through a loaded squad. Playing first and second singles were his brother, John, and Wes Aldrich, and playing third singles was his future doubles partner, Larry Owens.

That 1953 team finished 11-2, tying Oneonta for the Iroquois League championship. Ken, meanwhile, wound up 7-3 overall in singles and doubles competition. In a match against Herkimer, John and Ken paired up in doubles – the first and only time they would play together in high school. They beat Bob Wright and Dele Lubry, who played first and second singles for the Magicians 6-0, 6-2. They would later pair up and play as adults in various local tournaments throughout the '60s, '70s and '80s.

During the next spring of 1954, Coach Charlie Miers had a new lineup with many upperclassmen returning. Norwich defeated Oneonta the previous year in the last match of the season to tie for the Iroquois title, but the goal this time around was to win the league outright. Ken played third singles and finished the year 11-5, and Norwich achieved its mission to secure the league

crown. That same spring, Ken paired with Larry Owens to win the Iroquois doubles title, and finished runners-up in the Section III tournament.

Nominated captain to begin his junior tennis season, Ken was elevated to first singles where he did not disappoint. In addition to laying claim to the Iroquois singles championship, he placed second in sectional play, losing 9-7 to the Oneonta player he had beaten during the league finals.

Heading into his final spring season, Ken decided to switch from tennis to baseball. The 1956 baseball nine was loaded with talent, including two Norwich Hall of Famers, Fred Swertfager and Charlie Townsend. Ken was slated to be the starting third baseman, but during a basketball tournament at the YMCA over Easter vacation, he aggravated an old elbow injury, forcing him to hang up his cleats and return to the tennis courts.

He started his senior tennis season late due to his injury. His brother, John, loved to tell the story of how Ken played his senior year of tennis with his left arm in a cast. His highlight that year was forcing the reigning Oneonta sectional champion to pull out a three-set singles match 4-6, 6-2, 6-3, demonstrating that he was still a force to be reckoned with despite playing with only one arm.

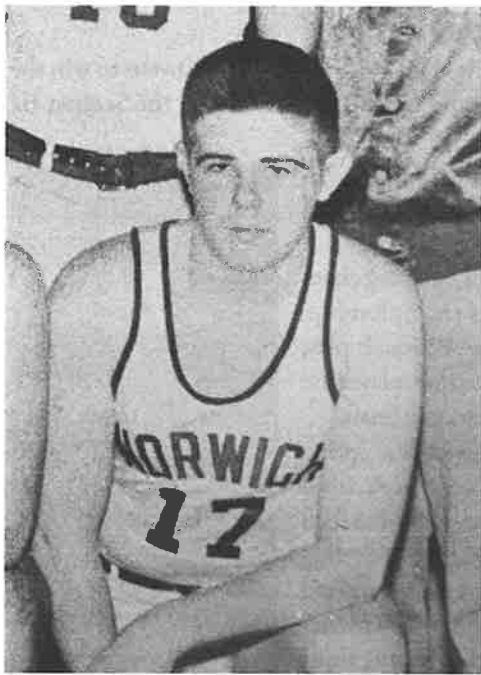
His basketball record was no less impressive. For his freshman and sophomore years, Ken was a star on the junior varsity team, serving as co-captain his sophomore season.

As a junior, he began the season as the starting point guard for the varsity, and was the third highest scorer on the team during that 1954-55 season with 181 points. During the course of their 20-game slate, the Tornado cagers posted a 5-5 Iroquois League log and an overall record of 11-9. And on nine occasions Ken reached double digits, with a season-high of 18 coming on Feb. 19, 1955 in a 71-69 loss at Hamilton. At the end-of-season banquet, he was nominated captain for the 1955-56 season.

His senior year saw a change in the coaching staff as Jim Flynn left Norwich for Elmira Free Academy, and his old JV mentor, Jim Smith, moved up to the varsity. After an up-and-down campaign, the Purple wound up 6-4 in Iroquois League play and 9-8 overall heading into Section III action. Needless to say, expectations were not very high as the March postseason began.

But Ken and his teammates came alive at the right time. After routing both Oneida (86-62) and Richfield Springs (72-53) in its first two sectional tilts, the Purple reeled off another five victories by a mere total of 11 points to capture the coveted Section III championship. The first three to fall were Chittenango (52-49),





Oneonta (51-48) and Whitesboro (47-45) before Norwich knocked off Watertown (60-58) and West Canada (40-39) on back-to-back nights of March 23 and 24 in the Onondaga War Memorial.

Ken opened that sectional run with a career-best output of 30 points on March 12 versus Oneida and closed out his Norwich cage career with a team second-best showing of 12

markers in the championship game with West Canada. On the year, he canned 279 points on a team-high 110 field goals and 59 free throws for an 11.6 average. Fourteen times he attained double digit numbers, that aforementioned 30 against Oneida his season and career best.

Following that improbable sectional run that catapulted the Purple's final log to 16-8, The Norwich Sun Sports Editor Mead Parce wrote, "Captain Stewart displayed poise and calmness that pulled many a contest out of the fire." Nowhere was that poise and calmness more evident than in the final game when he guided the Tornado to a come-from-behind victory over West Canada to cap the season for the "team of destiny."

In addition to tennis and basketball, Ken also excelled at football. He began his junior fall as the third-string fullback, but quickly moved up the ranks, and by mid-season, he was the starting quarterback. During this time, he would often eat lunch with Coach Kurt Beyer



and they would discuss strategy for Norwich's upcoming games. The season concluded with the Purple producing a 4-4 record, and Ken was honored as the team's Most Improved Player with the "1943 Team Trophy."

That award was given each year by the 1943 NHS football team that missed out on an undefeated season by one point, despite outscoring the opposition 186-34. Those Purple gridders produced a 7-1 record, losing their final game to Manlius by a scant 7-6 count on

Saturday, Nov. 13 at Kallet Field. The tying touchdown and go-ahead extra point came with just 100 seconds left in the mud- and snow-infested game.

When asked about his choice for this award, Beyer summed up Ken's junior year in a nutshell. "Stewart started the season with the third team and by the close of the year was the starting quarterback. The choice was simple. Here was a boy who figured to be third-string fullback but wound up as the club's field general. How much better could one get?"

What should have been an even better senior season, because he was starting from the outset turned into disaster when he injured his elbow halfway through the year. Although he played only four games, Ken received honorable mention status on the Iroquois League all-star slate.

After graduating from Norwich, he matriculated at Muhlenberg College in Allentown, PA, where he graduated in 1960 with a degree in mathematics. During his time there, he was offered a football scholarship, but declined fearing possible permanent damage to his elbow. He did, however, play tennis and was the No. 1 singles player his final three years for the Mules, where he was also a member of Phi Kappa Tau fraternity.

Following graduation from Muhlenberg, Ken returned to Norwich where he began a 34-year career as a math teacher. His passion for teaching and mathematics shone brightly in the classroom. His students admired and respected him for his friendly demeanor and no-nonsense teaching style that helped many students navigate the often challenging subject of math – so much so that they dedicated the 1972 yearbook to him. Ken went on to earn his master's degree from Hartwick College, and later served as Norwich's math department chairman for several years.

In December of 1962, he married Catherine Maiurano, also a teacher, and together they had two children, Kenny and Jimmy Stewart.

In 1973 Ken became the boys' tennis coach and led the local netters for 21 seasons, eventually handing the reins over to his son, Kenny. And in 1978 he was an integral part of starting a girls' tennis team that he went on to coach for 14 years. In addition to tennis, Ken was named the boys' basketball head coach in 1979 and coached six seasons until the conclusion of the 1985 year.

Throughout his coaching career, he coached many relatives, including his two sons and many of his nieces and nephews. He worked with many STAC and sectional champions, but most importantly brought to his coaching the same mindset that had made him such an exceptional athlete – a deep respect for hard work, preparation, humility; and an emphasis on the importance of teamwork.

While a teacher and coach, Ken continued to play and excel at athletics. He played fast-pitch softball for the Norwich Shoe Co. in the Chenango Valley Softball League (CVSL), and won several tennis doubles titles in the American Cancer Society Tournament – first with his brother, John, and later with his son, Kenny. He also was a member of the Norwich All-Stars basketball team that defeated the Ernie Davis-led Syracuse

University Warriors 90-53 back on March 30, 1962 during a fund-raising benefit game for the Norwich Football Camp Fund in the old NHS gymnasium on West Main Street. He was an avid golfer and secretary for the Elks Men's Bowling League.

Born on Valentine's Day in 1939, Ken was the youngest of six children. He and his brother, John, were the only two Stewart children to spend most of their childhoods within the city, thus sparing them the burden of working the family farm throughout their youth, much to the chagrin of their older siblings.

Stewart family lore holds that a 3-year-old Kenny would follow his brother, John, to elementary school every morning, his dog in tow. When their mother realized what was happening, she decided it was time for Ken to start school early, and altered his birth certificate to read "1938," allowing him to start school a year before his peers. When considered against his later accomplishments, this fact makes them all the more impressive – Ken Stewart was a full year younger than his high school classmates but still more than measured up against the older students.

Just before Ken was born, his mother, June, and father, H. Lynn – once a one-room school teacher – sold their farm on Perch Pond in Afton and moved to Norwich, opening Stewart's Store, a neighborhood general store on the corner of Conkey Ave. and Elm St. With the store only a few steps away from their new home, Ken and John loved living there, and would tell anyone who would listen that no one could have had a better childhood than they did.

While their father was at work during the day in Sidney, and their mother minding the store from her perch on a stool behind the counter, the boys were left to run wild throughout the southwest corner of the city. The Stewart brothers and their friends would fill their days with basketball and pool in the barn behind the store, or tackle football and other games in the yard, before heading back inside for lunch. Kenny would often have his favorite, a bologna and cheese sandwich, and June had a pad behind the counter where she would let the neighborhood boys run a tab, paying her back whenever they could.

When they were not at the family store, the Stewart brothers would venture across the street to Alumni Field, where they learned to excel at any sport they tried their hand at – football, baseball, tennis and basketball. As the younger brother, Ken demonstrated at an early age that he had the talent and determination it took to keep up with John, who was three years his senior and a superb athlete in his own right.

The boys would play tennis together for hours on the Conkey Ave. courts until their white balls turned grey from the court's asphalt coating. Sometimes in the summer the boys and their friends would sleep out on the courts under the stars. Around this time, Ken had an accident playing tag with his buddies on the Alumni Field bleachers and badly injured and dislocated his elbow. This injury would haunt him the rest of his life, occasionally popping up again, and limiting his sporting career. It may have limited him some, but it certainly did not deter him from achieving much athletic success throughout his life, something he passed on to his sons with vigor.

Ken always instilled a great passion for sports in his sons, who both became accomplished athletes as well as successful coaches. Kenny was awarded varsity letters in tennis and basketball, while Jimmy lettered in tennis, basketball and football.

After dedicating over three decades to teaching and coaching at Norwich High School, Ken retired in 1994 at the age of 55. Sadly, three years later he died after a hard-fought battle with cancer, leaving behind a profound sense of loss for all who knew him.

His memory, however, lives on through the Ken Stewart Memorial Scholarship. The scholarship was established in his name at the high school following his passing, and an annual golf tournament on Labor Day brought Ken's family, former students and athletes together to raise funds for the scholarship. The tournament was a beloved tradition, attracting participants from 42 different states at one point. For an incredible 25 years, the tournament continued to grow and set records, becoming one of the longest-running tournaments in Canasawacta Country Club history, second only to the annual Member-Guest event.

Today, thanks to the endowment, the scholarship is still awarded to two student-athletes annually, ensuring that Ken's legacy of dedication to education and athletics will continue to inspire future generations.

Ken Stewart's impact on Norwich High School and its community is truly extraordinary. From his impressive athletic achievements to his exceptional career as a beloved math teacher and coach, he embodied the values of hard work, dedication and commitment that define the Purple Tornado spirit. As a captain, leader and role model, Ken inspired generations of students to strive for excellence both on and off the field. And, as a teacher and coach, he continued to give back to the school and community that meant so much to him. Although Ken may no longer be with us, his impact on Norwich High School will be felt for generations to come.

—Amanda Stewart

ALMA MATER

(words and music by Frank R. Wassung, 1921)

With light thy brow is crowned,
With hope thy form is shrouded.
Thy face shines forth unclouded,
O Alma Mater dear.

Our burdens are made lighter,
Our inspirations brighter,
Our vows for right are mightier,
To thee, O Mother dear.

The chimes of memory sounding
Thy faith with praise abounding,
Confess our love redounding
For thee, O Mother dear.

When years have passed thee rolling,
Their mysteries unfolding,
We promise to be holding
Thine image, Mother dear.