



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Michael F. Nozzolio

## Remembering Coach George Davis

MICHAEL F. NOZZOLIO July 20, 2015



For those of us who grew up in Seneca Falls, and throughout the Wayne-Finger Lakes region during the 1950's, '60's and 70's we received some sad news this week.

George Davis, a legendary football coach who for almost three decades amplified winning football traditions and established new standards of excellence at both Mynderse Academy and Hobart College, passed away in Georgia, where he lived for many years in retirement.

Anyone connected with high school and college football in New York State during that era, and for almost half a century following, must have heard the many stories about the legendary Coach Davis.

There was always discussion about how George Davis, following his military service in World War II, became the college football player who established a long list of rushing records at Syracuse University until most were broken by the All-American Jim Brown, one of the greatest running backs of all time. Incidentally, one Syracuse football record set by George Davis endured, and remained unbroken for many more years.

But the stuff of legends occurred when George Davis came to Seneca Falls to teach physical education and coach football. It is here he established a powerhouse program that won many games and Wayne-Finger Lakes football championships; frequently had undefeated seasons; and rarely, if ever had a losing season. He fostered numerous All-League and All-Upstate all stars; developed a high school All-American football player; and coached many players who went on to play college football at the Division I, II and III levels, as well as one former star athlete who played a number of seasons in the National Football League. Coach Davis influenced many players who followed in his footsteps and went on to become great coaches in football and other sports at the scholastic, collegiate and professional ranks. One of his players who became a college head coach went on to become an assistant coach in the NFL and earned a number of Super Bowl rings.

After the 1970 season Coach Davis left Mynderse to coach football for a number of successful seasons at Hobart College.

But these successes on the field at the high school and collegiate levels, even though lengthy and significant, pale in comparison to the tremendous, pervasive and lasting impact Coach Davis had on his players, regardless of their individual skill level.

In his own personal way, George Davis instilled in the hundreds who played for him and learned from him, the fundamental values of hard work, teamwork, intense and focused preparation, self sacrifice and dedication to an objective. He himself was dedicated to this task and forged an indelible emotional bond with those who played football for him.

All of us who played for him would agree that Coach Davis worked us incredibly hard. Practices were long, and there was no doubt he was a tough taskmaster who demanded from us nothing less than excellence. But he also wanted all of us to know he cared for his team members, and it became his tradition that the evening before each game Coach and Mrs. Davis would have the entire team over to their home for pie and hot chocolate.

For three varsity football seasons at Mynderse I started every game for Coach Davis. I learned those life-lessons then, and they have reverberated in me for the over forty-five years since then. I hear his admonitions almost every day, and frequently share them with those wanting to learn. I proudly quote Coach Davis to instill inspiration at the graduation speeches I have

been honored to present.

During the late fall of my senior year in high school, a few weeks after our final football game, I wrote in my weekly sports column in the Seneca Falls-Waterloo Reveille that at Mynderse Academy we are blessed with many wonderful teachers. Mr. Dickinson teaches us about chemistry; we learn the nuances of English from Mrs. Shannon and Mrs. Wilson; Mr. Winthrop guides us through math; and Coach George Davis teaches us about life.

On the day following the newspaper's publication, Coach Davis called for me during class to meet him in the school library. With the newspaper in hand, Coach put his hand on my shoulder, looked me in the eye and said with significant and unexpected emotion, "thanks Nozz", (the nickname he coined for me and my two brothers Joe and Matt who also played for him), "this means a lot to me."

Well, you meant a lot to us coach. Here's our thanks to you, Coach George Davis, from me and all your former players who were fortunate enough to learn from you lessons of life for use far beyond the football field.