

Rudy Gisolfi



The name Rudy Gisolfi can fall under several different headings:

- Place kicker extraordinaire.
- Standout defensive end.
- Slugging first baseman.
- Even successful band leader.

Rudy Gisolfi fits all those, but when it comes to local sports, he's probably best remembered as one of the best place kickers in football the city of Norwalk has ever produced.

The lifelong Norwalk resident didn't start playing organized football until his junior year at Brien McMahon High School, but his right toe quickly became one of the Senators' best offensive weapons. As a junior in the fall of 1969, Gisolfi set a new city record with 25 extra points, which also tied the state record.

He also kicked a 26-yard field goal — a rarity in high school football at that time — to go with two PATs in McMahon's 17–6 win over Greenwich.

But one of the biggest kicks of his scholastic career came in Week 7 that season when the Senators rallied late in the fourth quarter to tie city rival Norwalk High 6–6 and Gisolfi booted the extra point to provide the winning margin in McMahon's thrilling 7–6 victory. He was named to the

All-FCIAC first team as he helped McMahon to a 7–2 record.

As a senior the following year, he broke the state record he shared by kicking another 26 PATs. He also registered another field goal, this one from 27 yards against Danbury. In fact, his extra point in that game gave him a total of four points — the exact margin of victory as the Senators beat the Hatters 16–12.

Gisolfi finished third in team scoring with 29 points and again earned All-FCIAC honors. McMahon went 8–1 that season — best in school history at that point — and 15–3 in Gisolfi's two years with the team.

The 6-foot-1 Gisolfi had adopted the straight-ahead kicking style, approaching the ball in a straight line and booting it with the top of his foot. It was a style made popular by Hall of Famer Lou Groza in the 1950s and '60s, and duplicated by other pro football place kickers before soccer-style kicking became the trend.

Gisolfi did more than just kick for the Senators, however. He also started every game at defensive end during his two seasons, and as a junior he scooped up a blocked punt and returned it 25 yards for a touchdown in McMahon's 33–8 win over Danbury.

As a senior in 1970 he was a key part of the No. 1 defensive unit in the state. McMahon posted four shutouts that season, including its last three games, and allowed only six points in two other contests. The defensive coach of that unit was Sam Testa, Gisolfi's fellow Old Timers honoree tonight.

But kicking was Gisolfi's calling card and he was recruited by over 20 colleges in the United States and Canada. An excellent student, he decided to continue his education at Columbia University in New York City, where he played four years of Ivy League football from 1971–74.

Like he was at McMahon, Gisolfi was a kicking specialist and defensive end for the Lions, and as a senior he kicked a last-minute field goal to defeat Princeton. He capped his collegiate career by receiving All-Ivy League Honorable Mention.

As good as he was in football, however, growing up in Norwalk Gisolfi's sport of choice was baseball. He began playing in the National Little League when he was nine and as a 12-year-old led Kiwanis to the championship, batting .750 and belting eight home runs. He made the all-star team as an 11- and 12-year-old and hit a HR in every all-star game, including a grand slam.

He moved up to the Babe Ruth League and played for the Fire Fighters. He was voted team captain two straight years, made the all-star team twice, and led the league one year with a .367 batting average.

At Brien McMahon, Gisolfi was a three-year starter at first base while hitting three career home runs and as a senior helped the Senators reach the 1971 FCIAC championship game. In the summer he played for the Frank C. Godfrey Post 12 American Legion team, which won the Zone 5 championship with Gisolfi hitting a league-leading .466.

He also played for Sterling Furniture in the old City League, leading the team in slugging and RBIs while batting over .450.

Besides sports, Gisolfi's other passion was music, and still is. He earned his BA degree in Music from Columbia, but his love for musical notes began more than half a century ago. By the time he was seven, he was playing various keyboard instruments and as a 10-year-old he founded the 'Silver Streaks' band while in the fifth grade at Broad River School.

That was in 1964 and today the popular Norwalk band is celebrating its 50th year with Gisolfi serving as band leader and business manager.