

## Dan Hughes



During his decorated football career in high school and then college, **DANNY HUGHES** made playing defense look like a work of art. And very few did it any better.

In fact, no less an authority than the late Carl Paight, his head coach at Norwalk High School who many considered a defensive guru, called Hughes “one of the finest tacklers we’ve ever had.”

The lifelong Norwalker certainly had the credentials to back up his coach’s claim. As a senior safety in the fall of 1971, the 5-foot-10, 160-pound Hughes recorded the second highest single-season number of unassisted tackles in NHS football history. Only Paul Krasnavage, his former teammate who graduated the year before Hughes, had more tackles.

Paight wasn’t the only coach, however, to take notice of Hughes’ outstanding play a half-century ago. He was voted to the 1971 All-FCIAC football team by the league’s coaches, and he was also selected by the Connecticut High School Coaches Association to play in the prestigious East-West Nutmeg Bowl, which featured the 60 best players in the entire state.

Hughes was also the only defensive player from Norwalk High to make *The Norwalk Hour* All-City Football Team. Back then the local newspaper picked an offensive team, but only one defensive player from each of the city’s three high schools, and Hughes was the NHS selection.

His all-star caliber play continued at Graceland College in Iowa, where he joined a number of fellow Norwalkers on the football team. Hughes played cornerback and special teams his first two years, and by his junior season in 1974 really began to make an impact. Switching to linebacker while still playing on all special teams, Hughes led the Yellow Jackets in tackles with 166 in nine games, an average of 18 tackles per game, which set a new school record. He was named first-team All-Heart of America Conference as well as first-team All-NAIA District 15. He was also selected by his teammates as recipient of the *Most Valuable Defensive Lineman Award*.

Hughes was also voted by his teammates to be a captain his senior year in 1975, and again topped the Yellow Jackets with 136 tackles in 10 games—just under 14 a game. He repeated as first-team all-conference, all-district, and most valuable defensive lineman as he helped lead Graceland to its first Heart of America Conference championship and an invitation to its first-ever postseason bowl game.

Hughes capped off his four-year career by receiving NAIA All-American Honorable Mention at the linebacker position. Excelling in the classroom as well as on the gridiron, Hughes received the Graceland College *President’s Award for Academic Athletic Excellence*.

The biggest honor Hughes received as a result of his collegiate career, however, came four decades later in 2017 when he was inducted into the Graceland College Hall of Fame.

While Hughes made his mark in football, he also participated in three other sports while at Norwalk High, including track and field. During his three seasons with the Bears, he competed in the 880, pole vault, low hurdles, and triple jump, while as a senior he served as one of the team’s quad captains.

Hughes was also a diver on the swim team his first two years of high school, but when Norwalk introduced wrestling during the winter of 1971–72, he was part of the Bears’ first club team.

Even after his high school and collegiate football days were behind him, Hughes continued to play the sport he loved in the highly competitive Inter-City Touch Football League and in 1980 received the league’s *Award for Excellence*.