

Nick Mastrolillo



When he wasn't selling chickens as a youngster for his family business, **Nick Mastrolillo** was earning a reputation as one of the toughest "little guys" from Norwalk to ever step onto a football field.

Born in 1917, the local native grew up in the Springfield section of South Norwalk where his family raised and sold chickens to everybody in that section of town. Young Nick himself spent most of his time working in the business and selling the family's product to individuals and for organization functions.

But Mastrolillo would spend any free time he had during his youth at the Neighborhood Center on Bouton Street, a youth center run by Irving C. Freese, who would later become mayor of Norwalk.

It was during his time at the Neighborhood Center that Mastrolillo, along with Vinnie D'Orso and Joe Macaluso, organized a local football team that joined a junior football league. It didn't take Mastrolillo very long, however, to make his presence felt. Despite weighing only 135 pounds, he quickly became known as one of the best middle linebackers in the league.

That same trio went on to become a very important part of several Laurel Athletic Club football teams throughout the 1930s and early '40s under coach Joe Marino.

Longtime Laurel members still recall one particular game against a very strong Derby team in the Valley where Mastrolillo leveled a 235-pound tight end after catching a pass. In fact, after the game the Derby player made it a point to seek Mastrolillo out to tell him "Little Man, you're the best I've ever seen."

In 1943, Mastrolillo went to serve his country during Pearl Harbor and played center for the football team at Camp McCoy. In addition, before departing for European Operations, he and fellow Norwalker Jeff Cimminello participated in a football game with service personnel at Soldiers Field in Chicago.

Even after his playing days were over, Mastrolillo became an integral part of the Laurels AC for many years and was eventually awarded a lifetime membership. He was a staple at the club's annual summer outings, while he and his late wife, Sarah, attended nearly every Laurels affair.

Nick Mastrolillo passed away himself this year shortly after his selection by the Norwalk Old Timers committee, and his daughter, Debbie Marsan, will accept the award on his behalf tonight.

The father of five — Elizabeth, Jackie, Joe, and Anna are the others — and grandfather of 11, Mastrolillo also worked for Hat Corporation of America, the City of Norwalk, and the Hilltop Restaurant. Besides the Laurels, he was also active with the South Norwalk Boat Club and the St. Ann's Club.