

Sal Nuzzo



The city of Norwalk has had its share of great high school football teams over the years. But the 1948 state championship Norwalk High School football team has always had a special place in history and **Sal Nuzzo** was one of the key players who made that state title possible.

Nuzzo was a valuable two-way performer for that 7-0-1 NHS squad as a halfback on offense and a defensive back when the opposing team had the ball.

But Salvatore Nuzzo was never more valuable than on the afternoon of November 13, 1948 when he sparked the Green and White to a thrilling 18-13 win over Stamford before 10,000 fans at Boyle Stadium.

Coming into the game Stamford was No. 1 in the Class A state rankings, while Norwalk High, boasting a 5-0-1 record and winners of five straight games, was ranked No. 2. Keep in mind that this was still 28 years before the present state football playoff system was adopted. Back in 1948 the state champion in football was determined by a weekly poll done through a committee.

Stamford appeared to be on track to claiming the prestigious Waskowitz Trophy, emblematic of the state championship, and led Norwalk High 13-6 in the first half. But Nuzzo's one-yard touchdown plunge in the second quarter brought the Norwalkers to within 13-12 at halftime.

Nuzzo was just warming up, however. In the third quarter, the NHS halfback broke loose for an electrifying 78-yard TD run to provide the winning points in his team's thrilling 18-13 victory 67 years ago this week.

When the new rankings came out Monday, Norwalk had overtaken Stamford and moved into the top spot in the state. All that stood between NHS and the Waskowitz Trophy was a win over longtime rival Danbury on Thanksgiving morning. The Green and White responded with a 25-7 victory to clinch the school's first — and still only — state title.

But it wouldn't have been possible without Nuzzo's memorable 78-yard touchdown run against Stamford, which, for all intents and purposes, won the state championship. That wouldn't be the only big play Sal Nuzzo made that season, however. In fact, in the very first game of the season Norwalk trailed Central High of Bridgeport 7-0 in the fourth quarter at Hedges Stadium. But with the clock ticking down, Jack Ryan, the tailback in coach Ike Kern's single wing formation, completed a pass to Nuzzo, who shook off two tacklers and raced into the end zone for a 20-yard touchdown that made it 7-6. Frank Troy then kicked the extra point to give Norwalk a 7-7 season-opening tie, a tie that would prove to be valuable several weeks later when the state championship picture began to take shape.

Besides his TD play that day, Nuzzo had several other key runs during the 74-yard game-tying scoring drive, including a big 14-yard gain on third down to keep the drive alive.

The following week, in Norwalk's second game of the season against Staples, Nuzzo broke his finger, but continued to play the rest of the season injured. It didn't seem to slow him down much as two games later the resilient Nuzzo broke off an 80-yard touchdown run to spark a 26-12 win over Stratford, helping NHS improve to 3-0-1. And three games later came his two-touchdown performance in the win over Stamford.

Nuzzo, who grew up in the Fitch School area of East Norwalk, didn't even play organized football until he arrived at Norwalk High. In fact, he didn't come out for the team until his junior year. He worked various jobs after school, but his parents allowed him to choose one sport to play and he picked football.

He would continue his brief football career after high school at Yale University, where he again played halfback and defensive back on the freshmen team and helped the Bulldogs win the Ivy League freshmen football championship. The following year, however, Nuzzo suffered a knee injury that ended his football days.

But he graduated in 1953 with a degree in Electronic Engineering and went on to enjoy a successful career in the business world, rising to chairman and CEO of three different companies in Little Neck, New York, Cleveland, Ohio, and Garland, Texas. During his first 35 years in New York, Nuzzo served on Governor Cuomo's Business Advisory Council and the Board of New York State's Business Council.

Nuzzo, who splits his time living in Florida, Pinehurst, N.C., and The Hamptons, developed a passion for golf over the years and in the late 1980s and early '90s he managed a small seniors tournament, which eventually grew and became a regular stop on the PGA tour. Nuzzo still plays golf himself, twice shooting a 79, while last year he shot an 81 at the age of 83.

He and his wife Lucille have four children and nine grandchildren.