

Norwich University Football Improvement Program

A Touchdown Club Proposal

Captains Initiative

March 31,2023

Norwich alumni, particularly many former players, have been expressing concern for the apparent decline of the program. The narrative has grown to include expressed concern in the following areas:

1. Brand definition
2. competitive quality of play
3. coaching expectations
4. results
5. recruiting efforts
6. program support

We are a collection of former players from teams spanning the mid to late 60's through the mid to late 70's. Our perspective was formed as talented athletes challenged by rigorous competition and led by superior coaching during a highly successful period of Norwich football. Our shared pride compels our work here. This work is directed through the Touchdown Club to evaluate and explore stated concerns with the purpose of re-establishing the football program as a **Strategic Priority** by the Board of Trustees and President. To that end we will identify here our initial findings and share actions we believe to be vitally important to the future growth of the Program and how an exceptional Football Program will perform as a critical conduit to solving our most concerning issue of Student Retention.

The Norwich University and Norwich Football Brand

The University and Program Brands are not mutually exclusive. They are, in fact, of a symbiotic nature existing for and within each other. The University Brand defines individual characteristics required to succeed and flourish in the uniquely challenging Norwich universe. The Football Brand clarifies the additional burden-readiness vigor the Program Student/Athlete must possess. In a practical sense this intersection of institution and sport is key to correcting the retention issue.

Since the advent of the three - division NCAA format in 1973 there have been 110 Division 3 colleges launching startup programs and another 10 restarts of previously dropped programs in the US. The New England states alone added 14 new school programs during this time and plan to add another one in 2023. Our background research revealed that motivation for adding programs across the country was based on Brand Recognition, Increased student and athlete enrollment, increased enrollment revenue, favorable student retention, existing facilities improvements, erection of new facilities, and an exciting

growth of school spirit. Endicott and Salve Regina are examples of success in this new-found D3 Football environment. Both teams beat Norwich in 2022. Salve Regina is Ranked #124 by the NCAA, Endicott #42. Norwich wrapped 2022 at #167. Salve began football in 1993, Endicott began play in 2003. By comparison, Norwich began in 1893, 130 years ago, yet we suffer retention issues and our on field results pale in comparison to these relative upstarts. Some have suggested that times are trying for military related endeavors. We would caution; That's a hard sell to a successful collection of Viet Nam era football alums. We know how to fix this. We know a bit about "try."

Competitive Quality of Play

The NCAA ratings include strong consideration for the degree of difficulty of every team's competitive schedule. For 26 successive seasons beginning in 1965 Norwich played a challenging independent schedule and was noted for finishing in the NCAA top 25 often. As D3 football evolved participation in conference play became the norm providing paths to postseason, single- elimination playoff progression. Norwich participated in various conferences with competitive levels ranging from weak to stiff. Current membership in NEWMAC, a mid-level conference, does offer a pathway to NCAA D3 Championship playoffs. In fact 2022 NEWMAC Champion Springfield College was defeated by Ithaca in the Northeast Regional playoff game. This resulted in Springfield concluding the 2022 season ranked 52 Nationally by the NCAA. Prior to joining NEWMAC we won several championships in the ECFC, "widely considered one of the worst conferences in the nation." By comparison our results in the moderately more competitive NEWMAC have been, disappointing. We need and want a defined path to win the NEWMAC Championship by the 2025 season. We must also elevate our winning percentage to .750 and above consistently to sustain a long term regular position in the NCAA top 50. Doing so will open future opportunities to upgrade into a more competitive conference such as that where our old friend St Lawrence is situated. Such a move would bring back the level of play we knew as Independents during our tenure.

Coaching Expectations

We expect our coaches to produce winning teams playing competitive opponents. Our coaches should rightly expect to be provided with the proper support to achieve those requirements. Our preliminary investigation reveals problem areas related to compensation, housing, training capacity, and recruiting. We must approach these issues in depth. Our coaching compensation packages are far below market. We do not offer an affordable housing solution that enables Graduate Coaches an opportunity to accept positions. We currently do not offer academic curriculums necessary to produce Graduate Assistant coaching opportunities in the first place. We cannot overemphasize our need to support our coaches by providing immediate solutions to these roadblocks. Remember, D3 Football across America is a pay to play proposition. Our kids are paying to play and have high expectations that coaches and facilities meet their expectations of excellence. The greater competitive challenge we provide, the better the quality of players we will attract. The greatness of our program will earn increasingly higher praise in the sporting news. Better players and more non-athlete students will be drawn to Norwich. Athletes want challenge and respect excellence in coaching. Our own beloved Joe Sabol is proof that devoted, talented coaching

spurs every player to reach beyond their grasp and recognize the gravity in the maxim “expect challenge achieve distinction.” This is how football can and does impact retention in American D3 colleges.

Results

We must set the lofty goal of winning the NEWMAC Championship in 2025. Thereafter, we must continue to finish either first or second in the NEWMAC going forward. The results will continue to define our ability to draw new enrollment overall and more highly competitive athletes. We must recognize that today’s student/athletes require excellence from the programs they decide to join. The online information available directing kids into D3 programs is weighted to the following points as published by GMTM:

Five Benefits of Playing Sports At A Division III College

1. The athlete’s you compete with are really, really good.
2. There is a lot of financial aid available for athletes.
3. Students-athletes have an intimate and focused academic environment.
4. You play regional schedules and some of the best postseason tournaments.
5. You can still sign NIL deals and build your career.

Number 5 is the new reality. Name, Image, Likeness contracts are out there and expected to flourish in the Northeast D3 football of the future. The best athletes can move up through the transfer portal. Division III kids can become rock stars and bring the program visibility up right along with them. By what logic does a school with a 130-year history in college football willingly continue along a descending trajectory? We must assign student communications specialists to support Recruiting and player NIL needs. We must shift our paradigm to improve results.

After we establish our program as a premium Northeast presence, we will be able to shift up into a more competitive conference. The activity related to establishing Norwich as a highly ranked **football** program will feed into future enduring Norwich success free of such concerns as poor retention. Strong football programs drive successful collegiate institutions favorably. We highly recommend formation of a Best Practices Assessment Team to visit targeted schools with the aim of gaining full understanding of our shortfalls by learning from their success. Many area upstart programs are putting us to shame and beating us soundly along their way. It is time for a learning moment. Launch and complete this effort in 120 days or less.

Recruiting

An obvious opportunity for football alumni to help is by acting as Ambassadors to the Admissions Department in Recruiting. We are spread across the country. Norwich needs to expand its Recruiting reach far beyond New England. As expressed above the New England student/athlete market for football recruits is pressured by the increased success of D3 football in New England. We need to move into New Jersey and Mid-Southern states. We need to move efforts into the Mid-West where we will find many players suited to the challenges at Norwich and the weather in Vermont. By targeting cities with direct airline flights into Burlington we will increase our chances of signing good kids who will thrive

and stay. We will happily raise our alums to meet this challenge. We will be the Recruiting Program Force Multiplier.

Support

This area provides an opportunity for the Touchdown Club to expand Program influence. Integration and coordination supporting various alumni, parent, faculty, and administration activities offers many opportunities for fund raising and spirited team support. Development of exciting game day activities such as flyovers, parachute team demonstrations and away game tailgating type activities supporting student recruiting would be very impactful. Working with alumni clubs to coordinate bus trips to Northfield and away game locations with post game social events may be a popular way to raise funds and increase spirit as well. Any events the Touchdown Club can sponsor in support of recruiting efforts would generate great benefit to the program and school. Such activities will be viewed as very positive enrichment to the Norwich University and Football Program Brand. Raising funding for bleacher seating on the visitors side at Sabine would exemplify an idea with great merit for the Touchdown Club to undertake. A strong program generates the enthusiasm required to undertake such projects. In fact several contributors the Captains Initiative have provided fund raising ideas for future Touchdown Club consideration.

We have much to offer at Norwich that is unique. That is why the Norwich education is so singular. For example there is no other college in New England that can match the festive atmosphere of a Norwich home football game in our magnificent foliage wrapped stadium. This is a high impact differentiator. We must exploit this competitive recruiting advantage. The Touchdown Club is uniquely suited to execute this role.

Consolidated Action Item Recommendations

- 1. We request the Board and President to recognize the Football Program Improvement as a priority in the Norwich Strategic Plan. To do so will recognize excellent football as a significant contributor to correcting student retention and assure diligent follow through by executive leadership.**
- 2. Set and execute a plan to win the NEWMAC Championship by 2025. Set goal to finish 1st or 2nd every year there-after.**
- 3. Develop the long-term goal to finish in NCAA top 50 annually with a long-term winning percentage of .750 and higher.**
- 4. initiate immediate launch of Best Practices Assessment Team. Complete the study in 120 days or less.**
- 5. Commence immediate actions to correct identified Coaching Roadblocks to include compensation, housing, Graduate Assistant Staffing, training capacity, and recruiting.**
- 6. Assign Student Communications Specialists to support athlete NIL activity.**

7. Recruit Football Alumni to Admission Ambassadors as Force Multipliers for the Recruiting effort.
8. Expand recruiting reach geographically to the South and Midwest.
9. Expand Touchdown Club Programs to enhance our Football Brand through noteworthy social, financial and facility endeavors. Exploit our differentiated competitive advantage to the benefit of the Recruiting effort.

A Word of Thanks

We would like to recognize and thank the many former players and fans who have so willingly shared their thoughts with us for this project.

Dick Starbuck CoCapt 67, HoF

Terry Stecker CoCapt 69, HoF

Jay Cottone CoCapt '70, HoF

Rick Riccio Co Capt '71, HoF

Mark Conroy CoCapt '72, HoF

Nominee

Jim Patterson CoCapt '73

Steve Canty Letterman '73

Tony DiLeva CoCapt '74

John Balducci, Letterman '74

Bill Tanner, Letterman '75, HoF

Fred Morsheimer '69, HoF

Bob Murphy Letterman '70 HoF

George Kulhowick Letterman

'70, HoF

Dan Cox Soccer CoCapt '70, HoF

Jimmy Garvey '72, HoF

Steve Jones Ardent Supporter '69

Bob Draper Ardent Supporter '69

Tony Rizzo Ardent Supporter '69

Paul Winberg Former NU Coach

- **All dates represent senior season not graduation year.**