



*Negley (second from right) was part of Penn State's great defensive line in 1947, which included All-American Steve Suhey (third from left).*

# Negley Norton:

## *Proud of place in Penn State football history*

**By Michael V. Emery**

Some of the most dominating and renowned defensive lines in the history of football include the Pittsburgh Steelers' Steel Curtain, the Minnesota Vikings' Purple People Eaters, and the Los Angeles Rams' Fearsome Foursome.

If anything close to that kind of ingenuity had been around in an earlier era, the 1947 Penn State front line could have been coined any number of names.

But, by any name, the Nittany Lions'

defensive line from 1947 ranks among the best ever.

Among the stalwarts in that State unit was Altoona's own Negley Norton. A four-year starter at tackle, Norton went on to become a co-captain his senior season in 1949.

"We always took a lot of pride in our defense," Norton said in a telephone interview from his Slingerlands, N.Y. home, just outside of Albany. "In 1947, we held nine opponents to under 15 yards rushing. On the line, we had Steve Suhey, Matt Suhey's father, who was an All-American,

John Nolan was the tackle opposite me, and Joe Drazenovich. When I think of playing at Penn State, I think of the unity and pride we had on that defensive team and everything that we accomplished."

That '47 unit set several school records that still stand. Among the staggering statistics and still-standing records set by State's defense that year include: Fewest net yards allowed per game (76.8); fewest yards rushing per game (17.0); fewest points allowed per game (3.0); fewest yards allowed in one game (-47, against Syracuse); and fewest yards

allowed per rushing attempt in a season (0.64).

"It's kind of nice to go back and see those records still standing today," Norton said. "Just being part of a team like that was very gratifying."

Penn State went undefeated during 1947 regular season, finishing 9-0, and was invited to the Cotton Bowl—the first Nittany Lion team to make a bowl appearance in 25 years.

"Back then, of course, there were only four bowls — the Cotton, Sugar, Rose and Orange bowls — so it meant a great deal more back then to earn a bowl trip than it does today," Norton said. "So much time had elapsed since the last Penn State team had gone to a bowl game that I don't think anybody quite knew how to react."

On New Year's Day, Penn State met the SMU Mustangs, who had legendary quarterback Doak Walker. SMU jumped to an early 13-0 lead in the first half, but Penn State fought back to tie the game in the second half. The Lions missed an opportunity to win the game in the closing seconds, when quarterback Elwood Petchel had his pass tipped away by a defender at the last second, and the final score stood at 13-13.

"It was a great game, as I recall," Norton said, "but we always felt like we should have won it."

Penn State had another outstanding season in '48, finishing 7-1-1 in Bob Higgins 19th and final season as the Lions' head coach.

"They broke the mold when they made Coach Higgins," Norton said. "He was a grand old man, who went through a lot of trying years at Penn State, because they didn't have scholarships in those days.

"But, Bob Higgins was the reason I attended Penn State. I had an opportunity to go to Georgia and on the day I reported to Penn State I was supposed to go to (the University of) Pittsburgh.

"But, one day Coach Higgins came to our house. My dad went to Penn State and he was in the same class as Bob Higgins. So, Bob Higgins just looked at my dad and said, 'Earl

Norton, are you going to let your son go to Pittsburgh?'"

Eventually, Norton was persuaded to attend Penn State.

## Negley Norton



**Age:** 69.

**Sport:** Football

**High School:** Altoona.

**College:** Penn State

**Hall of Fame achievement:**

*Four-year starter as a line-man at Penn State. Co-captained the 1949 team.*

**Current occupation:**

*Traveling Salesman.*

**Current residence:**

*Slingerlands, N.Y.*

The fact that any recruiters came knocking on Norton's door is a credit to his talent, considering that he never played organized football until his junior year in high school.

Norton's size — at 220 pounds, he was considered monstrous in those days — made him a natural tackle.

Although Altoona finished 7-1 and 6-1-1 during his two seasons, Norton recalled the Mountain Lions as being

"nothing spectacular."

"We didn't have the powerhouse that Altoona had a few years later," Norton said. "But we were very competitive."

Norton credits Altoona Coach Ken Bashore for much of the Mountain Lion success.

"Coach Bashore was one tough coach," Norton said. "He'd literally get into the scrimmages with the players. When he wanted to show you how to do something he'd line up across from you and give you a pop. He was from the old school. I think that toughness rubbed off on his teams."

Norton was also a standout in track and field, placing third in the shot put at the state championships his senior year.

But his sport at the collegiate level was football and he capped off a spectacular career by being named co-captain, along with Bob Hicks, in his senior season of 1949.

"I was almost shocked about being named co-captain," Norton recalled. "I was very surprised and really honored that I would be selected. I had to work hard to live up to that honor, but I did my best."

After school, Norton got into sales and has remained in the field ever since.

"I sell metal products for commercial purposes," Norton said. "I have seven northeastern states, so I get to do some traveling. I get to Boston about once a month. And we're not far from New York City. I really like my job and we've come to love this area, because it's easily accessible to several big cities."

Norton and his wife, Bette, who met while he was working in Buffalo in another sales job, have been married 43 years and have one son, also named Negley.

Norton's son also attended Penn State and was active in athletics — but on the links, rather than the gridiron.

"My son didn't get involved in football," Norton said. "He was a golfer. He was smarter than his dad."

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