



## Henry “Hank” Diller

Year of Induction: **2019**

Year of Graduation: **N/A**

At a time when football was ‘traditional’ in every sense of the word, Johnson City Head Football Coach Henry “Hank” Diller broke free of conventions and was ahead of his time in many ways in his approach to coaching both on and off the gridiron.

Mr. Diller assumed the helm of the Wildcats football program in the fall of 1960, and his team immediately found success. Johnson City’s football teams enjoyed unparalleled success in the late 1940s and early 1950s; however, throughout the mid to late ‘50s, the Wildcats’ prowess began to fade, and Diller was hired with the hopes of resurrecting championship-level play once again. Diller’s 1960 Wildcat team had a strong regular season, highlighted by an upset win at Elmira Free Academy. This victory proved to be even more meaningful based on the experience the team had after the game ended. As documented in the Binghamton Press, Diller’s team stopped at a diner in downtown Elmira after their victory. While inside, Diller noticed that a group of Elmira students began to gather around the team bus. By the time the team finished their meal, the Elmira students dispersed, but when the Wildcats returned to the bus they found broken windows, lit cigarettes and broken beer bottles that had been thrown inside, and a note that read, “If you ever come back to Elmira, we will kill you.” Undaunted by this vandalism, and unbeknownst to the team, Diller collected the items, including the threatening note. Later that season, the Wildcats were preparing for a game vs. Elmira Southside that would decide the league championship. On the night before the big game, Diller brought out the items collected from the bus earlier in the season, put them on the ground before the team, and told them that he thought some of the students who had done this to their bus were from Southside. The team rallied behind this pep talk and defeated Southside to bring home the Southern Tier Conference Championship with a 7-1 record in 1960.

It was clear from stories recounted in the media, as well as from former players, that Coach Diller wasn’t afraid to break from traditional routines and try new methods to build a quality program. In the fall of 1961, Diller promoted eight sophomores to the varsity squad. Such an action was unheard of at that time, as underclassmen were almost always relegated to the junior varsity until they reached 11th grade. These brave promotions turned out just fine as the Wildcats rolled to a 5-2-1 record in Diller’s second season as head coach. Other examples of his innovative approaches included: requiring all players to eat lunch in his classroom throughout the entire football season so that he could keep track of academic progress; creating a flag football league for Johnson City boys in grades 6, 7 and 8 in an effort to increase participation in the sport; putting play-

ers through workouts that included a focus on plyometrics rather than just weightlifting; taking his entire team to a preseason camp in Pennsylvania to build team unity and spend time solely focusing on football. Employing these strategies with his teams in the 1960s clearly showed that Coach Diller wasn't afraid to think outside the box.

Diller would coach the Wildcats for nine seasons from 1960 – 1968, compiling a 31-27-7 overall record with the help of two assistant coaches who went on to become JC Athletic Hall of Famers, Mr. Paul Munley and Mr. Bob McDevitt. He continued to follow his passion for the sport by being one of the founders of the T.C. Jets semi-pro football team based out of Binghamton in the 1970s and 80s, and he was inducted into the Section IV Athletic Hall of Fame based on his coaching record and his contributions to both football and track in our area.

The Johnson City Athletic Hall of Fame is proud to welcome Mr. Henry 'Hank' Diller, a coach who led the Wildcats football team during a time of great tradition with a non-traditional approach.