



Playing it forward: Richard Mull honors his North Salem roots



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Richard Mull was honored with a philanthropy award during North Salem's homecoming festivities.

PHOTO: TOM WALOGORSKY



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“ I’m proud to still
be part of the
North Salem family.”

RICHARD MULL

By Tom Walogorsky

NORTH SALEM, N.Y. - When Richard Mull walked the halls of Purdys High School—before the days of North Salem High School—the building may have been small, but the spirit inside was enormous.

“If you’ve ever seen the movie *Hoosiers*, think of that gym,” Mull says with a laugh. “You couldn’t find anywhere to sit or stand. People were even up on each other’s shoulders just to see the game.”

A multi-sport athlete who ran cross country and played basketball, baseball, and golf, Mull’s time at Purdys in the late 1950s was defined by determination and transformation.

“We were always losing,” he recalls, “but then Freddie Tompkins and I decided we wanted to play good at sports—and it became part of my world.”

The two friends’ newfound competitive spirit would inspire the same in the school’s underclassmen, and the administration quickly took notice.



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"Other younger athletes got on board too, and the school's physical education teacher recognized what was going on," Mull continues.

The newfound spirit surrounding the PHS Tigers led to new uniforms for teams, the involvement of new teacher-coaches, and a long range plan to establish a winning culture.

By his junior and senior years, Mull's teams were not just competitive—they were capturing section titles and filling that tiny gym to capacity.

For Mull, one moment still stands out vividly: a fateful cross country meet.

"It was a sectional championship—and we won it," he said. "The following year, we did the same thing. Then I came in second in the county race down in White Plains, and that made me All-County. No one from our school had ever been recognized at that level before."

The achievement, he said, helped raise pride and spirit across the school.

That sense of pride followed him long after graduation. Mull went on to earn both undergraduate and graduate degrees from West Virginia University, where his athletic ability opened new doors.

"I wasn't a strong student in high school," he admits. "I had to do remedial work before college. But once I found physical education, everything changed."

At West Virginia, Mull discovered a passion for recreational sports that would define his career. He joined Indiana University in 1972 as Assistant Professor and Director of Recreational Sports, ultimately overseeing the development of a 120,000-square-foot recreation center that became one of the largest student facilities in the Big Ten. Over the years, Mull's work earned national honors, including the 1989 Honor Award from the National Intramural Recreational Sports Association and induction into the Professional Hall of Fame at West Virginia University.

Yet despite his success in academia and athletics, Mull never forgot where it began.

"Without my sports in high school, I'm not sure I would have made it through at all," he says. "They kept me in school because of what I was doing for and with the school through my sports performance."

That gratitude inspired Mull to give back to the next generation of North Salem students. In recent years, he established two scholarships through the high school's counseling office and Booster Club: one honoring Gladys Lupton, a pioneering special education teacher who briefly mentored him, and another recognizing students pursuing sports-related careers.

"The Gladys Lupton Scholarship goes to a student who may not have been academically strong, but who has the drive to go to college," Mull explains. "The other is for someone who wants to study sports. It's my way of saying thank you—and paying it forward."

Mull's connection to the school was rekindled through a simple gesture.

"I was trying to find an old North Salem pennant for my memory wall," Mull says. "I'd already hung up my West Virginia and Indiana ones. I couldn't find one anywhere, but Danielle Cylich from the Booster Club found one and gave it to me. That really got me reconnected."

What began with a pennant evolved into philanthropy. At North Salem's 2025 Homecoming, Mull was honored with a Philanthropy Award for his enduring support of the school and its students.

While living in Texas years ago, Mull built what he called a "memory wall," lined with laminated clippings from his high school days, his university accomplishments, and the recognitions he's received throughout his career.

"Sports probably saved my life," he admits. "And I'm proud to still be part of the North Salem family."

Looking back, Mull sees a throughline from those early days playing sports to the career that followed.

"Back then, we just wanted to stop losing," he concludes. "We wanted to make something happen. And in a way, I've been doing that ever since."

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