

## Hall of Fame

# The running man

## Bill Albrecht led the Lewis High School charge in '49

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SPORTS WRITER

Bill Albrecht can still remember sitting across the desk from Southington High School's principal, and begging for a second chance. It was the late 1940s. Albrecht had just been kicked out of a trade school in Meriden, and he had developed a reputation for playing hooky and being difficult.

Principal Martin Phelan stared at the young man from behind his desk but finally relented.

"He told me I wouldn't make it anyway, but I set out to prove him wrong," said Albrecht. "From there, I had to tow the line, and I did. The best thing that every happened to me was, when I was graduating, he came up to me and shook my hand. He congratulated me for graduating, and that made my day."

### Athlete

Albrecht was a hot-shot kid, but he was determined to set things right. He showed up, hit the books, and eventually earned his principal's trust. Finally, he earned a chance to try out for the football team, and everything else was history.

"I always wanted to play football. When I was growing up, at Christmas time my aunts would ask me what I wanted for Christmas, and it would be shoulder pads or helmets," he said. "I always had football on my mind since I was five years old."

Albrecht was destined to play the game of football, and he was born to play at Southington High School. As a boy, he played on a neighborhood team in Mildale that would challenge neighborhoods from as far as Meriden or Plainville. When his older brother, Julian, made his debut at Lewis High School, Albrecht started to study the playbook.

The team instituted the same single wing formation, and Albrecht threw himself into the game. So when his principal offered him a chance to play, Albrecht jumped at the chance. He started by running scout offenses into the starting lineup, but was quickly noticed by the coaching staff once he found shoes that fit.

"I remember I was wearing a pair of size 12 football shoes, and I took size 10.5," said Albrecht. "I guess I just ran through the defense, and the guys that were watching the game asked the coaches, 'Why



Bill Albrecht on a Pacific trading card during his college career with the Washington Huskies.

don't you buy the kid a pair of shoes? He might run better.' Then I started to play."

By his junior season Albrecht had earned the chief running position, and he doubled as a defensive back.

"When he tackled you, he wanted to put you down for good," said teammate Ray Michanczyk. "He was very good defensively. He put 100 percent into his ability to play. He just put everything he had into it every minute that he was on the football field. He wasn't the flashiest runner, but you didn't have much flash when you're running the single wing."

The theory is simple. The line opens a hole. The quarterback hands the ball off to a running back that plunges through the defense behind a wall of blockers. But the 1949 team ran the formation to perfection.

Albrecht led the way, scoring 25 times and setting

a new state record for single-season yardage (1,307). He rushed for 215 yards and three touchdowns against Notre Dame-West Haven on the second game of the season, ran for 195 yards the following week, and managed 193 yards and three scores in a 40-12 rout over Meriden in October. In November, Albrecht scored six times in a 54-7 win over St. Mary's.

The Southington back couldn't be stopped, but he credits his big, powerful line for paving the way.

"I made all-state and was captain of the all-state team, but that was all because of those seven guys on the front line. If I didn't have those guys, I was nothing," he said. "In fact, we could have played five of those teams on one day and beaten them or put them all together and beaten them. It's not that they were bad. That line I had was excellent. They took care of anybody

that wanted to tackle me anywhere near the line of scrimmage."

"He was tough," said Michanczyk. "I think he did a lot to keep himself in condition and to keep himself in shape to do all that running that we did. Running constituted maybe 80 percent of the game."

One day, a car wound its way up the drive and a strange man knocked on the door. He introduced himself as a recruiter from the University of Washington, one of the biggest programs in the country, and asked Albrecht if he wanted to play.

"I didn't even know where that was, but he mentioned Howie Odell," said Albrecht. "When I was growing up, Howie Odell used to coach at Yale, and I thought it would be great to play for him. I probably made up my mind right then."

That wasn't his only choice because, by the time

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Ray Michanczyk,  
Football player

he was a senior, Albrecht had turned himself around. He was a three-year starter on the baseball team, and the Chicago Cubs offered a contract. He was offered football scholarships at a couple of other schools and had a Presidential appointment to the naval academy, but Albrecht packed for Seattle.

"I was a guy from Southington, CT out here with all these all-Americans? I never thought I'd ever come in contact with those kinds of people," he remembers. "They were so down to earth."

Despite his offensive resume, Washington moved Albrecht to defensive halfback. In his first year, the Huskies went 8-2 and finished second in the Pacific Coast Conference. They topped out at No. 10 twice and finished the season at No. 11.

Two years later, Albrecht anchored the defense with 12 interceptions in 1951 to set a new school record that stood for a decade. He played alongside two all-

Americans and a pair of teammates from his 1941 state championship team—Michanczyk and Stan Kuscinkas.

"I had a chance to play with him during his senior year," said Michanczyk. "He was such a good defensive player there. He was used more defensively, but he was an all-around player. He put a lot into what he did on the football field."

For his storied high school career and its continuation into the college spotlight, Albrecht was chosen as one of 15 athletes to represent the town in the first class of the Southington Sports Hall of Fame. On Wednesday, Nov. 10, he will be honored in an induction ceremony at the Aqua Turf in Plantsville.

"I really can't take the credit," he said. "Our linemen were great. My coaches were great. Everything just clicked."

To comment on this story or to contact sports writer John Goraliski, email him at [jgoralski@southingtonobserver.com](mailto:jgoralski@southingtonobserver.com).

### Southington Sports Hall of Fame



#### Inside the Numbers

##### FOOTBALL

- Ran for 1,307 yards and 25 TDs (1949)
- All State (1949)
- Captain of the all-state team (1949)
- Attended the University of Washington (50-53)
- Held single season interception record (12) at the University of Washington (1951)

##### BASEBALL

- Three years starter, shortstop
- Batted over .400 as a senior
- Offered contract by the Chicago Cubs