

## BROWNSVILLE CLOSE-UP: CHARLIE SLICK

This is the story of three men whose lives were different, yet identical.

The first man was a high school mathematics teacher. Students feared taking his class because of his reputation as a disciplinarian who demanded all-out effort from his students. Later in life, though, these same students agreed that they had learned a great deal from him.

The second man spent many peaceful hours in the solitude of his backyard garden, carefully tending to his vegetable plants. A devoted husband and father, he was a familiar figure each Sunday morning, sitting quietly in his family's pew at Brownsville's First Presbyterian Church.

The third fellow was an occasionally volatile, hard-driving coach noted for his quick temper and a refusal to tolerate losing. Any momentary letdown by a player could bring the coach's wrathful stare, a long, hard, silent look that made the player yearn to disappear into the grass beneath his feet. That look was often followed by three words that made the player cringe – "Take off, son!" The phrase meant that the young man had been sentenced to a seemingly endless orbit of the playing field, running lap after lap after lap.

Three men – a conscientious math teacher, a neighborly family man, a tough coach – who were very different from each other, yet who were the same. In the Business Math class at Brownsville High School during the 1940s and 1950s, students respectfully addressed their teacher as "Mr. Slick." On the grass at Brownie Stadium and on the baseball field behind the stadium, the players called their demanding taskmaster "Coach Slick." On the side streets of Brownsville's North Side, appreciative residents who received delicious vegetables from their neighbor's overflowing garden just called him "Charlie."

Charlie Slick deserves to be written about. Any person who is so well remembered by the many men and women whose lives he influenced, who still inspires enthusiastic stories forty-two years after he

gave up high school teaching and coaching, must have been very special.

This man's name was synonymous with Brownsville High School for a quarter of a century, but he was not from Brownsville. He wasn't born within a hundred miles of the town, and his final resting place is just as far away. Yet if you mention Charlie Slick's name, thoughts fly back through time to the middle of the past century, to the halls of the old Brownsville High School on High Street. Mental images of Charlie Slick and that school cannot be separated.

How did this man from Osterburg, a rural village ten miles north of Bedford, become one of Brownsville's most unforgettable personalities?

"He was born on a farm on December 7, 1917," Charlie's daughter, Lee Slick, told me recently. She and her mother, Ruth, were showing me family photos in their Church Street home as they told me about a man whom they knew better than anyone.

"Charlie's dad was in the meat business," Lee said, "slaughtering and butchering, taking meat around the community on his meat truck, and going to market in Altoona on Wednesdays and Saturdays."

Charlie was only sixteen when he graduated from Bedford High School. He spent a year helping his dad, then enrolled at Indiana State Teachers College, majoring in business education with a minor in physical education.

Noting that Charlie had played sports at Bedford High School, I asked, "Was Charlie a big man?"

Lee and Ruth both shook their heads. "He was about five-seven, 155 pounds when he played high school sports," Lee said, "but he didn't let that stand in his way. He played several sports in college."

"How did this central Pennsylvania native wind up at Brownsville High School?"

"Dad graduated from Indiana in 1939," Lee said, "and came to Brownsville for an interview. He was hired to teach business arithmetic, accounting, and early on, bookkeeping at the high school. In his teaching career, Dad never taught in the academic curriculum, always in the commercial department."

"And what about his coaching career?"

"When he came to Brownsville, the team had only a few coaches, so he helped out as an unpaid assistant. Then in 1942, he was hired as assistant football coach and assistant baseball coach under Coach Earl Bruce."

"Were your parents married yet when Charlie got the teaching job?"

"Dad and Mom got married in Indiana on December 20, 1939."

"That was during your dad's first year of teaching?"

"That's right. Dad was still a bachelor when he started teaching. He

rented a room from Harry Walker, who was high school principal at one time. Each weekend and on holidays, Dad would go back to Osterburg. Mom lived in Bedford, ten miles away from Dad's parents' home. Even after they were married at Christmas time, Mom stayed in Bedford with her parents, and Dad returned to Brownsville.

"I was born in June 1941, and Mom and I moved to Brownsville later that summer. My parents rented the Pearl Street house where Norma Ryan lives now, and we lived there until June 1945. Then my dad was called into the service, even though the war was over.

"While Dad was away, Mom and I returned to Bedford to live with her parents. Dad was honorably discharged after six months and resumed teaching in January 1946. But housing was at a premium in Brownsville after the war, and he could not find a house to buy in Brownsville.

"So my mother and I remained in Bedford while Dad searched for a house, and he rented a room in the Monongahela Hotel. On Fridays after school, he would catch the Greyhound bus at the hotel and ride to Cumberland, where my grandfather would pick him up. On Sunday afternoon, my grandfather would take Dad back to Cumberland to catch the bus to Brownsville."

"So your dad lived at the Monongahela Hotel until he bought the Shaffner Avenue house in the spring of 1947?"

"Only for a while," Lee laughed. "At that time, Andy Sepsi Sr.'s family lived on Howard Street. Andy and Dad had been assistant coaches under Earl Bruce, and after Earl left, Andy was head football coach.

"One day, Mrs. Sepsi telephoned my dad's room at the Monongahela Hotel. It seems that Andy was fixing up his attic to make bedrooms for his boys, Andy Jr. and Alan. Mrs. Sepsi, a small woman, was at her wit's end.

"She told my dad over the phone, 'Hey, Charlie, I'll tell you what! If you will come up here and be Andy's 'go-fer,' because I can't do all this work to help him and he's always hollering at me, I will give you room and board! You can sleep up in the attic with the boys.' So Dad lived at Sepsi's until March 1947, when he bought a house on the corner of Shaffner Avenue and Spring Street."

"As a young teacher and coach who was not much older than his students and players," I said, "I imagine Charlie needed to be strict in his classroom and on the practice field. From what I am told, he was a disciplinarian from the start."

Lee chuckled. "How many people tell me, 'Oh, we need a few Charlie Slicks in the schools today!' But in his later years, even Dad

admitted that if a teacher were to do in a modern classroom some of the things that he did back then, that teacher would probably wind up in court! As small as Dad was, people will tell you, he had a ‘look.’ And all he had to do was give you that look, and you straightened up.

“I grew up with that look,” Lee continued, “but I wasn’t fearful. Everybody always marveled at how well I got along with my dad, because they assumed that since he was so strict in school, he was like that at home. He could play and have fun with me. But don’t kid yourself. I knew that look too!”

“Did your dad teach at Brownsville High School for his entire career?”

“No. Dad taught there from 1939 until 1960, then he became high school principal until 1964. In 1964, he joined the faculty at California State College, where he taught Physical Education and was assistant football coach. He retired from coaching there in 1975, and he retired from teaching at the college in 1978.”

“The old Brownsville High School on High Street was torn down quite a while ago. Where did your dad work in that building?”

“The school was built in a square,” Lee remembered. “When you entered the building, you were in a big hall. To get to my dad’s principal’s office, you turned left, went to the end of that hall, turned right, passed the secretary’s office, and continued down the hall to the principal’s office.

“When my dad was a teacher, he had the same home room for many years, Room 113 on the bottom floor. My dad once told me that during the war, there were so many kids at the high school that they did split shifts. One group of students started early, then the others came later in the day. They also had a fire up there in the early forties, and Dad’s classes met in the South Brownsville Methodist Church while they cleaned up. Perhaps some of the readers may remember more about that.”

What was it like to have Mr. Slick as your teacher? Many former students have responded to my invitation to share their memories of Mr. Slick’s classes. Among their comments are such phrases as “the least he



**Mr. Slick, Business Math teacher**

expected was 100%,” “aggressive in the pursuit of excellence,” “highly respected by his students,” and “I was a wreck before attending his class!” You are invited to join us in Room 113, as Mr. Slick teaches his crowded class the basic principles of Business Math. And whatever you do – don’t be late!

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***STRICT DISCIPLINE AND HIGH STANDARDS  
WERE HALLMARKS OF CHARLIE SLICK***

“Johnson!!”

Principal Charlie Slick’s piercing voice boomed across a hallway crowded with chattering Brownsville High School students. Who could be the unlucky target of Mr. Slick’s anger on the very first day of the 1961-62 school year? None other than brand-new senior Chuck Johnson.

Chuck recently explained to me what he did to get into trouble on his first day as a senior, forty-one years ago.

“To understand what I did wrong,” Chuck said, “you need to know that the old high school on High Street was laid out in a square. The walls in the school’s halls were light green, and there were dark green one-way arrows painted on the walls. Those arrows indicated that students must walk through the halls in only one direction, and teachers were very strict about enforcing this.

“My home room teacher was Miss McGinty. Her room was on the corner next to Mr. Slick’s office. My first period English class was to be taught by Joe Hall, whose classroom was right next to Miss McGinty’s room, but in the opposite direction of the student traffic flow. So according to those green arrows, I would have to exit my home room and walk all the way around the building to reach Mr. Hall’s class, which was actually only a few feet away from my home room door.

“When the bell rang to go to first period class, Mr. Slick was standing in the doorway of his office with his arms crossed and feet planted wide. I exited my home room and turned against traffic to take a short cut to Mr. Hall’s room. Of course, Mr. Slick saw it, and he hollered in his shrill James Cagney voice, ‘Johnson!! Didn’t you see those arrows?!’

“When Mr. Slick would holler, everyone would just tremble. He wasn’t a big man, but he was tough. However, I was now a ‘cool’ senior! So when Mr. Slick yelled at me about the arrows, I dramatically ducked, pretending there were arrows flying through the air, and shouted back, ‘I never even seen the Indians!’

“The kids in the hall started howling. Mr. Slick hustled over to me, grabbed me by the back of my neck, and took me into the office, where he had a big paddle. He bent me over his principal’s desk and gave me five terrific whacks that brought tears to my eyes! And to make it worse, I got another beating when I got home, because when you got paddled in those days, the principal called the house and you got it again that night!

“My classmates and I still joke about how I was only two minutes into my senior year when I became one of the few students paddled by Charlie Slick.”

I said to Chuck in surprise, “Are you saying that Mr. Slick didn’t paddle students very often?”

Chuck laughed, then said softly, “By then, he didn’t have to.”

Maybe not by the 1960s. But early in his teaching career, Charlie Slick was still earning his tough reputation. Ed Porter, now of St. Augustine Beach, Florida, learned that Charlie had a hair trigger.

“I was in Mr. Slick’s class in 1942-43,” Ed told me. “He kept a big flat paddle on which he had drawn a large star in white chalk. Any boy who misbehaved in class was called to the front of the room and told, ‘Bend over and grab your ankles.’ Mr. Slick would swing the paddle and place an imprint of the star on the posterior of the mischief maker.

“That imprint remained visible to everyone for the rest of the school day. It was a source of amusement for the girls and a kind of badge of honor among the guys. As I recall, Georgie Mitchell collected the most honor badges in my class.”

There was more to Charlie Slick than his uncompromising disciplinary methods, but his strictness usually assured that he had the undivided attention of his students. Charlie taught math from 1939 until 1960, then served as high school principal until 1964.

Burte John of Pittsburgh recalled, “He was truly a very good teacher, because he made you so afraid of him that you tried harder! That is probably why math was my best subject, and I have used it in every one of my jobs.”

Jean Huston Bright of Brownsville concurred. “He would say a list of figures to the class,” she declared, “then point his finger at you for the answer. That is why I can add faster mentally than by using a calculator!”

Charlie believed in the Socratic method of instruction. Ask him a question, and the process would begin.

“If you couldn’t solve a math problem and asked him for help,” said Cicely Laverdi Forcina of Republic, “you always ended up solving it yourself. He’d ask you more questions than you asked him!”

“I was absolutely a wreck before attending his classes,” exclaimed

Norma Ryan of Brownsville, “and I must say that I studied more for his classes than for any others out of fear! You would think that it would be hard to learn out of fear, but he had a way of teaching that made it remain in my brain. He was gifted!”

“He was a no-nonsense teacher,” agreed Rosalie Coughenour of Hopwood, “who would accept nothing but your best effort. Most of the students in our class made an effort to do our best so we would not be on the receiving end of one of his famous, very vocal ‘mini-lectures.’”

What did Rosalie think of Charlie’s demanding classroom methods?

“I didn’t perceive him as a mean teacher,” she said. “I perceived him as being a bit frustrated at wanting us to leave his class with optimum knowledge, knowing that we did not all take advantage of that opportunity. Outside of the classroom, he was congenial and friendly.”

Norma Ryan also saw the congenial side of Charlie Slick, although not until years later.

“The memory of him being so very stern lived in my mind until many years later,” Norma said. “After I was married, I saw him on a totally different level. He was my uncle Vince Ryan’s friend, and that is when I saw a side of Mr. Slick that was the opposite of his teaching persona.

“He had a great sense of humor, and he was such a nice gentleman. I once told him how I had feared his class, and he laughed and thought that was so funny. I must admit that even then, I found it hard to call him ‘Charlie.’ He was still ‘Mr. Slick’ to me.”

In the early 1960s, Charlie left the classroom and became the high school principal.

“Why did Charlie accept the principal’s job?” I asked Charlie’s daughter, Lee Slick, a retired teacher who still lives in Brownsville.

“I think that just as in many occupations, you want to climb the ladder,” Lee said. “He had earned his master’s degree at West Virginia and then earned his principal’s papers. He just thought he would like to move up, and I suppose the increase in salary was a factor.

“After he became principal, I remember he said to me once, ‘Lee, when you’re a teacher, you’ve got your own problems. When you’re a principal, you’ve got everybody’s problems.’ I don’t think he liked being a principal that much.”

Victoria Vavases Thornton of Cumberland, Maryland, saw first-hand how Charlie dealt with students called to the principal’s office.

“I worked as an ‘office girl’ for Mr. Slick during the 1961-62 school year,” Victoria explained. “As an office helper, I often had the task of going to classes to ‘escort’ students to the office so that Mr. Slick could talk with them. Many students were a bit reluctant to come with me.

Mr. Slick was a strong disciplinarian, but he was always fair and held high expectations for his students. The students knew the rules, and if they chose to disregard the limits set before them, there were consequences.”

“I graduated from Brownsville in 1964,” added Paula Terreta Skrobot of Columbus, Ohio. “I remember Mr. Slick as being short of stature but a very stern disciplinarian. I never had any problems with him, but some of the guys did, and he sure knew how to set them straight. He made the ‘tough guys’ know who was in charge, and I think the students really respected him for it.”

However, even Charlie could bend – a bit.

“A few of us girls went to him to ask if we could please wear trousers in the winter,” Paula said. “At that time, girls couldn’t wear trousers to school. Most of us walked to school, and it could be very cold wearing skirts. Mr. Slick finally let us wear pants to school. But only under our skirts or dresses, and then we had to go into the girls’ room and take them off before class!”

Charlie Slick set high standards for himself, and he set high standards for his students.

“He expected children to come to school with a serious attitude towards their education,” commented Victoria Thornton, “and he had a unique way of reminding students that the privilege of obtaining an education carried with it the responsibility to put forth one’s best effort at all times.”

“He was an excellent teacher,” observed Bob Simpson of Vacaville, California. “He demanded performance from his students, and he was very aggressive in his pursuit of excellence. Some students were intimidated because of his relentless exhortation to encourage them to excel, but personally, I wish there were more teachers like him.”

Charlie Slick’s students have vivid memories of him. But perhaps the most revealing vignettes about this man come from athletes and coaches with whom he was associated on the football and baseball fields. Next, some of Charlie’s former athletes and fellow coaches will join us to share some hilariously classic “Charlie Slick” stories. Charlie wouldn’t mind, for as these tales have been retold over the years, often in Charlie’s presence, among those laughing hardest was Charlie himself.





**Brownsville High School head football coach Earl Bruce and assistant coaches Andy Sepsi Sr. and Charlie Slick pose at Brownie Stadium in the early 1940s.**

***FORMER BROWNSVILLE ATHLETES DESCRIBE  
THEIR UNFORGETTABLE COACH***

Charlie Slick was a teacher, principal, and coach in Brownsville from 1939 through 1964. In this article, our focus shifts from the classroom to the athletic field as some of Charlie's former players remember Coach Slick.

Charlie was hired as an assistant to head football coach Earl Bruce in 1942. One year later, Brownsville's 1943 team won the WPIAL AA championship. In a 1982 interview, Charlie told Gary Thomas of the *Tribune-Review*, "That was a football team! There was Noodie Johns and Nate Barnette at halfback; Dan Stimmell at blocking back; Bert Sutton at fullback; Ross Herron and Bill Sutton on the ends; Bob Kraft and Barney Bakewell at tackle; Joe Drazenovich and John Simon at

guard; and Chuck Drazenovich at center. Talk about quality!”

Quality, Charlie believed, resulted from concentration and determination, and he ran practices with that principle in mind. In 1982, Charles Lynch, left end on Brownsville’s undefeated 1947 team, described one of Charlie’s favorite tricks.

“I’ve never forgotten Charlie’s method of holding the football players’ attention while talking with the backs and receivers,” Lynch commented. “Charlie always had a football in his hand. He’d stand within ten feet of the group, and his eyes would demand complete attention. If Charlie caught anyone whose eyes were not on his, he was known to get his attention by drilling a bullet pass straight at the guy’s nose. Since we didn’t have face masks then, Charlie’s method worked! At the end of every talk session, someone was always going to get the ball from Charlie. When you played for Charlie, you stayed alert!”

Bert Sutton played on Brownsville’s 1943 championship team. Bert, who lives in North Versailles, became a fellow coach and good friend of Charlie Slick.

“I know that at times he was said to be cold and insensitive,” Bert conceded, “but I never saw anything but a warm, funny human being. I remember when Charlie came by after varsity practice one day to give me a hand with my junior high football team.

“I had a fullback who for some reason could not align himself with the quarterback, so Charlie instructed him to line up on the quarterback’s heels. The player did exactly as directed. He moved up and put his toes right against the quarterback’s heels. Charlie looked over at me and deadpanned, ‘Lots of luck!’”

Charlie’s friends knew his lighter side, but his players rarely saw it.

“If you were dogging it,” said Brownsville’s Chuck Johnson, “he would give you a swift kick in the rear end and shout, ‘Get the lead out, son! Where do you think you are? Gimme ten laps!’”

“Mr. Slick was someone you didn’t mess with,” agreed Bob Bakewell of Morganton, North Carolina. “If he told you something, you better do it and not even look like you disagreed. He wasn’t big, but I remember him getting after the big guys like Joe Shoaf, Bill Valko, and Lester Billups. When he got through chewing them out, all I could think was, ‘I’m glad it wasn’t me!’ Yet if you had a problem, you knew that you could go to him and he would help you if he could.”

“He was a very good motivator of young men,” agreed Tom Kostelnik, Class of ’61. “Charlie took time to help me with the college selection process and advise me on areas of interest for a major. As a result, I enrolled at Notre Dame in 1961, majored in Business, and eventually obtained my MBA. Today I have my own consulting

business, and there is no question Charlie Slick played a part.”

After more than forty years, the memory of Charlie Slick still provides inspiration.

“When I was living near Myrtle Beach,” explained Jim Garred of Phoenix, “I played golf with one of Charlie’s great athletes, Andy Sepsi, Jr. Andy and I were partners against two other guys, and we really wanted to win the match.

“So when we had a difficult shot to make, we would tell each other, ‘Just pretend Coach Slick ordered you to make this shot!’ Two grown men, years removed from those days, and Charlie could still inspire us to produce!”

Charlie declined the opportunity to become head football coach, preferring to serve as assistant to coaches Earl Bruce, Andy Sepsi, Sr., Warner Fritsch, Alex Barantovich and John Popovich. On the baseball diamond, though, Charlie was in charge. Freshmen walking onto Charlie’s practice field for the first time often did a double take when they spied the head baseball coach.

“He was the only person I knew who was more bowlegged than I was,” declared Cutty Cunningham of Yorktown, Virginia. What’s more, Charlie didn’t linger by the mirror when selecting an outfit to wear on the practice field.

A few years ago, Ron Forsythe, one of Charlie’s former players, humorously described Charley’s practice uniform.

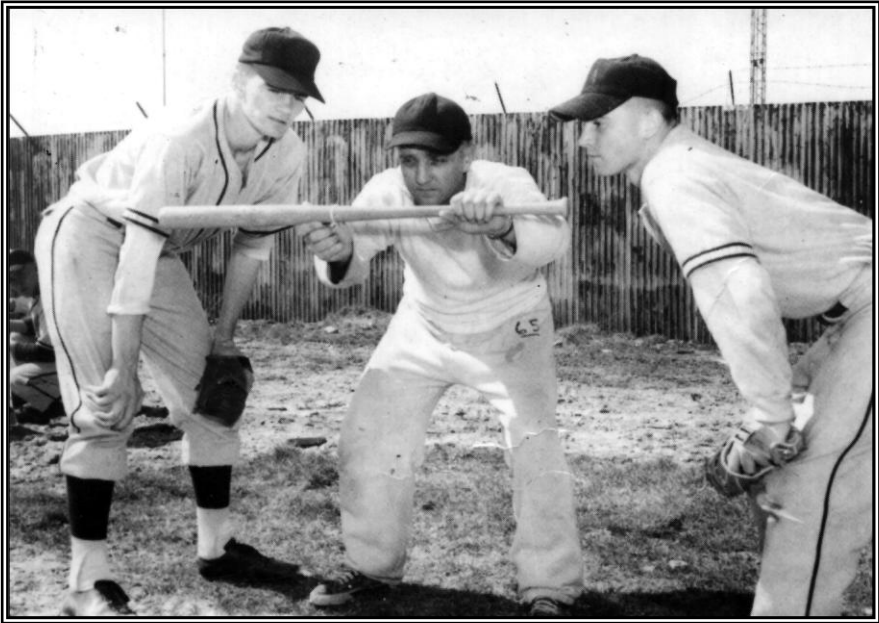
“My friend’s description of the coach was camera correct,” Ron remembered about his first day at practice. “He had this guy down pat – voice, mannerisms, drills. But for some reason, my friend had never said a word about what this man wore on the field – an outfit without parallel in baseball history, a get-up that would have had Stalin in stitches, garb so bizarre as to demand description.

“How he ever got that faded black cap off his head, I’ll never know. It looked as if it had been painted on centuries earlier. And those World War II army pants – baggy, brown, woolen – must have weighed ten pounds per leg. If he wore spikes, I never saw them. His trousers hid his feet. His off-white football jersey made him a tough batting practice pitcher. Its arms were so long that the hitter never saw the ball coming.”

Appearance aside, Charlie was all business on the practice field. He had no patience for shenanigans or lukewarm effort.

“I can sum it up in one short sentence,” said Jim Garred, “that all of his former athletes can relate to – ‘Take off, son!’ When a player heard those words, he knew he had crossed the line and laps would follow.

“He taught us to play baseball very aggressively,” recalled Gary Klingensmith, whose memories were shared at a 1982 testimonial dinner



**Brownsville High School head baseball coach Charlie Slick demonstrates the fine art of bunting. The scene is the old baseball field behind Brownie Stadium, now the site of Brownsville Area High School.**

for Charlie. “We would steal on any pitch, and we were a swinging team, because in practice if we failed to swing at a good pitch, the next one was coming at our head.”

“I used many of the things he taught me when I became a coach,” noted Erman Hartmann, Class of ’59. “Charlie taught us things in high school that some major leaguers don’t learn today. We studied base stealing techniques in detail, and he taught every defensive position to every player, because you never knew when you might have to play out of position.”

Coach Slick made an instant impression at Gary Klingensmith’s first baseball practice.

“I was a freshman outfielder,” remembered Gary. “Coach Slick pitched batting practice, and I was positioned in center field behind his back, so I thought I was pretty safe. The first time I missed the ball, I started jogging after it.

“Then I saw the other outfielders waving to me that Mr. Slick was giving his ‘spinning fingers’ sign for me to start running laps. After a few laps, Mr. Slick called me over and said, ‘Don’t you ever trot after a missed ball. You RUN after it. And remember, I’ve got eyes in the back

of my head.’

“I owe everything to Mr. Slick,” Gary declared. “He and Coach Dave Simon did a great job of selling me to Coach Earl Bruce of Penn State, which meant a full college scholarship for me. Mr. Slick taught me all I ever needed to know about discipline.”

Charlie even made a lasting impression on one particular Brownsville basketball player. Joe Fenwick told me, “Mr. Slick was a Penn State fan and a good friend of my dad, Joseph E. Fenwick. I played basketball at Pitt, and in my final game in 1956, we beat Penn State and I played pretty well.

“The following weekend I went home, and on Saturday morning the phone rang. It was Mr. Slick. He had called to talk to my dad, and he was surprised when I answered the phone. He had been at the Penn State game and complimented me on my play. He went on to say how proud he was that night to be from Brownsville. Through the years I’ve always remembered that phone call, and what his compliment meant to me.

“I have always wondered, though, whom he was rooting for that night – Pitt or Penn State?”

Charlie enjoyed coaching, but his greatest disappointment was the decision to tear down Brownie Stadium in order to construct a new high school on the site.

“Dad was still principal when they were discussing building the current high school,” said Charlie’s daughter, Lee Slick. “Harrisburg officials came to inspect the site. My dad accompanied them and told them, ‘This is probably the best stadium in the whole Mon Valley. The lighting system, the field, the drainage, the seating – why would you tear this down, when we have all of this land around here?’ His objections were futile, and Dad was always so disappointed that they tore that stadium down.”

Students and athletes knew that Charlie Slick was a demanding taskmaster. What must life have been like at home for Mr. Slick’s only child? Next as we conclude our series, Charlie’s daughter Lee will reveal the side of her father that few students or athletes ever saw. Perhaps we will even find time to drop by the raucous 1982 “roast” of Mr. Slick, organized by his friends to honor this Brownsville legend.

*FRIENDS AND FAMILY SAW A DIFFERENT SIDE OF CHARLIE SLICK*

Today we conclude our series about the late Brownsville High School educator and coach, Charlie Slick. His former students, athletes and colleagues have described Mr. Slick as tough and demanding. But what was he like at home? When I spoke with Charlie's daughter Lee in her Church Street home, I asked if her father was difficult to live with.

"Did your dad demand that you excel academically?" I asked Lee.

"No, he actually didn't," Lee answered. "People probably expected that would be the case, but I can honestly say my dad never pressured me scholastically. I remember coming home crying with a B on my report card, and he said to me, 'Lee, as long as you tried your best, you have nothing ever to worry or be ashamed about.'"

"So he wasn't quite as tough on his only child as he was on his students and athletes?" I asked.

"She could get anything from him!" laughed Charlie's widow, Ruth, who had joined the conversation.

Of course, a critical test of any father's patience comes when he begins to teach his daughter to drive.

"Where did your dad teach you to drive?" I asked Lee.

"On the streets of Brownsville," Lee said, rolling her eyes. "And I kept telling myself, 'If you can learn to drive a manual transmission car going up and down the hills of Brownsville, you can drive anywhere!'"

"My biggest fear was that I would be following someone up High Street hill who would want to turn left at Angle Street. You'd have to stop on the hill and use the clutch to hold the car from drifting backward as you tried to get going again."

"Was your dad a calm driving teacher?" I asked.

"Well, I couldn't quite get the hang of working the clutch at first. Dad would try to be patient, then he would finally shout in exasperation, 'Lee! Lee! Can't you tell when the clutch is going to take hold?!'"

Lee and Ruth both laughed. "So mom took me out until I learned how to operate the clutch properly."

"I guess you're implying that your dad had a temper?"

"Oh, yeee-ah," Lee drew the word out as she shared a smile with her mother. "Dad had a temper. I always told him he mellowed as he got older, but if something would tee him off, he would let it out."

"What words do you think would best describe him?"

"Determined. Strict. A very focused person. But deep down, a very caring person. My dad really did love kids, and he would do anything with kids.

"I'll give you an example of how my dad's image as a tough guy wasn't always quite accurate. When Dave Simon's family moved to Brownsville, they lived on Pearl Street in the Craft Apartments. My dad and Dave were good friends, and one evening my dad was visiting the Simons, who had two little girls.

"Dad was sitting on the couch in front of their living room window, and Dave's two-year old, Susie, had climbed up on the back of the couch. She had a comb, and she was just combing my dad's hair every which way!

"A woman who'd had my dad as a teacher was standing across the street," Lee laughed, "and when she looked across at the Simon's window, she exclaimed, 'Oh, my God, you won't believe this! That is Mr. Slick in there, and Susie's up there on the couch combing his hair!'

"The lady couldn't believe it, of course, because it really didn't fit her image of my dad."

Leslie Addis of Seattle, Washington, also remembers Mr. Slick as being different from his popular image.

"My dad, Edwin Addis, coached at Brownsville High School with Mr. Slick," Leslie told me, "and my dad had a very high regard for Mr. Slick as a coach and as a friend. When we would visit the Slicks, I remember how patient they were with me as they allowed me to bang away on the piano in their dining room."

Charlie Slick? Patient?

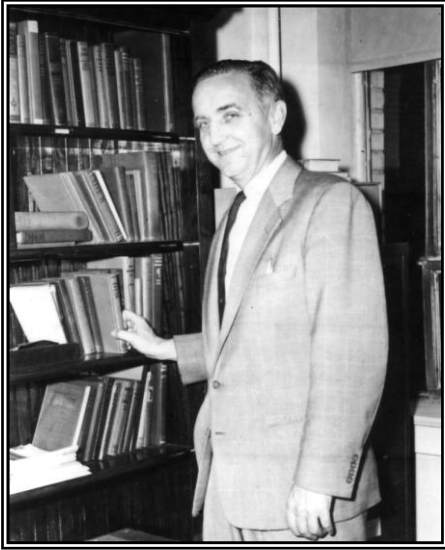
"We were next-door neighbors of the Slicks for many years," Ruthie Cooper Klodell told me from her home in Girard, Ohio, "and they were a wonderful family. Many times Mr. Slick would drive me to the high school when I was a student. He was a very nice, low-keyed kind of individual, very mild-mannered and a hard worker."

Low-keyed? Mild-mannered?

Did Charlie Slick have a different personality when he was not in school or on the athletic field?

Gail Schwartz Gurin, Carol Schwartz Franko, and Debbie Schwartz Pechersky were also neighbors of the Slicks. They lived with their parents, Edith and Theodore Schwartz, in a yellow brick house at 21 Shaffner Avenue.

"Our neighborhood included Louise and Harriet Walker, the Moskovitz family, Paula and Mike Orsog, the Coopers, and the Cichettis," the three former Schwartz girls recalled. "We still remember Mr. Slick as a friendly man who regularly mowed his lawn with a 'push' mower. Even though he was our neighbor for many years, we always called him Mr. Slick. When the Slicks moved to a bigger house on Church Street, Mr. Slick planted an even larger garden."



**After retiring as Brownsville High School principal in 1964, Mr. Slick taught and coached at California State College until his retirement in 1978.**

“Tomatoes!” exclaimed Lee, when I asked her what her dad planted in his backyard garden. “Cabbage, peppers, onions, and beets. One year I counted over one hundred tomato plants in the garden. He would give to all of the neighbors, then Mom and I would do as much with the tomatoes as we possibly could.

“The ground in the yard is all clay, but he spaded it up himself every spring. It was like digging in cement, and he would come in wringing wet from perspiration, but he enjoyed it.”

“It was a workout for him,” I said.

“That’s right,” agreed Lee. “Even after he retired from California State College at age sixty in 1978, Dad remained physically active. He would get up early every morning and go

to the college to work out, come home and read the paper, then return to the college at 9:30 to swim with the swim club.

“Dad enjoyed being with his friends. He was secretary at the Elks for many years, and he would go down there to play cards with guys like Tom Liston and Joe Fenwick. Nazzareno Cicchetti was another good friend of his, and Dad would go over and help him with his beer distributorship during the summer.”

On August 1, 1982, a lot of those friends held a testimonial dinner for Charlie at the Hiller Fire Hall. They called it a “roast,” and it turned out to be a real roast when the fire hall’s air conditioning gave out. The crowd had a great time though, as the lineup of speakers didn’t let up for a minute, keeping everyone in stitches with nonstop stories about their honored guest.

“Dad laughed right along with them,” Lee said, “and as each one spoke, Dad scribbled down a note or two. My dad wasn’t one for making speeches, but when his turn finally came, he went on for an hour! I couldn’t believe it! He went right down his list and made sure he got in a zinger or two on each of his friends who had roasted him. It was a great evening for everyone.”

Charlie spent seventeen happy years in retirement with his wife



Ruth, tending his garden, swimming daily, golfing, and playing cards with his friends.

In 1995, at the age of seventy-seven, Charlie Slick died.

Bert Sutton, the youngest of seven brothers to play football at Brownsville High School, was the master of ceremonies at Charlie's 1982 testimonial dinner. Bert, who now lives in North Versailles, summed up his feelings about Charlie Slick.

"I had the pleasure of knowing Charlie Slick very well," Bert told me. "He coached me in baseball and football, and later he was a fellow coach, a teaching colleague, my principal, and my friend.

"Charlie Slick excelled in every position he held. He was always kind and compassionate to me and my family, and I considered it an honor to be the emcee at his testimonial dinner. Charlie was one of the finest men I have ever known. He served his community and his country with distinction. I will always miss him."

"When Dad died," Lee said, "Don Bartolomucci, the current high school football coach who loved my dad, and Jeff Petrucci, the college football coach for whom my dad was an assistant coach, gave the eulogies. They were just great. They had the people laughing and crying with things that happened with my dad. After the funeral, Reverend Clark, who knew him only as a quiet man who came to church every Sunday, said to me, 'I never knew that side of Mr. Slick.'

"The funeral was on a Sunday at Skirpan's," Lee continued. "On Saturday afternoon, Dad was in one of the front rooms, and the other front room was empty. During visiting hours, I looked over in that other room, and there were fifteen or twenty fellows, all Dad's former players, fellow coaches and friends, having a great time telling 'Charlie stories.' Dad would have been in his glory."

Charlie Slick's name will forever be linked with Brownsville. But despite his many years working and living in the community, Charlie is not buried anywhere near Brownsville.

"Dad attended the Presbyterian Church in Brownsville faithfully," said Lee, "but he had always kept his membership back in the Lutheran Church in Osterburg, where he was born and raised. That is where he is buried."

Many of us can name one or two individuals in our lives who stand out as having made a difference for us. For a remarkable number of people, Charlie Slick was one of those individuals.

"To this day," said Lee Slick with a smile, "people will come up to me and say, 'Let me tell you about Charlie . . .'"

And then the stories begin.