

## **Coach Vince Lombardi, the Power of Example, a Tribute**

By Victor Mastro and Johnny Shevalla

"Do you know that all who run in a race, all indeed run, but only one receives the prize, so run ye to obtain it." (St. Paul) In the locker before each game coach Lombardi, down on his knees, with his Green Bay Packers, loved to quote this passage from St. Paul and pray with his players.

General Norman Schwarzkopff's last message to his troops before the Persian Gulf War was Lombardi's "Will to Win" speech: "Believe in God, believe in yourself, strive to excel, believe in human decency, the desire, the will to win. I firmly believe in an individual. In life as in the game of football, he who works his heart out for a good cause, lies exhausted on the field of battle... victorious."

In 1961 after Green Bay beat the New York Giants, 37-0, Vince was feted at a testimonial, and when he stood up for his acceptance speech Lombardi was so emotionally overwhelmed at the response, he just stood, looked around, and his eyes filled with tears. He finally spoke, "I was blessed with parents who encouraged and supported me." Lombardi showed us that the strongest force in man is gentleness, love. "If you play together as a team, you've got to care for one another, you've got to love each other, then you know you've got a team." (Be men for others, and serve others). Lombardi stated in triumph on national television, "We don't like one another, we love each other," referring to his team concept.

Lombardi took many defeats, trying to get a head coaching position, but he would not yield. This same mental toughness he taught his players, do not yield. Vince called Col. Earl Blaik, Army's greatest coach, "My Mentor." Coach Blaik said after talking to Vince about coaching for me "Something stood out about Vince. I called him back for a second interview and I knew Vince was the coach I really wanted." Lombardi coached at Army as an assistant, and that year Army was unbeaten. Five years at Army and Lombardi became an assistant coach for the New York Giants under Jim Lee Howell, then on to Green Bay. He coached five world championships and the first two Super Bowl triumphs. A team together by which all other NFL teams will be rated. The Packers stood supreme, and Lombardi the coach, 1959-1967.

Vince had this passionate philosophy of life and of football, "A few men working closely together in a spirit of discipline, singleness of purpose, and a commitment to excellence could succeed no matter the odds." His misquoted, "Winning isn't everything, it's the only thing," statement exemplified this passion. As Bart Starr, his quarterback, correctly noted, Vince as saying, "The effort, the desire, the will to win is everything." Lombardi believed that a team mentally prepared can not be beaten, "Winning becomes a habit, and so can losing."

Mel Heimer, New York syndicated columnist, wrote of Lombardi: "Vince talked with deeds rather than words," the true classic champion. Jerry Kramer, former Green Bay Packer lineman, wrote this after the Packers' reunion in 1984, which became a best seller among football books, "Distant Replay," "Lombardi's Packers weren't the champions of Super Bowl I and II, they were champions forever. Why? because guys used football to get out of the mines, mills, farms, and away from their dreary childhoods. Guys found in Lombardi, the father figure they had never known at home. Guys who learned to win in Green Bay after too many losing seasons in too many towns, looked up to him. That tough little man, who coached us, knew something, knew how to look inside people, to see strengths people never knew they had, to draw out those strengths to blend them and refine them. God, I was proud, happy, and lucky to be part of it."

Vince Promuto, Washington Redskin lineman, and last captain of a Lombardi team, before Vince succumbed to stomach cancer, September 3, 1970, echoed a similar sentiment to me, "Lombardi was able to get inside your heart and mind and lead you to levels way above your abilities and skills. Besides a creator of football champions, Lombardi created champions for life."

"Who the heck is Vince Lombardi?" That was the question asked when Lombardi was named general manager and head coach of the Green Bay Packers in 1959. The Jesuits answered that question by

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giving Lombardi the Fordham University Insignis Award. Vince cherished this award over the many others he received over time. The text reads, "Untried kids and tired old men have learned from him. They have learned that men like Vincent Lombardi know how to fight, how to win, and how to lose. Above all, they and all of us have learned that only with such men is the whole greater than its parts, that a team, a real team is like all creations, a thing of wonder, a thing of love."

Indeed, Lombardi loved football and his players. Truly, a tribute to Vince, who was a man for others by his strong teaching of the power of example.