

Debunking De Myth

by Jim Campbell

Recently, there has been an effort to get to the bottom of the mystery of just who was the originator of one of football's most famous sayings: "Winning isn't everything-- it's the *only* thing."

Usually, Vince Lombardi is given credit for it. That could be in large measure because Jerry Kramer in his 1970 tribute book to the Packers' coach, *"Lombardi, Winning Is the Only Thing,"* bestows the honor on Lombardi. No doubt Lombardi did utter the famous phrase at one time in his Hall of Fame career, but he did *not* originate it.

When Tom Dean, not too far removed from an outstanding career as quarterback at Bucknell University, greeted a motley crew of 15 gridiron candidates at Selinsgrove (PA) High School in the late-summer of 1953, he didn't take long to tell us that "Winning isn't everything, it's the only thing." Tom was quick to credit Paul Brown as having expressed the philosophy. At that time, it should be noted, relatively few people outside of a group of linemen at the United States Military Academy at West Point, knew who Vince Lombardi was.

In recent attempts to demythologize Lombardi as the first to utter the statement, several sources have cited the 1953 John Wayne film, "Trouble Along the Way." Wayne plays unemployed coach "Steve Aloysius Williams", who is a single father and about to lose custody of his daughter "Carole" (played by Sherry Jackson), unless he finds gainful employment. He takes a job at a small Catholic college (St. Anthony's) and stops at nothing to field a winning football team.

The film's dialogue includes the famous saying, *but* it isn't delivered by Wayne/"Williams." It is daughter "Carole," who says "Steve says, 'Winning isn't everything, it's the only thing.'" Well, it's a matter of semantics, I guess, but Wayne only said it indirectly.

Now for the rest of the story--apologies to Paul Harvey. The earliest documentation of the saying goes back to Henry R. "Red" Sanders, head coach of the then highly successful UCLA Bruins (1949-1957). Since Red enjoyed rubbing elbows with the Hollywood crowd, it isn't too much of a leap of faith that screenwriters Jack Rose and Melville Shavelson heard Sanders state his feelings about the game and included them in the manuscript of the film, which was based on a story by Robert Hardy Andrews and Douglas Morrow.

The next time you hear Lombardi credited with coining the phrase, if it's not too impolite, please say something along the lines of, "Not so fast my friend," and then explain about three known sources BV (Before Vince).