

### **32963 Faith Column for 11-10-11**

**By Rev. Drs. Casey and Bob Baggott, Community Church of Vero Beach**

#### **Thanks, Coach!**

Sure, Rome had its Caesars. Springfield, Illinois had Abe Lincoln. And New Orleans claims Louis Armstrong with pride. But Vero Beach can claim a legend, too. And last week we lost our living legend when Coach Billy Livings passed away.

Billy Livings coached for over twenty-six years at Vero Beach High School, racking up a staggering number of wins and actually bringing the state football championship to Vero Beach in 1986. And for these successes, he became for us across the years a larger-than-life figure, a celebrity, a hero – a legend.

It's been said that a legend is something that everyone knows by heart. And it's true that many of us know by heart the basic outlines and contours of Billy's life, his legacy, and his impressive string of successes. But we suspect that the making of this legendary life is owed, at least in part, to something that we may not all know. We may not all have known that Billy charted his life's course with confidence, courage, faithfulness, and integrity, though sometimes doing so required forging ahead in directions few others ever headed.

A favorite poem of Billy's by Robert Frost expresses the idea so well: *Two roads diverged in the wood, and I – I took the one less travelled by, and that has made all the difference.* Indeed, Billy's life exemplified quite a unique journey of independent conviction and purpose. And we suspect that the difference he made in our lives, and so many others, is due to that.

A classic demonstration of Billy's willingness to forge a new way forward in order to achieve a meaningful goal comes from his early coaching days in Montgomery, Alabama. Billy had been charged with organizing a new football team at Jefferson Davis High School. This brand new school had no players and little equipment. The team had been given 100 shoulder pads and helmets for the season.

Billy spent the weeks before the start of the school year driving through the neighborhoods of Montgomery, recruiting young men for the team. He told them playing football would give them a chance to be part of something bigger than themselves. He told them that if they wanted to contribute their best to their community, he'd make sure that they could.

When sign-up day arrived, Billy brought out the 100 helmets and shoulder pads, but 229 kids showed up! Determined to give every kid a chance at his dreams, Billy begged and borrowed equipment from other athletic departments all over the state. Every single one of those 229 kids eventually got his equipment and had a chance to be a part of something bigger than himself, just as Billy promised.

Although most of us never had the opportunity to don helmets and shoulder pads and run onto the field under Billy's guidance, he nevertheless showed us how we, too, could be part of something bigger than ourselves. He demonstrated to us that charting our life's course with confidence, faithfulness, courage, and integrity, and bringing together people with shared goals and dreams, can yield extraordinary results ... and sometimes even a legendary life.

Vero Beach has lost a fine man, a great coach, a beloved figure. Thousands of us have said our sad but grateful goodbyes. But we will never forget the legend.

Thanks, Coach!