

## Epilogue

*“Live a life worthy of the calling you have received.”*

-- Ephesians 4:1

*“Success is peace of mind which is the direct result of self-satisfaction in knowing that you did your best to become the best you are capable of becoming.”*

-- John Wooden

Michael Pecarovich’s concluding remarks at the end of the season football banquet were remarkably prescient. In fact, it could be said they deviated in only two minor ways. First, whereas Coach Stagg said he would not know whether a season was truly successful for 15 or 20 years, it took Mehrens and McMahon a full 40 years to appreciate the full depth of all they had achieved during those precious 77 days in the summer and fall of 1962. Second, Bill Mehrens did, in fact, come around to tell his players in no uncertain terms that he loved them. And although John McMahon didn’t utter any such words at the 40<sup>th</sup> reunion, much as Pecarovich predicted, the players had come to understand that his love was implicit in everything he did that season.

And that in the end is what separates the good coaches from the great coaches. It is not merely a coach’s understanding of the fundamentals of the game; nor is it their will to win, the success they achieve on the field of play, or even their ability to coach, that ultimately determines their success. It is their ability to love.

Amos Alonzo Stagg was right. The best coaches love their players. Frank Leahy, who played under Knute Rockne for three years at Notre Dame, most likely learned this lesson from him, and it was why he helped John Gagliardi land his first college coaching position in 1949. Gagliardi, in turn, knew it and conveyed it to Bill Mehrens (along with the thousands of other players he has touched during his 60 years of coaching). And Mehrens passed it on to every player he ever coached—including the 37 members of the 1962 Great Falls Central Mustangs.

True to their heritage, the 1962 Mustangs have kept up the tradition. Ed Flaherty continues to pass on the lessons of love he learned from Mehrens and McMahon to family, employees and strangers alike. Two of his children are now coaches. Hundreds of his employees—past and present—have borne witness to how the principles of goal-setting lead to success and how ethics and values can only be communicated through

action—such as his willingness to make a commitment to something greater than oneself by providing scores of scholarships to at risk children and helping the less fortunate in Guatemala.

John O'Rourke, the former 135-pound back-up quarterback and Jerry Kuntz are now both coaches themselves and continue to set high expectations and demand excellence from all their players. Byron Weber, as a teacher; Billy Sprinkle, as the executive director of the Montana High School Athletic association; and Dick Kuntz, as a school superintendent, are also continuing the legacy of love by encouraging the next generation of students to work hard, never quit and follow their passions.

Every other member of the 1962 team—in ways big and small—is doing the same. Whether it be Dave Nash's work to fund a camp for the Boy Scouts of Montana or Greg Steckler's (Brian Elliot) ability to touch the souls of millions with his music, the lessons of that season, like a small pebble being tossed into the ocean, continue to ripple out in an ever widening circle.

The Duke of Wellington once said that “the Battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton.” It was his way of saying that the discipline and ethos instilled through organized sport sowed the seeds of his country's later success.

The same can be said of America's grade school, high school and college practice fields. But the lessons and values today's coaches instill in this country's youth go well beyond paving the way for just battlefield success. For, quite literally, they are the ones who weave into the fabric of the American spirit the principles and characteristics upon which this country's success is founded: high expectations, goal setting, hard work, persistence, pride, character and teamwork.

Coaching will forever be a noble calling and those lucky enough to earn the title of “coach” must always remember that they have been entrusted with a sacred mission, and at the heart of that mission is a single, simple philosophy: love.