

Family, Faith and Football

Tony Dungy's

CHAMP

Life

by Don Yaeger

A man with a shaved head, wearing a blue vest over a white shirt and khaki pants, stands on a football field. He is holding a red football with both hands. The background shows a large stadium with a white, ribbed dome and blue seating. Three blue signs with white text and a horseshoe logo are visible on the stadium wall. The word "IONSHIP" is overlaid in large, white, bold, sans-serif capital letters across the center of the image.

IONSHIP

It's a badge of honor among many sports coaches to tout long hours studying videos, nights slept on office couches and devotion to winning so all-consuming that everything else be damned. Tony Dungy doesn't wear that badge.

Dungy, head coach of the Indianapolis Colts, has long believed that he, his staff and players should be as devoted to family time as they are to playing time, as focused on giving to charities as they are to taking the ball away from opponents.

“When I first was drafted into the NFL by the Pittsburgh Steelers, I had the good fortune to play under [Coach] Chuck Noll,” Dungy tells *SUCCESS*. “I learned a lot in two years as a player and then eight years as a coach for him. Coach Noll believed in being *efficient*. That was his word: *efficient*. Let's do things the right way, do them very well, and get them done.

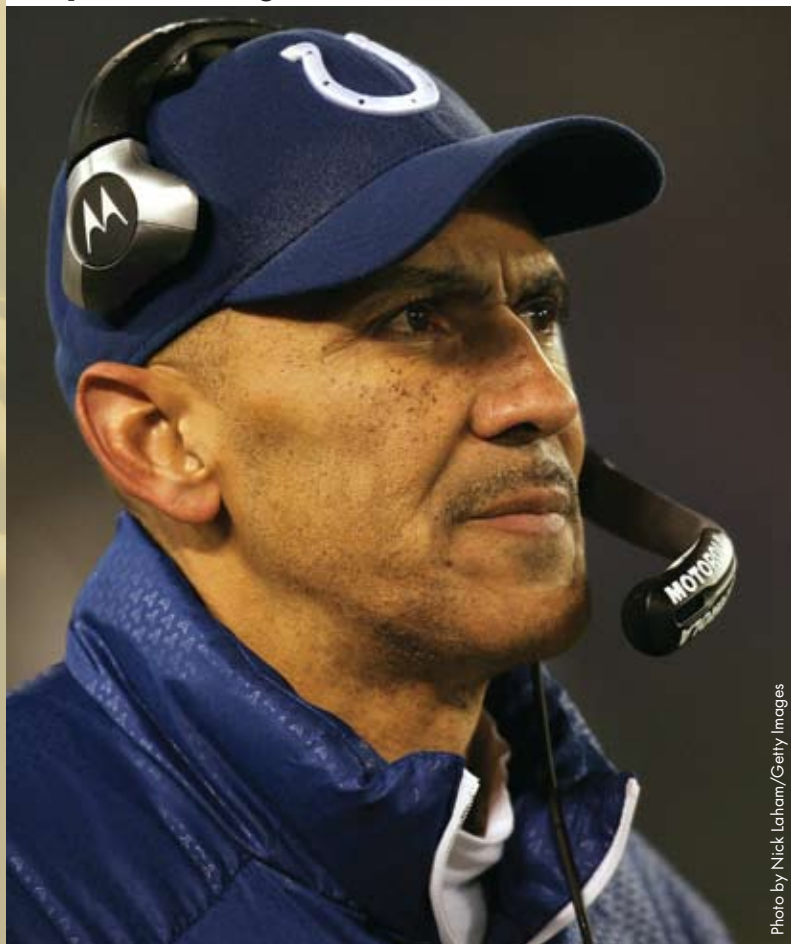


Photo by Nick Laham/Getty Images

“He also had a strong belief that you had to be well-rounded,” Dungy says of the legendary Steelers coach, who won four Super Bowls for the franchise. “Family life was part of that. He was a great family man. He also enjoyed flying planes, boating, cooking, theater—a lot of things. He showed me as a 22-year-old player and a 25-year-old coach that you can do this job very well and do a number of other things along the way. That was important for me to grow up in this league with his type of leadership, to see that it could be done the right way and the winning way at the same time.” Dungy concedes that, like many leaders, poor results challenged his resolve to balance work and home life. After waiting almost two decades to become a head coach, Dungy was hired to lead the Tampa Bay Buccaneers in 1996. His first team finished 6-10. The pressure, always a factor in sports, ratcheted up as fans and reporters questioned whether the coach was ready for the job.

Focus on Basics

Dungy never lost faith that he could balance work and personal life, even when he wasn't winning the number of games he wanted, “but I've got to admit it was tough,” he says. “Human nature tells you, ‘maybe this doesn't work. Maybe I should stay in the office and work until we get established.’ ”

As he was doing his personal post-season evaluation, Dungy says the words of his longtime mentor Coach Noll came back to him once more. “Coach Noll had a great saying that has always stuck with me: ‘When you're not successful, when you're struggling or having problems, do LESS, don't do MORE.’ Whenever we weren't playing well at the

No Regrets

Tony Dungy resolved early on to balance family and work.



His *Game Plan* Coach Dungy on Life

- Have hope for here and hereafter.
- “When a game ends, win or lose, it’s time to prepare for the next one.”
- It’s the **journey** that matters.
- “**Learning** is more important than the test.”
- Practice well.
- “It’s about the lives we touch, the **legacy we can leave**, and the world we can change for the better.”
- Use **faith** to encourage and lift people up.

(Quiet Strength, Tyndale House Publishers, 2007)

Steelers, he always looked at cutting back so we could concentrate on the basics, on the fundamentals. That’s another lesson I never forgot. Your human nature tells you that you have to look at one more film, add one new play. But I think back to Coach Noll and remember that’s not the answer. Just doing what we do a little bit better is the answer.”

Dungy quieted doubters by turning the perennial doormat Buccaneers into a consistent playoff team. But the team always faltered before reaching the NFL’s championship game. Then the complaint became, “Dungy can’t win the big one.” Fired by the Bucs in 2001, the chorus grew louder when Tampa Bay, playing with talent assembled by Dungy, won the Super Bowl the year after his departure.

By that time Dungy had been hired in Indianapolis and teamed with one of the game’s premier players, quarterback Peyton Manning. The Colts made the playoffs each of the first four seasons Dungy was coach, but again fell short of winning the ultimate prize each year. Then in 2006, the Colts won their first NFL title since 1971.

But while Dungy is proud to have become the first African-American coach to win a Super Bowl, he quickly says that isn’t the most significant subplot to the story.

“When you haven’t won—when you’re in the situation we were in for a number of years where everybody says, ‘You have good teams, you’ve been to the playoffs, but you’re never able to win the big one’—you just get tired of answering those questions,” Dungy says. “As much as you can tell yourself that that’s not what you’re measured by, it is tough to keep hearing that. Then, when you do win it all, frankly it validates your approach in many people’s eyes.

It’s now much easier for me to talk about being balanced between work and family and still be able to win, as opposed to just saying, ‘In theory, you can win this way.’ ”

Darkest Moments

Dungy was all the more grateful for being able to work with other family-oriented people when his son Jamie took his own life in 2005. As he struggled to make sense of the tragedy, one of the earliest phone calls came from Dennis Green, who was head coach of the Minnesota Vikings when Dungy was an assistant for four years before taking the Tampa Bay head coaching job.

“After Jamie passed, Denny called and I was able to tell him how grateful I was that I had worked for Denny during Jamie’s formative years,” Dungy says. “Because in the days afterward, I didn’t ever say, ‘I wish I had spent a little more time; I wish I hadn’t been at the office for all those hours.’ ”

“Football or a job is never going to be that important to me; it will never be all-encompassing,” he says. “If I’d had regrets about the amount of time I had spent with Jamie, that would have made the situation so much worse, so much more painful. But Denny allowed us to bring our kids to training camp, to spend nights with us. He allowed us to bring our kids to practice. So I knew I had spent some great quality time with Jamie because of the way work was set up at the Vikings.”

In the toughest of times, Dungy also found strength in his faith. Among the most open and devout Christians in the NFL, the 52-year-old coach shares his belief that God had something good that would come from his son’s passing. What Dungy wasn’t prepared for was how that good would be spread.

Reaching Out

One by one, people from throughout the United States started logging on to the Colts Web site, finding Dungy’s e-mail address and writing him notes. Some were encouraging, but many were from teenagers like Jamie who were struggling with thoughts of ending their own lives.

As he received the messages, he started writing back. Many might have been surprised that the head coach of an NFL team, one of the most recognizable men in sports, would take time to pound out a response. They shouldn’t have been.

“Of all the things that have happened, including winning the Super Bowl, one of the things I’m most proud of is... let me show you this e-mail,” he says as he pulls his BlackBerry from its holster and flips through until he finds the note. “This is from a young man in college in Texas. He’s from the Boston area and his father had pushed him all his life to be an athlete and that wasn’t his desire. For a number of reasons he felt he couldn’t talk to his dad.... He read about Jamie and started writing me. The pressure he was feeling left him wondering about life. We wrote each other regularly for the last year, including during the season, and recently he wrote and said



Photo by Stephen Dunn/Getty Images

Quiet Strength Dungy with quarterback Peyton Manning.

thanks for being open to communicating and that he was ready to have that conversation with his dad.

“That note is more meaningful than all this,” Dungy says, waving at game balls littering the shelves of his Tampa home.

Opening Doors

Dungy began to connect with greater numbers of people—including those who never cheered the Colts—when he penned his autobiography, *Quiet Strength*. His faith in God evident on nearly every page, the book became the first sports book to debut at No. 2 on the *New York Times* Best-Seller List. The book’s success opened the door for Dungy to release a children’s book, *You Can Do It!*, in July 2008.

“If you had told me three years ago that I’d write a book—forget writing a children’s book, too—I would have told you that was impossible,” he says. “But the book [*Quiet Strength*] really opened doors for people to connect with the story and, in some cases, tell someone for the first time what was going on in their life. I would never have expected that response. But there’s a lot about these last few years I would never have expected.”

In each of the last three off-seasons, Dungy, who turns 53 in October, has contemplated retiring from coaching. Because of his approach to work, he has never suggested he was considering the choice because he was “burned out” or had lost motivation. Quite the opposite.

“Coach Noll used to say that motivation should come from a sense of doing your job well,” Dungy says. “And if you’ve done

a good job it doesn’t matter what the scoreboard says. You know when you’ve really done a good job. That used to be what our country was built on. My Christian beliefs play right into that. You’re not trying to please man, but use the gifts that God has given you to the best of your ability every day.”

Real Success Is Balanced

“I know that not everybody gets to coach an NFL team, and I want to do that as well as I can all the time. That’s my motivation. I want to help my players to be as good as they can be,” Dungy says. “My dad, who was a teacher, used to tell me that a

teacher’s goal should be for every one of their students to get an A. If that’s your goal every day—to make every student or player learn—then it doesn’t matter if you won last year or didn’t win. When next year’s team shows up, I try to help every player become as good as they can be. That thought gets me going each year. The only reason I wouldn’t want to do that is to spend more time with my family.”

When he finally does hang up his clipboard, Dungy already knows where the next phase of his life will be spent. He is a spokesman for All Pro Dad, an initiative intended to encourage fathers to be more involved in the lives of their children. And he regularly will be meeting with groups and companies to discuss tenets of leadership, including mentoring, team-building and the importance of keeping work in its proper perspective.

“Balance is a big part of real success,” Dungy says, looking across the room at two of his four surviving children—his daughter watching television, his son working on a computer. “Sportswriters today say it’s tough to be a head coach for five years at the same team. When you look at Chuck Noll and his 20-plus years at Pittsburgh, Tom Landry and his 20-plus years at Dallas, I think they were able to do that because there was a balance to their lives. Football wasn’t all-consuming.

“Their outlook on their job wasn’t that ‘if I don’t succeed at this job, my life is a failure.’ It’s important to have that perspective,” Dungy says, as Lauren, his wife, nods approvingly. “Balance provides the chance for longevity. You can be a champion at work and at home.” **S**