

February 2007

# Virtue In Action

## Super Bowl Super Coaches

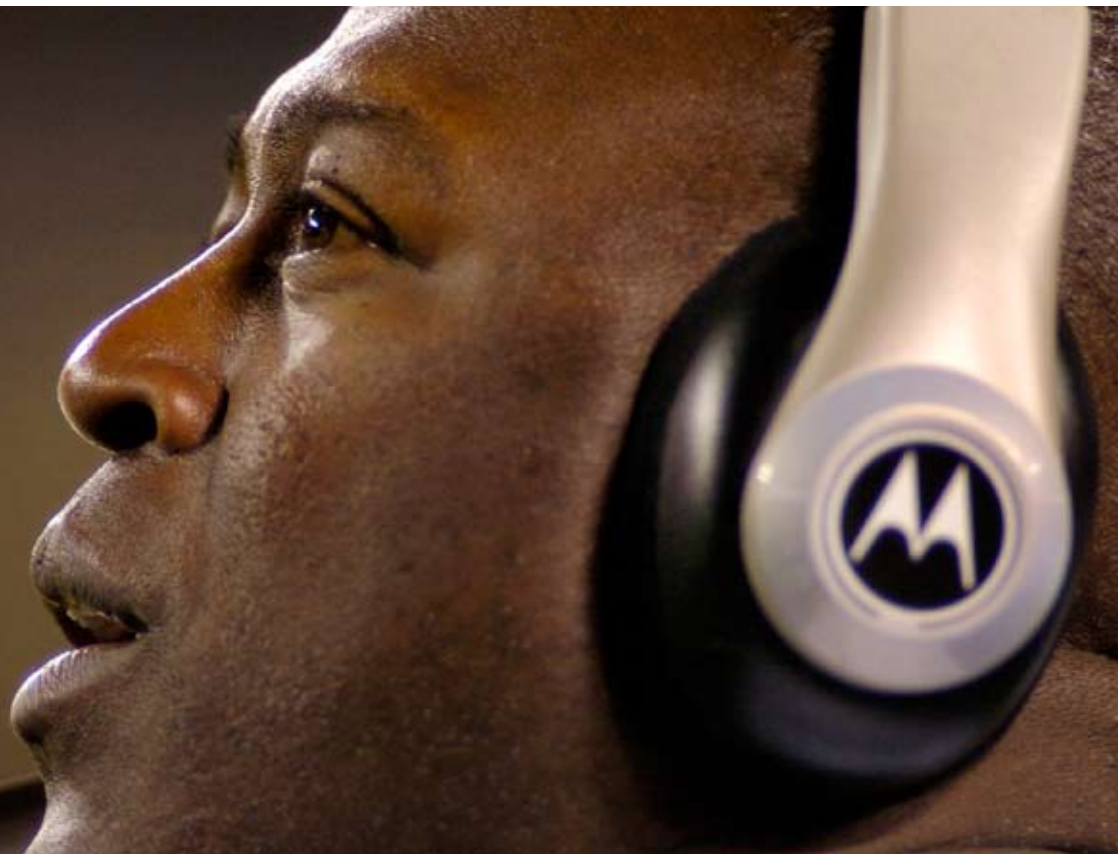
VIRTUE IN ACTION

FOSTERING CITIZENSHIP THROUGH CHARACTER EDUCATION



**TONY DUNGY**  
INDIANAPOLIS COLTS

**LOVIE SMITH**  
CHICAGO BEARS



## VIRTUE IN ACTION

**T**he Super Bowl. The final arena of football champions where, for the past five months players have run, thrown, passed, tackled, blocked and battled back from injuries to get one step away from the gleaming Vince Lombardi trophy, **coveted** Super Bowl rings and official bragging rights.

This year, the Chicago Bears, coached by Lovie Smith, faced off against the Indianapolis Colts, coached by Tony Dungy. The Colts ultimately walked away with the glory with 29 points to the Bears' 17. But the mere presence of the coaches and inspirational players made Super Bowl XLI a winning event for both teams, sports fans and society at large.

February 4, 2007 marked history when not one but two men became the first African American coaches to lead their teams into the Super Bowl. Making the event more

memorable was that it happened in February, Black History month. It is also **significant** that it marked a moment when two unique, compassionate leaders of deep religious **faith** persevered in the NFL.

The focus of the game may have been on the rain-drenched players on the field, but Smith and Dungy have also inspired us through their deep moral conviction and their **perseverance** in refusing to let the obstacles in their lives deter them from achieving success. Their achievements demonstrate progress in working toward the dream once



Indianapolis Colts coach Tony Dungy, right, and Chicago coach Lovie Smith pose with the Vince Lombardi Super Bowl trophy during their press conference at the Miami Beach Convention Center in Miami Beach, Fla., Friday, Feb. 2, 2007. The Indianapolis Colts will play the Chicago Bears in Super Bowl XLI on Feb. 4. (AP Photo/Jeff Roberson)

described by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in 1963 on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial:

“I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.”

### Two Coaches, One Historic Moment

To put Dungy and Smith’s achievement in perspective, it is important to remember that it was only as recently as 1989 that the then-L.A. Raiders hired the NFL’s first African American coach.

The media focused **intensely** on the color of Dungy and Smith’s skin as the Superbowl approached. The two were making history, editorials and analyses announced, some cheering the moment as a sign of **societal** improvement while others sniffed at it as “too little/too late” in a league where approximately 70 percent of the players are African American yet 7 of 32 head coaches in the NFL are African American..

But how did the two coaches – also great friends – react to their place in history? Perhaps more importantly, how did they get there?

### Dungy: A man of faith and determination

Dungy, a former professional football player who hails from Michigan, expressed his pride at representing African American coaches, but immediately after his win, he stressed even greater pride in his religious faith.

“I’m proud to be the first African-American coach to win this,” Dungy said to the media during the trophy ceremony. “But again, more than anything, Lovie Smith and I are not only African-American but also Christian coaches, showing you can do it the Lord’s way. We’re more proud of that.”

Dungy, since his days as an NFL player for teams including the Pittsburgh Steelers and San Francisco 49ers, has always held fast to his faith in placing his trust in God. “Dungy, a **devout** Christian, believes no matter what happens that all things work together for good for those who love the Lord,” wrote ESPN’s Michael Smith in an article: “Tony Dungy: Amazing Grace.

“We’re talking about a man who views it as a blessing that Pittsburgh moved him from quarterback to defensive back in the mid-1970s, because it was only then that he got to room with Donnie Shell, with whom Dungy would study the Bible as much as they did the Steelers’ playbook.”

Dungy applied that same faith when he was, in the 1980s, cut from the New York Giants and decided to go into coaching. He also relied on it when he went from the career high of being the youngest assistant coach, at 25, of the Pittsburgh Steelers’ to the **subsequent** low, in 2001 of being fired as head coach from the Tampa Bay Buccaneers after

six years and several trips to the playoffs.

Still, Dungy maintained his grace.

The next year, he moved on to the Indianapolis Colts where he made a name for himself as a kind, compassionate coach who was more a father than a hard-driving boss. Coaches need to be **leaders** in inspiring players to perform their best both individually and as a team. Many coaches do this through threats and intimidation. Dungy, driven by his religious beliefs has chosen a different model of leadership, refusing to curse or raise his voice to his players. This approach to leadership is based on a strong sense of **respect for others**, acknowledging that every person has value and dignity. Another unique aspect of Dungy’s leadership is his **humility** in understating his own achievements while focusing on the accomplishments of his team.

Though his professional success with the Colts continues to this day, and is now enhanced by a historic Superbowl win, Dungy is not **immune** to loss.

Less than two years ago, Dungy’s oldest son, James, an 18-year-old college student, hanged himself in his own apartment. Though Dungy was, and is, deeply troubled by the loss of his child, he **persevered** and returned to his coaching job at the Indianapolis Colts after one week. He led his family in accepting James’ death, donating his organs so that others might live, and speaking to groups to help keep a tragedy like this from striking other families.

When asked how he could maintain clarity and calm during this troubling time, Dungy reply to ESPN’s Smith shows us the essence of religious faith in placing our trust in God: “I’ve said all along that God is in control. I have to believe that he’s in control here, too.”

### Lovie Smith: Family Support, Hard Work and Faith

Chicago has long since fallen in love with Lovie Smith, a gentle, soft-spoken coach who is now mentioned in the same breath as the legendary, but fire-breathing Coach Mike Ditka of the ’85 season. But Smith, born in the small, impoverished area of Big Sandy, Texas, came a long way in order to become a successful, Superbowl-bound coach. He was born to a hardworking mother and alcoholic father, who though he loved his son, was unable to contribute to the family’s meager income.

Though his father later stopped drinking, alcohol took a toll on his health. It was Lovie who had to step up and be the man of the house, while his mother – a longtime diabetic – worked as a hospital cook and in a furniture shop to support his four other siblings. Though his mother, Mae, could not provide her son with fancy clothes or schooling, she instilled in him and his four other siblings, a sense that he could do and be anything he wanted.

Mae and her husband, Thurman, placed importance on religion and education, telling the whole family they could achieve anything they wanted through hard work and “by treating people the right way, regardless of skin color -- not always an easy thing in East Texas in the ‘50s and ‘60s,” Star-Telegram Rick Herrin wrote of Smith’s upbringing.

“I told him he was going to be a coach some day,” Mae Smith told Herrin. “I kept telling him it was my dream for him to be the head coach of the Dallas Cowboys.”

In an interview with Yahoo! News, Smith reflected on the influence of his mother on his life. “Like all sons, I loved my mother dearly. At a young age, she let me know that I could do whatever I wanted to do, not to use being poor or where I came from as an excuse for what happens to me in life. She taught me to not feel sorry for myself and she preached to me about hard work. She told me to not set my dreams too low, but shoot for the sky and I’ve had a chance to see her persevere. I’ve had a chance to see her fight diabetes that has taken her sight, but she doesn’t complain. Every day her glass is half full.”

Smith took his mother’s words to heart and began his career as a coach of high school teams after his own playing days ended at the University of Tulsa. In the mid-80s, he broke into the NFL with an assistant coaching job offered to him, ironically enough, by Tony Dungy who then headed the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. The men shared a similar religious faith and philosophy about treating players with respect. Like Dungy, Smith is known for never cursing at his players.

“I had my philosophy on life and football before I met Tony, but it was good to see someone like him have a similar philosophy on life and football,” Smith told CBS News about his time with Dungy. Discussing his religious faith with Jon Robinson of IGN.com, Smith commented: “My relationship, first, is with Jesus Christ and he is the center of my life. I try to live a Christian life. I would like for guys to know my faith based on what they see on a day-to-day basis. I had a chance to see that on a daily basis with Tony Dungy. I had a chance to see Tony through a lot of storms and he has been the same guy all the way.”

Smith’s life is inspiring others in his hometown, and in America at large. “Everyone talks about him, looks up to him, wants to be like him,” a 17-year-old Big Sandy resident, Vanity Darty, told the Associated Press from the porch of a small home about 100 yards from where Smith grew up. “If he can do it, I can, too.”

For Dungy and Smith, their Christian faith has been a strong and positive force in their lives. It is important to note that many other successful people have found inspiration, guidance and the strength from other religions.

### Beyond Race

Tony Dungy and Lovie Smith are two men who embody Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s dream that one day, men will be judged by the content of their character rather than the color of their skin. Though Smith, like Dungy, said he is proud to be a high-profile African American coach, he is more proud of his legacy of respect for others, and being true to his moral convictions.

Speaking with Yahoo! News Smith envisions a day when the novelty of being a black head coach wears off. “That day is coming,” Smith said. “But of course we’re talking about it now, so it’s not here now. In years to come it won’t be talked about, and I’ll look forward to that day.”

For as Dungy told the Christian Science Monitor, nothing but character and achievement should matter. “Doing it with excellence, whether you are a minority, majority, whatever, anybody who gets the opportunity can do it well and do it with excellence.”

Coaches Dungy and Smith have faced significant setbacks and adversity throughout their lives, including poverty, professional failures, and within their families, suicide and alcoholism. All of us have faced, and will continue to face obstacles and challenges. Dungy and Smith show us how through determination, hard work, perseverance, respect for others and religious faith, we can overcome the challenges of life and succeed in achieving our goals.

### VOCABULARY

**Coveted:** That which is wished for longingly  
**Faith** – confidence or trust in a person, thing or God. Religious faith is placing ones trust and confidence in a religions teachings and God  
**Humility:** the quality or condition of being humble; modest opinion or estimate of one’s own importance, rank, etc.

**Spirituality:** the quality or fact of being spiritual, of or pertaining to sacred things or matters; religious; devotional; sacred

**Intimidation:** to make timid; fill with fear

**Devout:** devoted to divine worship or service

**Leadership:** to influence or inspire others toward an action or belief

**Subsequent:** occurring or coming later or after

**Immune:** exempt or protected

**Meager:** deficient in quantity or quality; lacking fullness or richness; scanty; inadequate

**Perseverance:** Trying hard and continuously in spite of obstacles and difficulties

**Instilled:** to infuse slowly or gradually into the mind or feelings

**Philosophy:** the rational investigation of the truths and principles of being, knowledge, or conduct.

**Respect for Others:** showing full appreciation of the worth and dignity of others; living by “the golden rule”: do unto others as you would want done unto you

**Adversity:** condition marked by misfortune, calamity, or distress:

**Convictions:** A fixed or strong belief

**Non-issue:** the state of something that has outlived its relevance

## Virtue In Action

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# Virtue In Action

## Super Bowl Super Coaches

### VIRTUE IN ACTION

### FOSTERING CITIZENSHIP THROUGH CHARACTER EDUCATION

#### Virtues Highlighted

Perseverance  
Respect for Others  
Hard work ethic  
Family Support  
Setting high goals  
Religious Faith

#### Lesson Goals

- Develop understanding of the virtues of perseverance, hard work, respect for others and religious faith
- Provide students with examples of strong leadership based on respect for others
- Demonstrate how the above virtues can help students overcome adversity and challenges
- Show the progress our country has made toward racial equality
- Encourage students to be more determined and resolute in their own goals
- Cultivate understanding of the importance of being judged on character and abilities rather than exterior characteristics such as race
- Help students to appreciate the value of family support and the family establishing high standards and expectations

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AP photos

#### Discussion Question Options

1. For each coach, list the virtues they, and members of their families, have lived out in their lives.
2. Without the encouragement of Smith's mother, do you think he would have achieved success?
3. What was the personal tragedy that Dungy suffered recently? How did he react to it? What did his response demonstrate about his character?
4. How has religion impacted the lives and philosophies of coaches Dungy and Smith?
5. What family struggle did Lovie Smith face as a child in Big Sandy, Texas? What lesson did his parents teach him that lasted to this day?
6. Name at least two of the career setbacks Tony Dungy experienced in his early coaching career? How do you think those setbacks might have strengthened him?
7. What is unique about Dungy and Smith's method of leading their

respective teams? Does this stand out to you? Why or why not?

8. What are Dungy and Smith's reactions to their status as the first black coaches to go to the Super Bowl? Do you feel that they should place more emphasis on their status as African Americans, or is it positive that they see themselves as men of moral conviction and religious beliefs first? Explain your reasoning.
9. Do you know of anyone personally or in public life who has had to overcome great challenges in life? How did they do it? What virtues did they tap into in order to succeed?

### Journal Writing Options

1. Write about which coach you most identify with and why.
2. Write about an obstacle you face in your daily life, how it affects you now, and map out a plan to overcome that obstacle.
3. Have you ever been judged on appearance, rather than ability? How did that make you feel? Did you overcome it? Explain the outcome of that situation and what it taught you.

### Extended Learning Projects

1. Read Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, or play video of the historic speech, and ask students how the themes in the speech apply to Dungy and Smith's Superbowl achievement. Foster discussion on what else can be done to promote the goals of King's speech.
2. Break the class into two teams. Have one team research Colts' player and Chicago native Kelvin Hayden and have the other team research Bears' player and former Arena Football player, Rashied Davis. Have them present to the class how each player embodies the virtues of perseverance and any others in overcoming adversity.
3. Have each student write a letter to someone who has inspired them to go beyond the average and achieve. Ask them to send a letter to that special person.
4. Have students choose another athlete who has broken racial barriers: Venus and Serena Williams, Larry Byrd, Tiger Woods, Arthur Ashe, Wilma Rudolph, Yao Ming, for example, and ask them to explain the individual's impact on sports and how he/she helped encourage diversity.

### Internet Resources

Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech (text and audio-video) <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkhaveadream.htm>

"Tony Dungy's best protégé Lovie Smith," Steven Wine, AP Sports  
[http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20070205/ap\\_on\\_sp\\_fo\\_ne/fbn\\_super\\_bowl\\_coaches](http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20070205/ap_on_sp_fo_ne/fbn_super_bowl_coaches)

"Small-town roots drove Lovie to the Top," Alex Brandon, AP  
<http://www.chron.com/disp/story.mpl/sports/4505177.html>

"Tony Dungy: Amazing Grace," ESPN, Michael Smith  
<http://sports.espn.go.com/nfl/feature/featureVideo?page=amazinggrace>

"Lovie's Life Lessons: In Texas, young Lovie grew up fast"  
<http://www.nj.com/sports/ledger/index.ssf?/base/sports-1/1170222147213820.xml&coll=1>

Tony Dungy: Profile, NFL.com  
<http://www.nfl.com/teams/coaching/IND>

Lovie Smith: Profile, NFL.com  
<http://www.nfl.com/teams/coaching/CHI>

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