

Former NFL star: Coaches have vast influence on players

Onetime Linebacker Joe Ehrmann now uses life to motivate

BY LAYLA FARMER
THE CHRONICLE

More than 100 local coaches heard from former Baltimore Colts Lineman Joe Ehrmann last week during a two-day seminar hosted by Athletes for Others, a local nonprofit.

Ehrmann shared advice last Thursday afternoon at the Lawrence Joel Veterans Memorial Coliseum, providing tips to enhance the coaches' ability to guide young lives on and off the field.

"We've got a special opportunity, not only for today, but for the future," commented School Board Member Buddy Collins before introducing the former NFL standout to the group. "We ... have but one moment in time to educate our youth."

An ordained minister and football coach, Ehrmann's work outside the stadium threatens to overshadow his football career, and that's all right with him. At 59, Ehrmann has spent the better part of the past three decades working to bring about social change.

A 1973 first round draft pick, Ehrmann enjoyed a successful career in the NFL that spanned more than a decade.

But in the midst of his great success, Ehrmann faced an even greater tragedy, as he watched his younger brother lose his battle with cancer at age 18. The experience taught Ehrmann some tough lessons and shaped the course of the young athlete's life.

"At that moment, you get a clear understanding of what's really important," he related. "...here's what I know to be true for me and for every single one of you... all of life is about relationships; it's about your capacity to love and to be loved."

Since that time, Ehrmann has worked tirelessly to strengthen the things in life he deems important - relationships, justice and love. His rather unique journey was chronicled by Pulitzer Prize winner Jeffrey Marx in the book, "Season of Life: A Football Star, a Boy, a Journey to Manhood."

Though he learned the hard way that money and success aren't everything, Ehrmann says much of the wisdom he imparts to others in his motivational speeches stems from his experiences on the football field.

Football teams are like



Collins

small communities where each individual strives to achieve goals that benefit all, Ehrmann said. The same principles can be applied in many areas of life, he surmised.

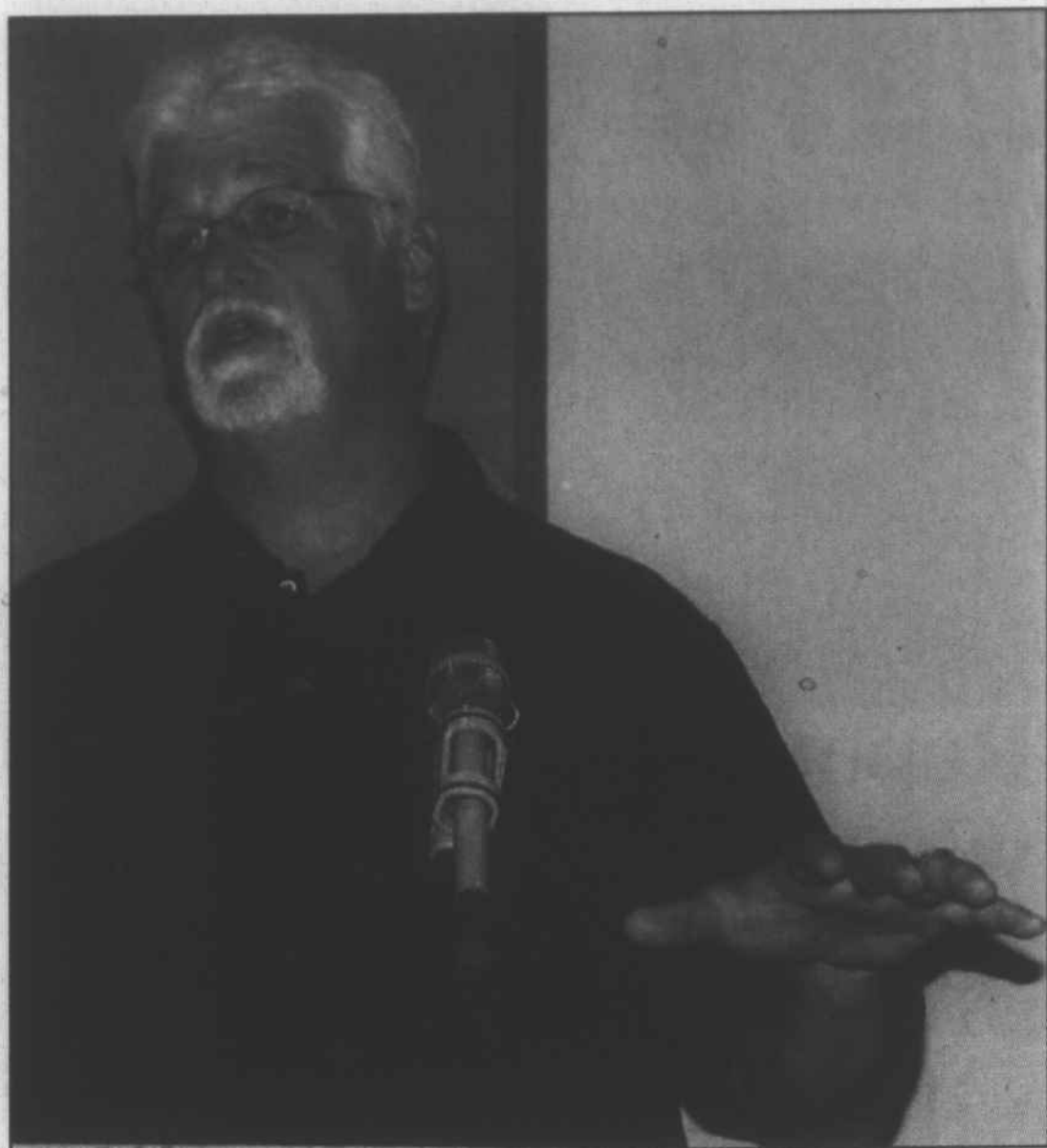
The role of the coach is vital to many young lives, Ehrmann told the group, and

the examples - good or bad - that each coach sets will undoubtedly be emulated.

"From the bottom of my heart, I don't think there's a more important group of people in this community ... than coaches," Ehrmann told the audience. "There is no other institution or religion that brings more people together than sports."

Ehrmann advocated for coaches to strive to be encouraging of the athletes that look to them for guidance, whether they are the star players or those who rarely make it on the field. He railed against coaching methods that focus on criticism and belittling athletes.

"Every coach ought to understand what their purpose is," he asserted. "I coach to help boys become men of integrity and purpose."

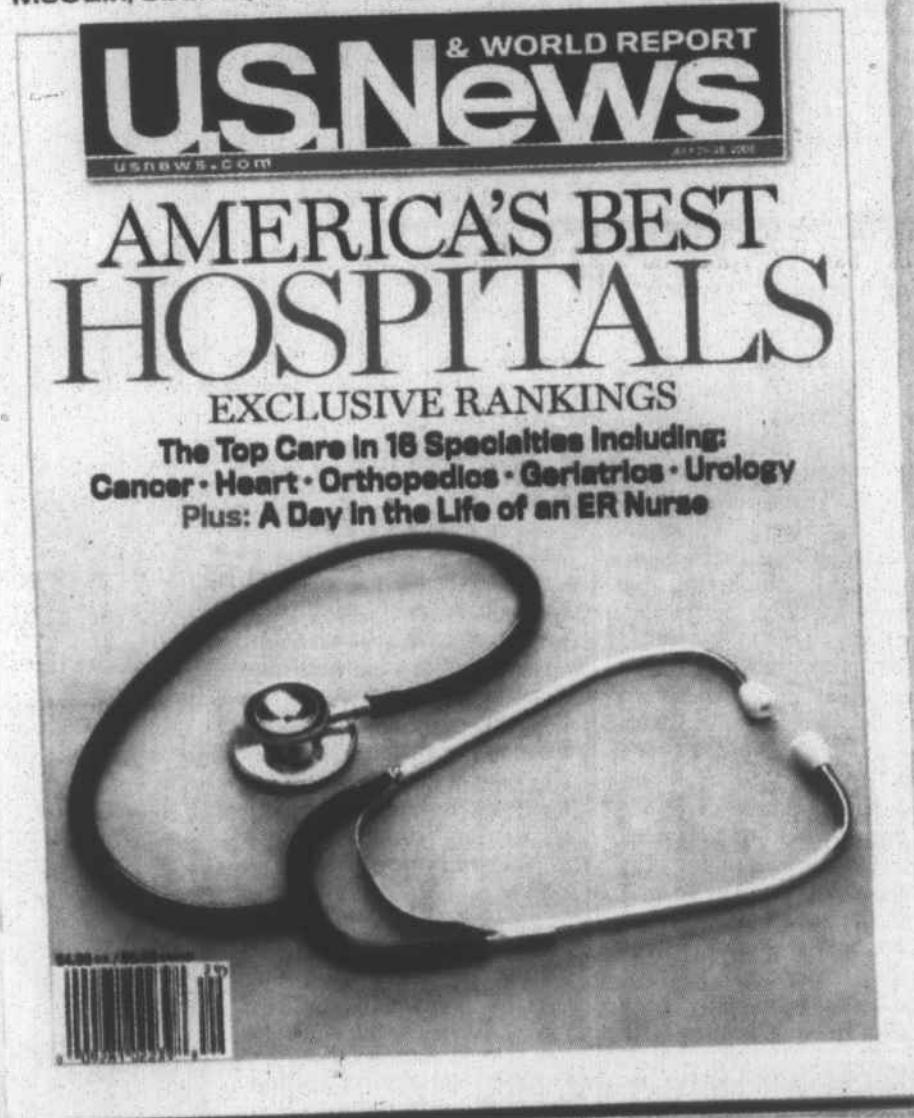


Joe Ehrmann talks to local coaches.

Photo by Layla Farmer

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Van Dyke

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as a dance professional.

In addition to her work at the university, she directs and choreographs for her own company, the Jan Van Dyke Dance Group, and works with the Dance Project at City Arts, which offers more than 25 classes each week to children and adults in downtown Greensboro.

She co-founded the North Carolina Dance Festival in 1991 and has served as its coordinator ever since. The festival, an annual showcase of North Carolina-based dancers and choreographers, will include performances in six communities around the state. Her book, "Modern Dance in a Postmodern World," was published in 1992.

A recipient of a Choreographer's Fellowship from the state of North Carolina and a Fulbright Scholar, Van Dyke spent three months teaching dance at Portugal's Universidade Tecnica de Lisboa in 1993, and she spent six weeks at the Western Australia Academy for the Performing Arts in 2000. In 2001, she received the Annual Award for Contributions to the Field from the NC Dance Alliance.

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