

Football Life

by Tony Arcovitch, Essex Chargers 7/8 Head Coach

Football has been part of my life since my earliest memories. It has taken many twists and turns to end back up in Vermont. I would watch games on TV with my brother and father. My brother graduated from South Burlington High School in 1974. I was 7 years old and I loved going to watch his games. One Sunday a NFL game was on, and I came into the room I asked, "Who is playing?". My dad said, "The Dolphins and the Jets." I said, "I want the Dolphins to win!" The Dolphins won the game and I have been a fan of the Dolphins to this day. I started playing in the 4th grade in the South Burlington program. Back then 4th and 5th grade was flag. My brother and father both coached me during my 4th and 5th grade years. We practiced at Chamberlin Elementary School. I can remember my dad leaning into the huddle and calling plays.

After my 5th grade year I could not wait to play tackle football. I thought, how great is this going to be? I get to play for the Dolphins! The Dolphins are my favorite NFL team! That is when my life took a tragic twist. My father passed away during the summer going into my 6th grade year. I became an angry and troubled kid. I could have headed into a really BAD direction...and actually I wanted to do that. My life was turned upside down and I did not care anymore. That is when I started playing for Coach Rene. I was a 6th grader on the 6th – 8th grade team. Skill wise, I did not have much to offer because I was at the younger end of the team. I was angry and I would try to pick fights with teammates and was really not a good kid. I hated life and did not care.

That is when Coach Rene took me under his wing. He worked with me and gave me a love for the game again that I had lost. We ended up winning the Championship that year. My mom and I ended up moving to Virginia because that is where she was from. We stayed at a hotel the night of the banquet because we were leaving the next day. It was really emotional for me. I remember during the banquet, Rene saying, "I hate to see this guy not playing for the Rebels." That night there was a knock on our hotel door, it was Coach Rene with a sign the team had signed and he told me, "He cared about me and wished me the best!". The sign was a football field with the Dolphin logo in the middle. I hung that sign in my room throughout high school and then some. Coach Rene would steady send me letters about how the team was doing over the years. I thought, "He took the

time to send this to me... I really did not even contribute to the team that much." I have never had a coach make such an impact on my life as Coach Rene did in that one season!

That is when I made personal commitment to myself. I thought, "Coach Rene was there when I needed someone, I will be there when someone needs me!" Not many people can make that kind of life commitment. Not many kids that are troubled can do this when they are 11 years old. I started coaching football when I was 19 years old in 1987. I started coaching kids that were 14 years old. I was not much older than them. I am still friends with them and see them every now and then even though they are in Virginia.

I moved back to Vermont in 1994 and started coaching with my brother on the 5th and 6th grade team in Essex. I remember seeing Coach Rene at the jamboree. It was at St. Albans that year. I gave him a hug and said, "Thank you for everything you have done for me!" I took over the head 7th and 8th grade team in Essex in 1995 and I am still currently the head coach. I owe Coach Rene in giving me my love back to football and passing it on. Coach Rene has passed on the love of the game to so many players. I am entering my 30th year of coaching. I have coached well over 1200 players in football, wrestling, baseball, and softball combined. I know many that I have coached that have gone on to coach as well. I have no idea of the amount of players that have been affected by Coach Rene and having such PRIDE in their teams that I have passed on. I thank Coach Rene for everything he has done for me. I am a better man, friend, and coach because of him. My life goal was to at least turn around one troubled kid and hopefully they pay it forward. I have no idea of how many players or parents over the years that have come up and told me, "Thank you, you have really changed me." This letter may seem long, but I actually kept it brief and just hit a few points. I could go on and on.

I owe everything to Coach Rene and so do many others that he does not even know!!!!