

# Back to the Basics

*by Charles R. Swindoll*

The late football strategist Vince Lombardi was a fanatic about fundamentals. Those who played under his leadership often spoke of his intensity, his drive, his endless enthusiasm for the guts of the game. Time and again he would come back to the basic techniques of blocking and tackling. On one occasion his team, the Green Bay Packers, lost to an inferior squad. It was bad enough to lose . . . but to lose to *that* team was absolutely inexcusable. Coach Lombardi called a practice the very next morning. The men sat silently, looking more like whipped puppies than a team of champions. They had no idea what to expect from the man they feared the most.

Gritting his teeth and staring holes through one athlete after another, Lombardi began:

"Okay, we go back to the basics this morning. . . ."

Holding a football high enough for all to see, he continued to yell:

"Gentlemen, this is a football!"

How basic can you get? He's got guys sitting there who have been playing on gridirons for 15 to 20 years . . . who know offensive and defensive plays better than they know their kids' names . . . and he introduces them to a football! That's like saying, "Maestro, this is a baton." Or, "Librarian, this is a book." Or, "Marine, this is a rifle." Or, "Mother, this is a skillet." Talk about the obvious!

Why in the world would a seasoned coach talk to professional athletes like that?

Apparently, it worked, for coaches don't lead their teams to three consecutive world championships all the time. But—*how*? Lombardi operated on a simple philosophy. He believed that excellence could be best achieved by perfecting the basics of the sport. Razzle-dazzle, crowd-pleasing, risk-taking plays would fill a stadium (for a while) and even win some games (occasionally), but in the final analysis, the consistent winners would be the teams that played smart, heads-up, hard-nosed football. His strategy? Know your position. Learn how to do it right. Then do it with all your might! That simple plan put Green Bay, Wisconsin, on the map. Before Lombardi's advent, it was a frozen whistle-stop between Oshkosh and Iceland.