



Vince Lombardi, Inspirational Italian-American

By

Sophia Marie Mazza

"I don't have any black players, I don't have any white players, I only have green players." This statement reflected Vince Lombardi's belief that success came from unity rather than race or background. He was ahead of his time in racial tolerance. He used that same philosophy to guide his leadership when he took over the struggling Green Bay Packers, a franchise many believed was destined to disappear.

Vince Lombardi was a first-generation Italian American born in Brooklyn in 1913. He was raised in a strict Roman Catholic Italian community, where he learned the values of discipline and hard work while experiencing ethnic prejudice that shaped his views. His faith and background influenced his strong commitment to inclusion.

Lombardi began coaching as a high school teacher and assistant at St. Cecilia High School in New Jersey and then continued at Fordham University and West Point under Army coach Red Blaik. He joined the National Football League as an assistant with the New York Giants before becoming head coach of the Green Bay Packers in 1959. The Packers were struggling, they won one game the year before. Lombardi worked them harder than they have worked ever before saying, "Winning isn't everything, it's the only thing".

By the start of Vince Lombardi's tenure with the Packers, the NFL was seriously considering getting rid of the Green Bay Packers entirely. Lombardi told his family he was going to move them to Green Bay, Wisconsin, and his family had no idea where that was. The next day, he brought a map of the U.S. and showed them where Wisconsin was, his family couldn't find Green Bay.. He told them that by the time he was done with this franchise, it would be on the map. He proceeded to win five championships within a seven-year span, including the first two Super Bowls ever played, with the same organization the NFL was trying to diminish.

Lombardi's commitment to unity and equality extended beyond the field. In the early 1960s, he told Green Bay restaurant and bar owners who refused to serve his Black players that their establishments would be off limits to all his players. This was a significant threat, since the Packers brought in large crowds. By taking this stand, Lombardi showed that respect and inclusion applied on and off the field. He insisted his team operate as a unified group, treating every player equally, and challenged societal norms to do so. It was this unity that helped his team thrive.



If Lombardi were able to see the NFL today, he would take pride in knowing that the game he helped shape continues to unite people from all walks of life each Sunday, disregarding differences of background and belief.

Even today, the Super Bowl trophy carries his name, the Lombardi Trophy, ensuring his legacy will never be forgotten. His life demonstrates the contributions of hardworking Italian Americans to American society, showing how one's perseverance can leave a lasting impact on generations.

#### References:

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