

THE REST OF THE J. W. INGRAM STORY

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It must be a beautiful thing to take a thin pine board, a bit of string and some glue and to make of it a violin that would solve out the great Ave Maria.

And it must be a wonderful thing to take a bit of gold and a few springs and fashion it into a timepiece that would keep pace with the magnificent sun.

It must be a wonderful thing to take a bit of canvass, some paint and a brush and to make of it a marvelous painting such as the Mona Lisa.

***It is* a wonderful thing to take a boy, to discipline him and to make of him a man. That's what great men like Coach James Wyman Ingram did all of their professional lives.**

Ingram is now a chipper age 92 and is sharp as ever. He is affectionately known as "*Coach*," by the thousands who either played for him or went to school under him for some four decades at Lexington High School in Lexington, S.C.

Despite his many exploits on the football fields, basketball courts, track ovals or baseball diamonds at Lexington High School, Ingram might be best known and appreciated for what he did off the playing field.

His football teams won over 70% of their games over the years. His offenses averaged over 300 yards a game and his defenses yielded on average less than 100 yards per outing.

His honors were so numerous that it took me four full pages to adequately chronicle his athletic exploits in the Lexington Dispatch News back when I was Sports Editor of that publication in the 1970's and 1980's.

Despite his Hall of Fame Awards and State Championships, Ingram's greatest accomplishments might be best told in a simple story about how he touched just one of his thousands of students and player's lives.

The story starts sadly enough with a broken home. A young boy by the name of Tillman, who grew up in the Edmund community of Lexington County, was dislodged from his seven brothers and sisters.

There was no welfare back in those days, only the love and affection that one would have for another in need.

Coach Ingram learned of the fifth grader's fate and took him in. He had no room in his own home on North Lake Drive across from the old school, but he managed to quietly put Tillman in the old Lexington gym two blocks from his home, where he slept on the floor and showered before school each day. Coach fed and clothed Tillman.

But the authorities soon found out about Tillman, and he was asked to move out of the gym. Coach Ingram found him a room over a doctor's office near his home and paid his rent and made sure he had food, clothing and books for school. He continued to help him and in turn, Tillman kept the old gym clean and did other chores around the school.

Tillman became one of the first in his family to graduate from high school where he was a standout athlete in three sports, but that's not the story here.

He entered the military where he also played three sports while serving his country, but that's not the story here either.

When he finished his service to his country, Tillman returned to the University of South Carolina where he earned a degree, but that's not the story here.

After graduating from USC, he went on to Law School where he earned a Law Degree, but that's not the story here either.

After graduating from the USC School of Law, he went to work for the FBI where he had a long and illustrious career with the bureau, but that's not the story here either.

After a successful career with the FBI, Tillman formed his own private investigation agency in Houston, Texas and among his clients were the Houston Rockets and the Houston Astros, but that's not the story here either.

Now in his eighties, Tillman recently bought an oil company. His success story continues to grow. However, I wonder which side of the law that a homeless fifth grade child would have ended up on were it not for the love of Coach J. W. Ingram.

A case could easily be made for his prowess in the world of athletics, but for my money, the things Coach J. W. Ingram did to change people's lives go far beyond the Friday night lights that illuminate the gridiron. The light that shines forth in the hearts and minds of the people he touched will never go out.

That's the story here.