



Now, no one will forget the Titans

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OPINION

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SEAFORD -- Of course, you do. How could you forget? How could anybody not remember the Titans?

And even though Hollywood made their story a little more dramatic than it really was, "Remember the Titans" is still one of the best sports movies ever made.

And that's because, like all good sports movies, it's not really about sports -- it's about people.



Team member Rufus Littlejohn speaks in Seaford at a Western Sussex Boys and Girls Club event.
The News Journal/SCOTT NATHAN

It does have some pretty good football footage, although Julius Campbell has a couple of complaints about it.

"We were better than they showed in the movie," he said. "And we hit a lot harder."

Campbell was a star defensive end on the T.C. Williams High football team that won the Virginia state championship in 1971. And his friendship with teammate Gerry Bertier is a focal point of the hit 2000 movie, which is about, well, you probably already know what it's about because you've seen it about a dozen times and we're not going to waste your time going over the plot.

All that matters is that seven years after the release of the film and 36 years after their championship season, people still remember the Titans. And that's why several of them -- including coaches Herman Boone and Bill Yoast -- were at the Western Sussex Boys and Girls Club on Saturday night.

The Titans were in Delaware as featured guests at the M.E.R.I.T "Night of Celebration," banquet, which honored the achievements of local kids.

"We started a foundation after the movie became successful, and we do things like this on a regular basis," said Yoast, 82, who has lived in Bethany Beach since 1994. "It's a chance for us to get together and do something positive for the community, so it's been a terrific thing for us."

And something they never expected. Boone (played by Denzel Washington) and Yoast (by Will Patton) were lifers in the coaching game and hugely successful over their careers. And even though that Titans team was special, well, so were a lot of them.

But people remember only one.

"It's amazing how this movie has struck a chord with all kinds of people, of all ages,"

said Boone, now 71, retired and living outside of Washington. "We didn't think we were doing anything special at the time, other than trying to win football games and doing a pretty good job of that. We certainly never expected all of this."

Kanen Horton, a 13-year-old student at Seaford Middle School, has seen the movie several times and he was there on Saturday night to see and hear the real Titans.

"It's like a history lesson, because it shows us what it was like back then," Horton said. "Nowadays, we're used to having all kinds of people around us, but it was different back then and black kids and white kids didn't play together or hang out. But they found a way to come together, and it paid off when they won [the state championship]."

That, by the way, is one of the areas where the filmmakers took some liberties. In the movie, T.C. Williams scores the winning TD on the final play of the game, which isn't exactly true -- the Titans won 27-0 to finish the season 13-0.

And the Titans didn't break much of a sweat in the other 12 games, either. They posted nine shutouts and outscored their opponents by an average of 33-4 per game.

Titans indeed ...

"We dominated teams," said Rufus Littlejohn, a linebacker and co-captain. "And that's why we really weren't aware of the tensions that some adults were feeling at the time -- we were too busy playing football."

All of the Titans were surprised back in 2000 when they heard that a movie was going to be made of their exploits, and they were stunned when it became a huge hit and a movie that people will be watching 100 years from now.

"That movie is my legacy," said Campbell, now a 54-year-old grandfather. "Through that movie, the 1971 Titans will live forever. And that's a powerful thing."

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