

The Value of Inclusiveness in Yale Football

By James L. Thompson

In reviewing the honor roll of donors for the Yale Football Association (July 1, 2012 - June 30, 2013) it became obvious to me that the Class of 1963 had 43 donor members, more than twice that of any other class in the Yale program. Why was our class so involved and what, if any, lessons have we learned that might be useful in encouraging greater support for the Yale Football Program from the alumni and possibly the active players.

For us today, the Yale Football Team includes every member of the varsity, the junior varsity and the freshman teams as well as classmates who tried out and did not continue with the program. Since football is a highly competitive sport and playing first string on the varsity is everyone's goal, there is some level of disappointment for those who do not make the starting teams on offense or defense or special teams. Often, members of the third and fourth strings and classmates who have dropped out feel that they do not matter to the program and, hence, they did not owe the program any loyalty during the season or after graduation. We have changed that attitude partly by accident and partly by plan.

After an undefeated freshman year in 1959, we graduated to what would become the undefeated 1960 varsity team as sophomores. Several members of our class were able to get playing time on the second string, and the rest of us played on the third or fourth string and became known as the "You Guys." That name emerged from the lack of name recognition that some of the coaches had for the group of players left over after the first and second string players were assigned to various practice fields... the rest of "you guys" go over there. The You Guys saw playing time on the junior varsity ("JV") coached by Stu Clancy, and during the course of the regular season we saw playing time with the varsity when the starting team had subdued our opponent after the first half of most football games. During our junior and senior years, many of the You Guys worked their way up to the starting team for Yale on offense or on defense or on both. Others did not. Some members of the You Guys felt neglected or forgotten by the varsity coaches and did not get much encouragement although, in fact, they made a significant contribution to the success of the varsity by pushing the starters in practice and honing their football skills. Ironically, this feeling of neglect or non-involvement was due to change for many several years after graduating from Yale.

As time passed, the 1960 undefeated Yale team was recognized at team reunions and at class reunions. No Yale team has been undefeated since then--over 50years. Football players in our class began to write about that experience, such as Ian Robertson or Hank Hallas (with substantial books and essays), team photographs were obtained and circulated and players on Yale's third and fourth strings were included and began to appreciate what for some had been a bittersweet experience -- "Whoever celebrates a third-string football player?" We did, in part, because we were included with the 1960 team which generously invited us to their celebrations and, in part, because we became more introspective and share our experiences. We were able to poke fun at ourselves and we laughed and discussed our stories (including our frustrations, disappointments and our surprises) with one another. We also learned that our football experience helped to lead many of our classmates to become business and professional successes of real stature . . . even as You Guys. Jerry Kenney, a top executive with Merrill Lynch and then with Black Rock Financial, and his brothers stepped up to build the Kenney Center at the Yale Bowl. He was followed by Erik Jensen, a successful highway construction

contractor in Iowa who, together with his brothers, built the Jensen Plaza in front of the Yale Bowl. Although he was not a You Guy, Hank Higdon, our team captain, helped to create the Ivy Football Association honoring football players from the Ivy League who have distinguished themselves in their profession after college even though they may have been You Guys when they played. Both Jerry Kenney and Hank Higdon have received that award and deserve the accolades. However, they are joined by Ian Robertson, a successful attorney and developer in California and Hawaii and captain of the You Guys, who, together with Denny Landa and Jud Calkins have given clarity of vision and voice to the You Guys from our class since graduation.

Now, at every reunion or football celebration, we include all of the football players who wish to join this group and to participate. The generosity of the 1960 team in inviting us to participate with them as well has allowed us to succeed in embracing Yale football and making contributions to it and Yale University which are significant. Ian Robertson knows the power of invitation and he, Jud and we have invited participation by all of the football players from freshman through senior year at Yale and, for the most part, they have responded, even those like Loper who did not play, but whose son was a captain for the Yale team.

With respect to contributions to Yale Football, the Kenney Center and the Jensen Plaza are beautiful and historic contributions. Thank you, Jerry and Erik. In addition, getting our entire team (the 1959 Frosh) plus our other classmates to join as a team and contribute to the honor roll of Yale Football Association donors was amazing. It has never been done. It should be noted that some members of our class were economically constrained and could contribute less than \$50, but the group as a whole added to those contributions to make the \$500-per-donor goal for all 43 of us. Hence, 43 members of our class qualify as being "Bulldog" members of the football association. From this experience, several points may be worthy for coach Reno and the University to consider:

1. Treat all members of the Yale Football Team as if they "matter" (because they do), even those on the third, fourth and fifth strings -- the "You Guys."
2. For the football players themselves, celebrate your collective achievements and address your disappointments and losses in a constructive manner.
3. After a player graduates from Yale, encourage him to maintain contact with Yale Football and his fellow football players, including those who were the "You Guys."
4. Share your stories of success and disappointments and share bonding among your classmates after you graduate--the stories improve with age like my facemask story about Ben Balme.
5. Be generous in including others into your successful adventures (as the 1960 team did with us), your bittersweet experiences, and embrace the concept of inclusion. It works.