

Assistant Coach Omar Verges speech for the 2018 award ceremony:

I want to talk to you guys about living with passion and being relentless and unstoppable in the pursuit of your goals.

Let me tell you a story.

About 5 years ago I had just come out of the darkest moment in my life. The point I was at was a direct result of every poor decision I had made, and because I stopped living my life with passion and forgot who I was. And my phone rang and it was Jason Cedeno, the coach of the Redskins and one of my dearest friends. See, Jason and I share a special bond. We played pop Warner football growing up and we were on the same team every year. First the Bronx Trojans, then the Bronx Vikings, and then The Bronx Wolfpack. He knows the story of why they called me "Toasty" on the Trojans. And I'm gonna get to that in a minute. So Jay and I talked for a while and he said to me, hey I'm coaching a Kids flag football team and maybe you can come help me out this Saturday. And I thought about it and said, I guess maybe this Saturday and had no intention of doing it after that. But God has a great sense of humor and Jay knew exactly what he was doing when he asked me. He knew that if he got me to go that day that chances were I was gonna stick around. You see, the game of football changed my life growing up. I was insecure and bullied with no direction. When I stepped on the football field on Van Cortlandt with my brand new helmet, and that ugly Randall Cunningham eagles jersey and brand new cleats on at the age of 12, Because my brother in law at the time cared enough to invest his time on a kid that he barely knew and owed nothing but because football did something for him. And I was hoping to try out for The Van Cortlandt Eagles but was very afraid and had no confidence in myself at all. Instead we met the men who would be my first coaches, Coach James and Coach Miles. And Coach James proceeded to have me run some drills. And something happened. Something inside me sparked and I felt like I grew a whole foot taller, I got faster and stronger and more confident. And so began my love affair with football. And I got all my friends on board and Jay was one of them. And then came our first game and I was ready, starting cornerback and my mom and sister and brother in law were there and I was excited and confident until the other team came out, and they had beards and were grown men, and I remember we lined up on our first play and I froze with fear. And the guy I was supposed to cover ran right past me and scored a touchdown and I don't think I moved until my teammates and the coach physically came and walked me off the field. I was paralyzed with fear and I felt humiliated and defeated and all those insecurities I had before I started playing came right back. And then we had practice that Monday and my teammates let me have it, and they ragged on me and gave me tough love and I was benched and I felt horrible and I was given the nickname toasty, you know like burnt toast. But then something wonderful and amazing happened during practice. I was faced with the fact I was afraid and yes there would always be, someone faster, someone stronger and someone just blessed with more God given talent and I decided to use that experience that I thought was a failure when I froze and used that fear as the springboard to success. I said ok, I'm gonna be more aggressive and more relentless and just be unstoppable on this field. Because what really bothered me was that as my team we went to war and I had failed my team on the battlefield. So I stopped playing for me and I decided to play for them. So

when I met up with Jay that Saturday and saw the team he was coaching, the raiders at the time and they were playing a game and I was able to give some input during the game and met them after the game, I was hooked and I was introduced as Omar, the guy that would be assisting jay. From that minute something happened again, it stopped being about me and it became about those kids. And I think they were 1 and 3 or something but they were special. And we ended up making it to the championship, where we lost to Footer and The Steelers which were a dynasty. But see I like to say that time beat us, because we were close to scoring again but time ran out. But I learned that if I can put my ego to the side, and learn to be led by Jay and learn from the kids that greatness can happen. See if you treat someone as they are, then that's what they will be but if you treat them for what they could be, then you help transform them into something better and greater. See these kids are me and I am them. Of course I want to be the head coach but I listen and follow so when the time comes I can lead. And I will make mistakes and I will fall and I will fail but that just means I have more to learn and a lot more to grow. The next year I was switched over to the Steelers and Footer and we dominated and those kids were Physically gifted but they were a bit too cocky and in the championship game we fell short by one play. And that hurt, it hurt a lot, but we had some young guys that learned what it was like to lose and to fall short and sometimes that's the best thing that can happen. How can you ever know or truly savor the taste of victory if you have not tasted that bitter and sour flavor of defeat. And that's a flavor that lasts a long time and it forces you to grow or lay down and accept it, the choice is up to you. The next year we changed to the Seahawks and it was a transition year and we had to start from the beginning, and guys were learning how to accept new leadership roles and play new positions and there were ups and downs and we fell one play short of going to the championship. But we learned again what it was like to lose not as individuals but as a team. I believe everything happens for a reason and life is a journey of ups and downs and we always went in ready to battle but the other team was just more prepared, not better, just better prepared and made Less mistakes and worked better as a team. So enter this past year, we are now The Falcons, I was going through some ups and downs but Footer and I were Optimistic and very excited to get this season going, we had a squad, we had some great talent but could we gel as a team, could we put our egos aside and be led and get out of our own way. You see the only competition is the one in the mirror because he is the one who doubts and is consumed with fear and can't be in the moment and can't let go of past failures but believes he is destined to fail again. I was not there for the first 3 games because of my own personal issues. But when I came back I was welcomed with nothing but love, just love and support by my team and everyone else that is a part of Yald. So I committed to The Falcons and got out of my own way and we moved forward as a team. We lost, and we learned and we practiced and we studied and we worked hard and these young men gave it everything they had every game and sometimes we fell short but see...we learned that just because we fell short, doesn't mean we stay down, oh no but instead we come back and become relentless and unstoppable! You see there is one thing that can't be measured and that is the size of the heart and the flame that is the soul. And we played a very formidable Panthers team in the championship, this game could have gone either way but it was just our time. We wanted it just a little bit more, but I have nothing but respect and admiration for The Panthers. And nothing but love and admiration for everyone that is a part of yald. And we won, I sobbed tears of joy, not because I was the coach of a championship team after coaching for 4 years but because these kids will forever be able to

say that on this day they were champions. See...they taught me more than I could ever teach them and in fact they coached me more than I could have coached them. You see, they showed up on Wednesday's and Friday's to practice. And they showed up early and ready to suit up and play as not just a team but as family. Doing this while going to school full time and some of them working part time and getting ready to start high school or finishing high school. They all were leaders and stepped up when we needed them too and when they fell short they got back up kept moving forward, they gave me something greater than I could have hoped for and that is, they gave me back my passion and reminded me that it's not about me but about the man next me, about the team. And when you're doing it for the man next to you, then you're fighting for a much greater cause because then you become selfless. I learned to show up and step up and keep moving forward. You see, we are all on borrowed time and one day we won't be here on this earth. What will remain is how you affected the lives of those around you, how you make them feel, did you inspire them, did you motivate them, did you help them to be the best version of themselves. That is what will remain and that is what will be your legacy. Fame and fortune are wonderful and great things and one should strive for greatness but the secret to that is, if you work to help others achieve greatness, you too will become something great in the process. So I leave you with this, no matter what you choose to do in this life, choose something you love and do it with passion and honor your name and your family and build your legacy and be relentless and unstoppable in the pursuit of your goals!! Thank you Lito and yald and footer and the Falcons and everyone here tonight. I love you all and God bless.