



## **GUEST SPEAKER**

### **Mike Gottfried**

It didn't take Mike Gottfried long to start living his dream. He began coaching football in his early 20s at Roseville High School in Ohio. Eventually, he moved to the college level and served as head coach for 12 seasons with Murray State, Cincinnati, Kansas and Pittsburgh. During his time at Pitt, Gottfried accumulated a record of 26-17-2, including two wins over Notre Dame, Penn State and West Virginia. Leaving the sidelines with a winning record in 1990, Gottfried became an ESPN college football analyst for ESPN's "Saturday Primetime."

The long story short makes Mike Gottfried's life sound easy, but it's the full story told that proves his coaching dream was only one small part of his destiny.

On April 3, 1956, Gottfried, his two brothers and his mother experienced a great loss when their father and husband passed away. Church and prayer became even more important – especially after his father's funeral was over and the flow of people coming in and out ended.

Looking for somebody to fill a father's role, Gottfried always felt he was at a disadvantage to the boy next to him that had a father. Consistently though, Gottfried had coaches take an interest in him, and as his own dreams of coaching became reality, he thought that he could be involved in a young man's life as a substitute father.

In 2000, Gottfried founded the Team Focus program for boys ages 9 to 17 whose fathers died, left home or are in prison. Team Focus provides fatherless boys with leadership skills, guidance, and an ongoing relationship with a mentor. "Team Focus offers a father's attention and affection to these boys – things that I missed," he says.

The Team Focus program begins with summertime camps where 450 boys are kept busy from morning until night, learning manners, playing sports, listening to speakers and talking in small groups. "I wanted Team Focus to teach boys how to be better students, how to tie a tie, how to fish – everything that a father would teach them. They play basketball, volleyball and softball. They learn how to understand teamwork, about points and winning and how to lose. A lady teaches manners – how to act in a restaurant, open a car door, use a telephone and work with mom."

From the camps, Team Focus assigns mentors to the young men and guidance counselors keep track of their grades. Gottfried compares Team Focus to a family photo: "There is a family photo with dads, uncles, cousins, and it slowly goes blank as dad fades out and uncles fade out. We tell our group that we walk into that picture and walk with that young man. We can't replace a dad but we can give him 25 hours a day. We'll be a phone call away and we'll help meet his needs." Gottfried himself is never more than a phone call away as he travels to different cities for work. "When I go to games in different cities, I might meet one of the boys at the game, let him work on the sidelines. I carry a notebook and stay in touch with them by sending them notes. I put dreams in front of them and constantly talk about college. I tell them that everything is attainable for them."

For Gottfried, there is no amount of applause or accolades that could compare to mentoring a boy who is fatherless. "Even when I was recruiting for football, at Pitt or Kansas or anywhere, when I found someone without a father, I would gravitate toward him. I knew what he was up against. I knew I could help him. I could take a special interest in him and give him the extra time that was needed."

When offered a job to coach college football again, Gottfried turned it down. "I got excited but my wife asked, 'What about the boys?' I started thinking. There comes a time when I set aside what I want to do and die to my self. This is the path I'm on now. I would like to coach, but I am to do this now, speaking about and being with these boys year around."