

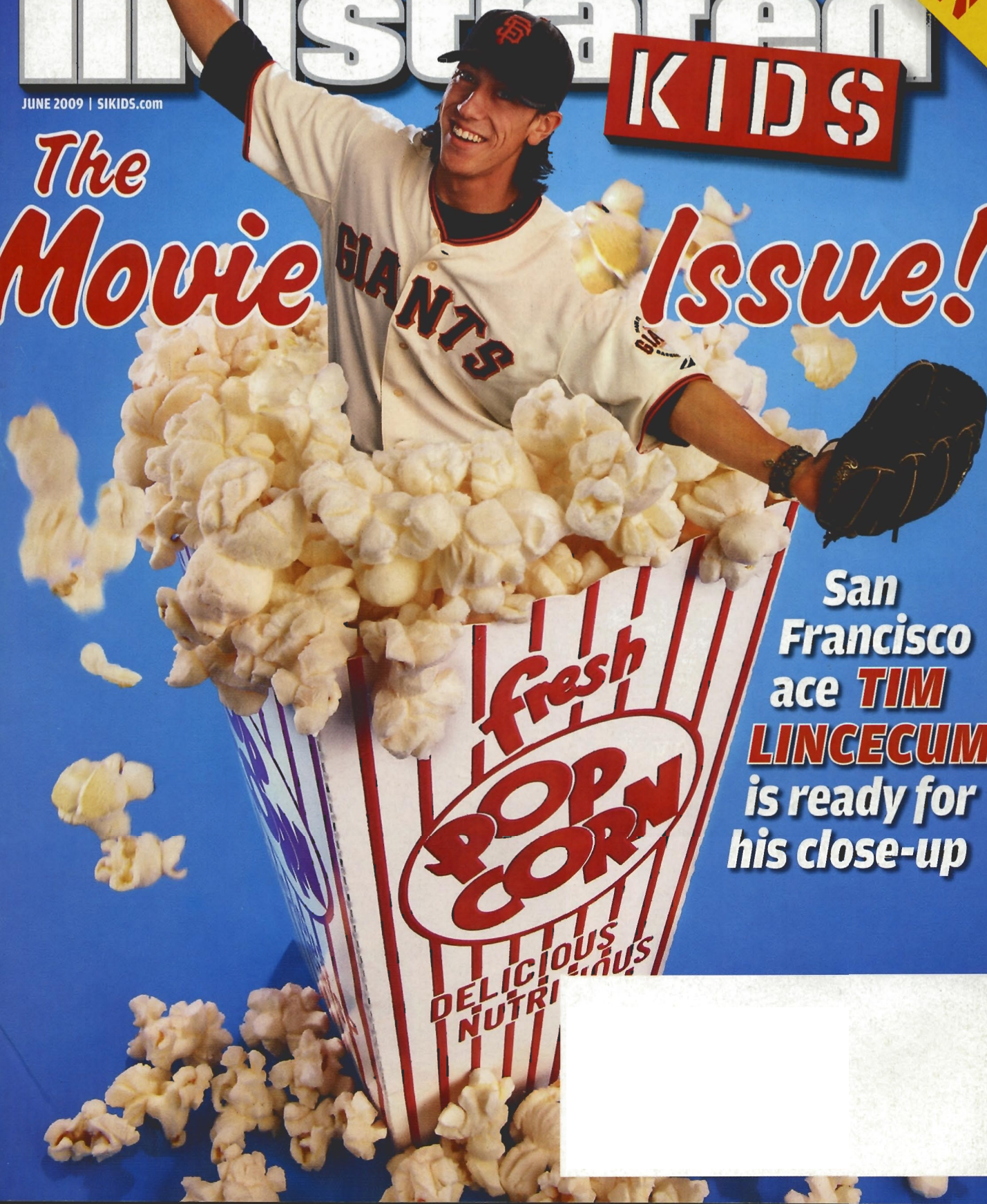
JUNE 2009 | SIKIDS.com

Sports Illustrated

KIDS

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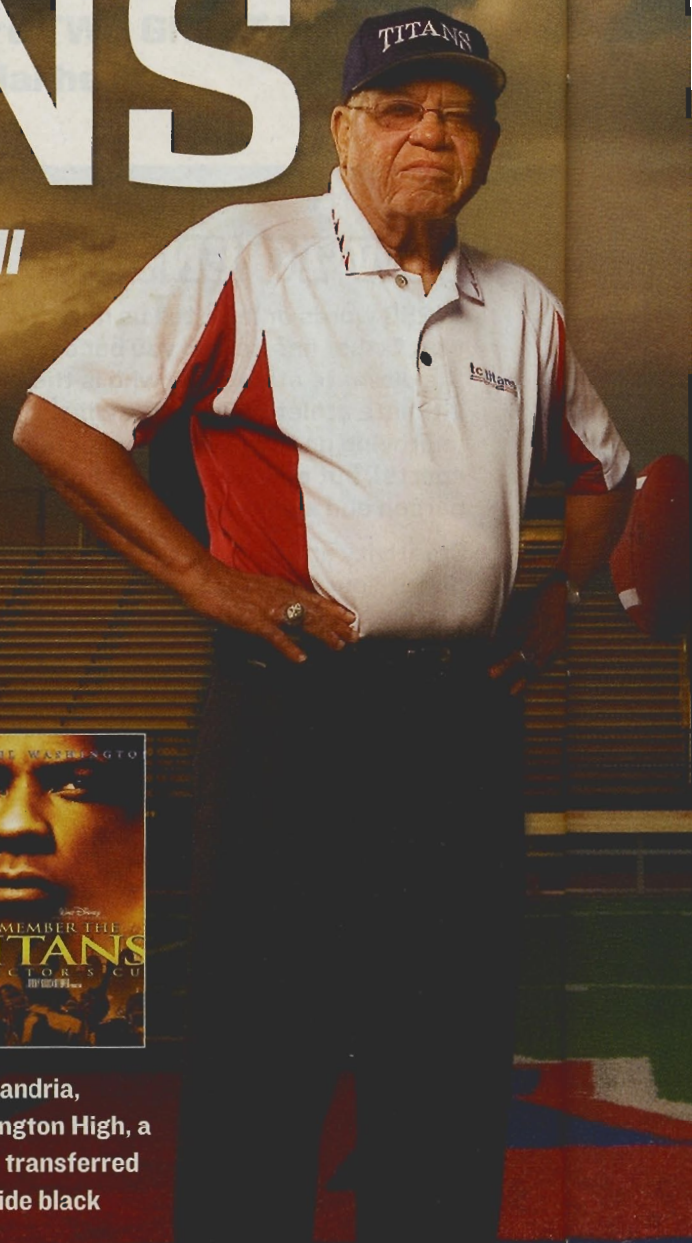


San Francisco ace **TIM LINCECUM** is ready for his close-up



REMEMBER THE *REAL* TITANS

You've seen the classic football movie. Now hear from the men who lived it. BY ANDRÉ CARTER



In 2000, Walt Disney Pictures released *Remember the Titans*, a movie based on the 1971 T.C. Williams High School football team. Starring Denzel Washington as coach Herman Boone, it told the story of how black and white players learned to put aside their racial differences and worked together to win the Virginia state championship.



In 1971, the U.S. Supreme Court passed a ruling that forced three Alexandria, Virginia, high schools to merge. Juniors and seniors from George Washington High, a mostly black school, and Francis Hammond High, a mostly white school, transferred to T.C. Williams, which had students of both races. The goal was to provide black students the same quality of education as white students.

It was not an easy transition. T.C. Williams's football team lacked unity at first because of racial issues and the players' loyalties to their old schools. Also, many adults in the city were opposed to people of different races mixing together, putting even more pressure on the players. Despite the obstacles, Coach Boone helped the Titans learn to trust each other on and off the field. *SI Kids* caught up with Boone and some of the players who were portrayed in the movie to tell you the story of what really happened that season.



WE ARE THE CHAMPIONS The Titans (from left): Coach Herman Boone, Darryl "Blue" Stanton, Reggie Watson, Kerry Lundin, Petey Jones, and Mike Lynch.

Culture Of Hatred

During the summer of 1971, Alexandria was filled with racial tension. There was a riot in the city the previous year after a white convenience store manager shot and killed an unarmed black high school student after a dispute.

Julius Campbell, Defensive End: [People] were fighting and throwing things. There were some broken windows and maybe even some fires set. The movie made it look like I led the riot, but that's not true.

Kerry Lundin, Offensive Lineman: There weren't actual lines drawn [to separate different races], but the city was divided.

Campbell: There were places, if you were black, you better not get caught at sundown. There were places, if you were white, you better not get caught at sundown. There was a bakery where if you were black you had to go around to the alley to get your bread or donuts.

In 1971 the school board named Herman Boone the coach of the T.C. Williams football team. He was chosen over Bill Yoast, a legendary white coach who had been at Hammond High. Boone became the target of hatred from white people who were angry that a black man was given the job.

Boone: I became the center of controversy. Protests were made to the school board. Parents were calling my house all night. A toilet [was thrown] through my window. My children were being harassed while walking down the street. People said I wasn't qualified to lead the biggest team in Virginia. Little did they know that I had won five state championships in North Carolina.

When the Titans met each other for the first time in 1971, many of the players were not warm to one another.

Campbell: It was forced on us. Everybody was comfortable at the school they were at [before]. It was like [bringing together] rival gangs.



HOLLYWOOD HEROES The story of Boone (top, far left), QB Ron Bass (far right), and the Titans was perfect for a movie (left).

were away from the hostile environment of their hometown, and were forced to interact with one another.

Boone: The day we went to camp, we loaded two buses.

I got on one bus, it was all white [people], including the coaches. I got off that bus and got on the other one. It was all black, including the coaches. I said, "Get off these buses right now!" [To combine the races] I loaded one bus with offensive players and the other one with defensive players.

Campbell: Some people were doing what was natural [to them] and some were [sitting separately] out of hatred.

Boone: Every day when we came to the cafeteria [at camp], the white kids would be sitting on one side and the black kids on the other. I told them, "From seven to nine [o'clock], you will talk to everybody on this football team." When you talk to people, you get a chance to understand them.

Ron Bass, Quarterback: Gettysburg was the key. It was just the coaches and the kids learning to live together.

Everybody was wearing their old school colors.

Mike Lynch, Offensive Lineman: Since football season happened to be the first big thing of the school year, it became the job of the coach to prove that the [plan to mix people of different races] could work.

Boone: The superintendent of schools told me, "Your job is to make these kids like one another."

Lundin: When you get a bunch of kids together, you're gonna automatically get some people who don't like each other. Coach said, "You don't have to love each other, but you will respect each other."

Hard Road To Glory

To form team unity, Coach Boone took the team to Gettysburg, Pennsylvania for training camp. There, the players



FOLLOW THE LEADER Denzel Washington (left, center) gave a spirited performance as Coach Boone. (Below) The real Julius Campbell (81) makes a tackle.

more we won, the more people talked to each other and [sat] together.

A major storyline in the movie is the friendship that develops between Campbell and white line-backer Gerry Bertier. In the film, Bertier is paralyzed in a car accident before the championship game. In real life, the accident happened after the season. Campbell visited Bertier in the hospital. **Campbell:** When I got to the hospital, I was told that only family could see him, but he wanted to see me. I knew Gerry respected me as a football player. But at that point I realized that he respected me as a human being. He chose me, a black player, to see him when nobody but family could. I



was told that he was paralyzed before I went in. I couldn't believe it because I used to call him Superman. You had never seen a better athlete. I broke down crying. It went from me going in to console Gerry, to him consoling me. He said, "You know we're brothers."

Bertier died in 1981 from injuries suffered in another car accident. These days, many of the remaining Titans still live in Virginia and see each other regularly. They hope the lessons shown in the film will continue to impact future generations.

Lynch: This movie is about decisions made by 15-, 16-, 17-year-old kids. People were taking notice of those decisions. We decided to work together, get along, and respect each other.

Campbell: When I talk to kids I tell them, "There are things that you need to survive: air, water, love, companionship. Racism isn't one of them. We can survive without racism." Eventually, we're going to get there. ■

“The success of the team carried over to the student body, the parents, and the city as a whole.”

Ron Bass, Titans quarterback

Reggie Watson, Defensive End: We were lucky to have Coach Boone. He did bring us together as a team.

Boone named Ron Bass, who is white, the starting quarterback over Jerry Harris, a black player. The decision angered many black people in Alexandria.

Boone: The biggest secret in town was who was going to be the starting quarterback. When I named [Bass] over Jerry Harris, the black parents [said] I'm an Oreo: black on the outside and white on the inside. They [complained] that I had nine white starters on offense. I didn't care if you were green. If you had talent, you would play.

Lundin: [Coach Boone] would jump in white guys' faces and black guys' faces the same way.

When the season began, the team gelled quickly. It held opponents scoreless in nine of 13 games. Unlike the movie, which showed the Titans winning the state championship on the game's last play against

Marshall High, they actually beat Andrew Lewis High, 27-0, in the title game.

Petey Jones, Linebacker: The filmmakers didn't want to use that [actual championship] game because it was too easy [of a win]. So they took the closest game we had and made it the championship game. That was actually the fifth game of the season.

Campbell: In the movie, the first game, we just barely won. Second game, we just barely won. That made me mad. We didn't have any close games.

A Community Comes Together

As the Titans kept winning games, the city rallied around the team, and race relations improved in the community.

Bass: The success of the team definitely carried over to the student body, the parents, and the city as a whole. People got behind us. It got to be a swell of support from everybody.

Jones: In the movie, you see people sitting separately [in the stands]. The