P.S. to the NEWS
by PHYLLIS SCHLAFLY

Box 618, Alton, Illinois 62002
Phone: 618-462-5415

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FOOTBALL HEROES

One of the few football games I ever attended was a Notre Dame home game in the fall of 1970. At half-time, a Vietnam veteran hobbled out onto the playing field and was given a citation of appreciation from the team and the University for which he had formerly played.

In Vietnam, a bullet had hit his left thigh, shrapnel was blown into both legs, and several bones in his right foot had been shattered by a granade. Army doctors said he had a permanent 40 percent disability. The fans in the Notre Dame stadium that Saturday cheered Robert Rocky Bleier for his bravery and mourned the end of his football career.

In his book, "Fighting Back," Rocky Bleier paid tribute to an unknown black soldier who saved his life by carrying him to safety. Blier called that "a special kind of love."

When Bleier tried to return to the Pittsburgh Steelers to play football, the team's orthopedic surgeon told him, "You've got to find another profession." Another doctor told him it was "impossible" to play football again. A third predicted, "You're going to be a cripple ... the rest of your life."

There were some who thought that Bleier, even without his war disability, didn't have the physique necessary to play professional football. He is only five feet, ten inches tall and is lighter than most players. He must make up in speed and agility what the taller and heavier players have in power and strength.

On television one Sunday last month, we watched halfback Rocky Bleier change a Pittsburgh Steeler defeat into a stunning victory, gaining more than 100 yards in the last quarter. Due to his skill, Pittsburgh overcame a 14-point deficit in the fourth quarter and won the game by three points.

He was so successful in the last part of the game that Steeler quarterback Terry Bradshaw called on Bleier either to carry the ball or to catch a forward pass on

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nearly every play. Bleier caught two forward passes and gained at least four yards on every run.

How Bleier overcame his disability is a thrilling story of human determination. He gave himself an incredible training program, arising every morning at 5:30 a.m. and running until exhaustion. He spent his afternoons lifting weights. He did sprints at night. He took special exercises to give himself new muscles in his war-damaged legs and foot.

When he reapplied for a job with the Pittsburgh Steelers, some believed that owner Art Rooney hired Bleier as a patriotic gesture to a wounded veteran, never believing that Bleier would ever again play as a regular on the team. Yet when Pittsburgh won the Super Bowl football championship three out of the last five years, Bleier was always a regular backfield star.

A deeply religious man, Bleier is convinced that adversity made him a stronger and better person. He proves that the spirit is more important than the body, and that the determination to succeed, with hard work and self-discipline, can overcome all odds.

A current movie called "North Dallas Forty" is a popular piece of fiction portraying professional football players as savage and immoral. The truth is that most professional football stars perform many civic and charitable acts.

More specifically, the Dallas professional football team, called the Cowboys, is led by quarterback Roger Staubach, another inspiring athlete. A graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, he served four years in the Navy before entering professional football. In order to fulfill his commitment to the Navy, he sacrificed four of his best football-playing years.

Staubach has led Dallas to many great victories. ~~At this writing, the Cowboys are unbeaten in their 1979 National League games.~~ ~~last year he led the Cowboys to the Superbowl~~

Young Americans need real heroes with high morals and great achievements to inspire them to tackle the tough challenges that life presents. Even though Hollywood chose not to put any such heroes in "North Dallas Forty," Rocky Bleier and Roger Staubach prove that they do exist in real life.

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