



Always there

BY TODD KORTH

Harry Sydney has had the experience of playing pro football many men can only dream of. The former fullback also has experiences, especially as a youth, that can be described as nightmares at best.

Growing up in Fayetteville, N.C., Sydney's mother was an alcoholic and his father in the military. The two often argued to the point where the younger Sydney had to physically separate them.

"Imagine what it's like when your dad is a Green Beret soldier, a Black Rambler teaching his soldiers how to survive in the wilderness, and you're 11 or 12 and you've got to break up the fist fights," said Sydney.

Sydney says, at the time, he lived by the duck philosophy. "On the outside people thought I was calm and cool, but underneath I was swimming a 100 miles an hour."

He figured the best way to escape the family turmoil was sports, and he did. He earned a scholarship to play football at the University of Kansas and went on to play in the NFL, mainly with the San Francisco 49ers and Green Bay Packers. With the achievement of reaching his athletic dream behind him, Sydney is now focusing on an idea that has been in the back of his mind since he earned a degree in criminal and juvenile justice from Kansas.

Sydney, 44, recently began My Brother's Keeper, Inc., a mentoring program for Green Bay area men and boys, ages 11 to 65. A non-profit program, Sydney feels he can draw from his past experiences and be there for men who need someone to help them sort things out.

"If you think about it, we have so many organizations out there for women," said Sydney. "We have women's shelters, a homeless shelter, single women raising kids, abused, battered wives. All of those are the trickle down effect of men not doing their jobs."

"The problem is what our men are doing. What they view as success. What they view as failure. What they view as a relationship. What is a relationship? All the problems from drinking to alcoholism to infidelity. A lot of times men are doing that because they don't know any better way. We have no programs to help men become better men. That's how this program came about."

Sydney coached the Packers running backs from 1995 to 1999, then worked as a financial advisor in Green Bay before he and his wife, Madonna, began My Brother's Keeper in early November. They currently have received funding from six Green Bay area companies and endorsements from many public officials and programs.

Individual and group sessions are available with costs ranging from \$25 to \$50 per session. With the help of the sponsors, no one gets turned away because they cannot afford the cost.

"It's always important to afford young people opportunities to develop relationships with role-model systems that will permit them to deal with everyday pressures and concerns," Brown County Circuit Court Judge J.D. McKay told the Green Bay Press-Gazette. "The more help we have to give, the better off they're going to be."

Ex-fullback leads Green Bay mentoring program for men

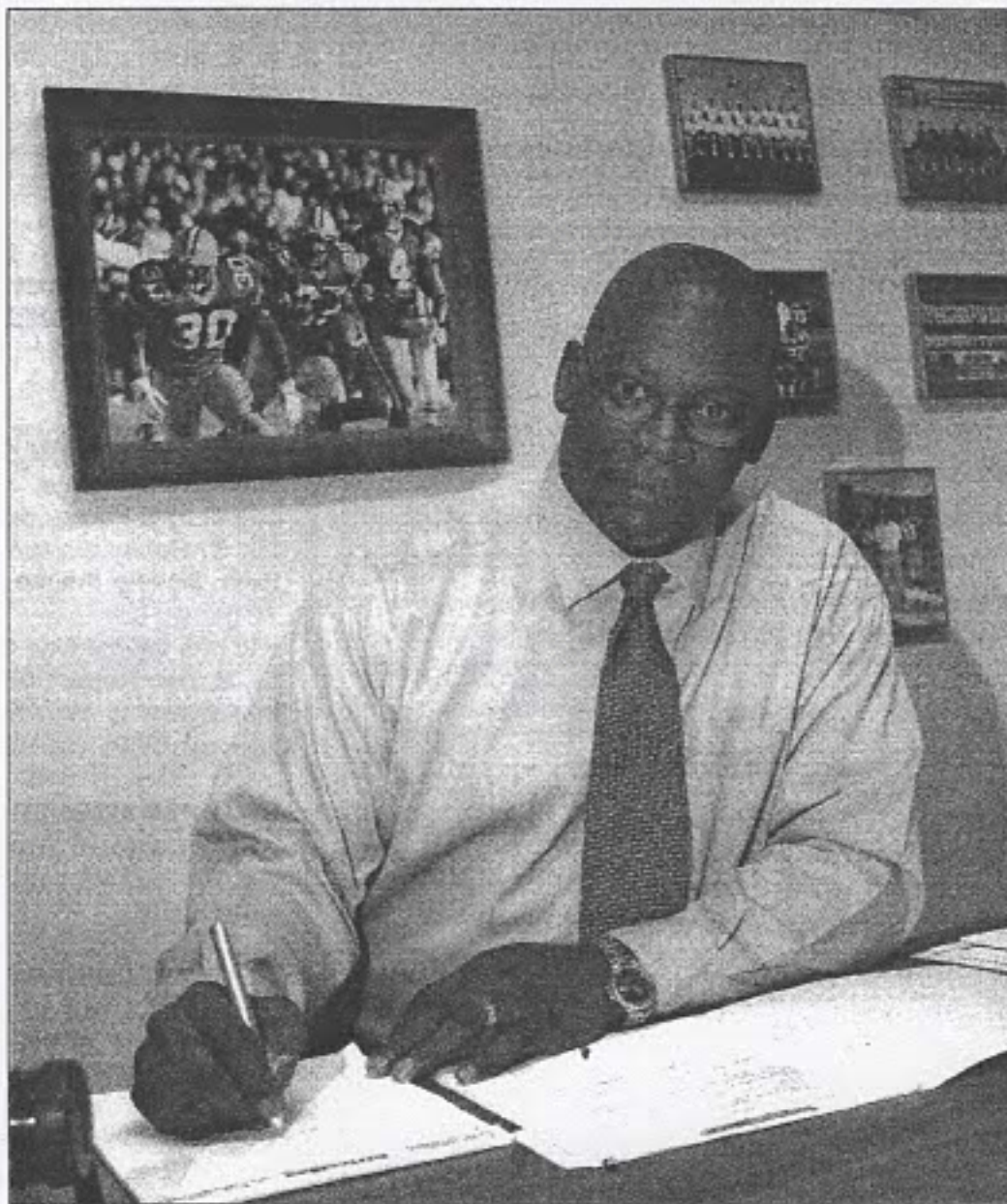


Photo by Mark A. Wallenfang

Harry Sydney works out of his office in Green Bay for My Brother's Keeper, a mentoring program for men ages 11 to 65.

"What we're doing is we're finding out the root of some of the situations that they're dealing with, then coming up with alternative planning to get out of the rut that they're in, or to move forward. So many times in our life, we let things hold us down and because they hold us down, we never move forward."

—Harry Sydney

Sydney wants to be there for men who need someone to talk to, and he knows they're out there because he was one of them at one time.

"There were times that you try to block the sounds out with a pillow, but the pillow doesn't stop the sound,"

Sydney recalled, as his mother and father argued.

He also realizes that, as a father of eight and on his third marriage, he wasn't always there for his older children. So, he's hoping that as the lead mentor in My Brother's Keeper he can be that person "outside of the loop" that can point troubled men in the right direction or change their way of thinking.

"I don't have a Ph.D in books. I have a degree in criminology and juvenile justice, but I also have a bunch of letters behind my life because of all the (expletive) that I've dealt with," Sydney said.

Fortunately, Sydney's mother has stopped drinking, and he and his father have settled their differences. Sydney's father has "changed in many ways," according to Harry III, allowing him to move on. Sydney is moving on as well, and there as a neutral party for others.

"What we're doing is we're finding out the root of some of the situations that they're dealing with, then coming up with alternative planning to get out of the rut that they're in, or to move forward," Sydney says. "So

many times in our life, we let things hold us down and because they hold us down, we never move forward. We're always looking behind us and never move forward. We're missing a lot of what's great out there, but we can't get over these hurdles. This program is geared to help men get over some of these hurdles that they're dealing with and be able to move forward."

Sydney said that he is hoping to establish a relationship with Brown County correctional institutions, school administrators and businesses to meet with men in need of direction.

"I'm here to see what's going on and make my observation. I'm not trying to be your friend. I'm just trying to help." 