

Ford, on Speaking Trip, Blends Politics and Football

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CHICAGO, Feb. 14—As Vice President Ford's motorcade crept through suburban Tinley Park this morning, Mr. Ford, just out of his car and coatless in the 20-degree chill, marched resolutely along the sidewalk shaking hands with some of the 4,000 school children who were lining the route and waving flags.

At one point Mr. Ford stopped and patiently held 3-year-old Danny Whitemiller in his arms as the boy's mother snapped a picture. Mr. Ford beamed; Danny cried.

Mr. Ford insists that he has no intention of being a candidate for any office in 1976.

Nonetheless, the Vice President's three-day swing through the Middle West, which began yesterday in Kentucky and ends tomorrow night in Nebraska, has produced some indications that the former Michigan Representative is enjoying his new role of national prominence.

The trip, which involves mainly speeches at Republican fund-raising affairs, is his heaviest travel schedule since he became Vice President Dec. 6. And apparently not all his friends rule out Mr. Ford as a candidate in 1976 despite his repeated disclaimers.

'With All My Strength'

Last night, for example, Representative Tim Lee Carter, Republican of Kentucky, introduced the Vice President to an enthusiastic audience of about 1,200 in a high school gymnasium in London, Ky., and announced:

"I shall work for his nomination in 1976 with all my strength."

Mr. Ford just smiled as the

audience applauded and cheered.

Mr. Ford, who normally reads his speeches in a rather wooden manner, gave what some observers regarded as his best recent speech-making performance.

"We should be proud of the United States," he said as he recited what he viewed as the accomplishments of the Nixon Administration, particularly in foreign affairs. He did not mention Watergate, but he declared at one point:

'Man of Integrity'

"Let me say a word about a great American—the President of the United States. I've known the President politically and socially. . . . He is a man of integrity, ability and dedication and great intelligence."

Mr. Ford added that when historians reviewed the record they would conclude that Mr. Nixon has done more for America than any President in our lifetime.

Mr. Nixon got 73 per cent of the votes in the London area in south-central Kentucky in 1972, and Mr. Ford's praise of the President appeared to go over well.

Mr. Ford's speeches blend political appeals accentuating the positive in the Administration, without dwelling on its Watergate problems, plus references to football.

Speaking tonight at the Frank Leahy Awards fund-raising dinner for the American Cancer Society, Mr. Ford declared:

"I only wish that I could take the entire United States into the locker room at half-time. It would be an opportunity to say that we have lost yards against the line drives of inflation and the

end runs of energy shortages, and that we are not using all our players as well as we might because there is too much unemployment.

"There would be no excuses about previous coaches and previous seasons. I would simply say that we must look not at the points we have lost but at the points we can gain. We have a winner."

Reimbursement Pledged

Mr. Ford is traveling with a small staff in a propeller-driven Air Force Convair. An assistant said that the Republican National Committee would reimburse the Government for the cost of the trip related directly to Republican fund-raising activities.

The Vice President has told reporters several times that he has "no plans to go out and collar delegates and seek support" for 1976. He said he made a "pretty firm commitment" to his wife not to run for election again and that he could probably "do a better job" as Vice President if he were "not suspect . . . as a potential president."

"He's refreshing. He's new," Senator Marlow W. Cook, Republican of Kentucky, said of the Vice President. Mr. Cook, who accompanied Mr. Ford on the first leg of the trip, contended that "it's kind of refreshing to hear somebody who says 'I don't want to be president.'"