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UPI Telephoto

Students at Tinley Park (Ill.) High School gave Ford an athletic shirt bearing the number he had at the University of Michigan.

Coach Ford Gives U.S. A Pep Talk

Chicago

It is time for the American people to stop dwelling on difficulties and begin rallying to improve their future, Vice President Gerald R. Ford said last night.

In a speech, brimming with football analogies, prepared for the Frank Leahy awards dinner, Ford said:

"A team is doomed if it attributes insurmountable power to its opponents. A nation is in serious trouble at home or abroad if it gives in to pessimism or to a psychological complex of defeat . . .

"The time has come for the nation, the Congress and the administration to unite to move America forward. Let us restore harmony to our national team."

The Vice President did not mention Watergate in his prepared text, but his call for end to "dwelling on difficulties" sounded much like President Nixon's recurrent plea that the nation put aside Watergate and get down to business.

Ford received one of the Leahy awards, given in memory of the famed Notre Dame football coach.

Ford said that while the United States is running short of gasoline, there is no shortage of "the kind of energy that counts in the long run" — the ability to surmount difficulties, American initiative, courage and patriotism.

"I only wish that I could take the entire United States into the locker room at halftime," he said. "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 the points we have lost but at the points we can gain.

"We have a winner. Americans are winners."

There also could be some talk in that locker room that "America is dying," similar to "God is dead" reports a few years ago, Ford said.

"It is easy to refute those ugly rumors. God is alive. He is living within each of us," the vice president stated. "He offers the greatest hope and greatest help — if we play on His team.

"America is as alive as the spirit of Frank Leahy is alive tonight . . . America is as alive as our determination to keep her alive."

Associated Press