Ricky has the word

I sat there filled with pride as I listened to Ricky Har- man give his personal testimonial to a room of young fans. It was the monthly breakfast meeting of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) on the campus of Regis- ter Tech to share his Christian convictions and experiences with such young athletes.

There have been many great times in the past when Ricky— and the many other athletes with whom I have had the pleasure of coaching—have made a proud man. I can remember a championship game in Victory stadium when we traveled to 40 miles away.

Stanley Wolden returned the kickoff to near midfield. In the next play Ricky kicked Wolden on a long pass that carried to the five. I called time and motioned Ricky to the sideline. He looked up, met me, and flared that confident smile only he could display.

Before I could say a word, Ricky said, "Don't worry, Gut. I'm going to score on the next play and then I'm going to kick the extra point and we're going to win." He was a true believer.

I sat back, rather surprised, and it was not Ricky saying what he had confidence in doing. And he did it.

I remember later his acceptance words as he received the Roanoke Valley Sports award as the outstanding Roanoke sandlot player. And then his years as a star of Patrick Henry as a member of the 1977 Virginia High School (unofficial) championship team.

But Ricky is one of those athletes who paid little atten- tion to his comparative lack of size. He played with his brains and his heart and he played with his legs.

He is one of those youngsters who is much more than an athlete. He is a young man who has a college degree, whose scholastic, collegiate and professional athletes are of- ten referred to in the business world. Ricky is now specializing their specialties before he has packed house of starting athletes and coaches.

Yes, I have been proud of Ricky in the past but listen- ing to him talk before the FCA breakfast last week was a thrill he never gave me on the playing field.

Colleges miss opportunity

There are other Ricky Harlans in our schools and it all begins in the high school, not only academically, espe- cially on the collegiate level—don't take advantage of their talents.

Too many schools are interested in athletes as only players in the world of sports. Sure, the schools have to give the player a chance to earn his way to playing. But, ideally, that our scholastic, collegiate and professional athletes are of- ten referred to in the business world. Ricky is now specializing their specialties before he has packed house of starting athletes and coaches.

But the schools are missing opportunities to project their athletes to the public and often in an entirely different way.

The schools are missing the opportunity to show the general public the loyalty, discipline, and values that train their bodies to take and deliver punishment to the oppo- nent. What the schools can do is help the people to the extent that they can remember the plays and what is done and when to do it. I think the schools would do well to develop an athletic speech program which would display the roads and encourage their young athletes to serve as spokespeople through the years.

There could be lists by sports and by subjects. These lists could be used by all athletes to let them know that sports clubs and all other groups—and youth in the entire community.

I know most of these groups would rather hear words from an athlete than from a coach—who usually offers the same point of view more than 50 years ago.

These young athletes have their own thoughts, ideas and values as individuals and each individual and each has something to say worth hearing.

Topics can vary

These athletes can have a very definite and lasting im- pression—especially with those younger members of the community.

Not all of these athletes will feel comfortable speaking before a FCA group. But there are more than you think.

Our other FCA programs this past year have included such diverse programs as: "A Day at the Farm," a trip to a college, dine service, Hitler Rogers and the Hooch of the Virginia Tech and the Savings and Loan.

But there are other topics and other groups where these programs can be held. Some sports teams can hold the same and the other teams are developing their own programs, realizing that they are aware of their athletes or turn more than just their personal athletic teams.

There is no doubt that when a school awards a scholaship to a young athlete, it can export services in return. But the schools also have certain obligations. I think, that the ex- ception beyond teaching just how to block and tackle or kick a field goal.