

*"The NFL stands for 'No Family Life' I missed out on some things with my kids, and I realized that the man upstairs blessed me and had prepared me for things to come, like My Brother's Keeper."*

# Hard road has served Sydney well

Former fullback now helping others in GB

By **MARTIN HENDRICKS**  
Special to Packer Plus

Harry Sydney's primary job responsibility as a fullback in the National Football League was to knock people down.

For the last six years, his life's work has been to lift people up.

After five seasons as a player in San Francisco under Bill Walsh and George Seifert (1987-'91) and one under Mike Holmgren in Green Bay (1992), Sydney served as an assistant coach in Green Bay.

He earned two Super Bowl rings from 1987-'88 as a 49er and another in 1996 as the Packers' running back coach, but three years later was not retained when Mike Sherman became Green Bay's head coach.

Sydney then embarked on establishing My Brother's Keeper, an organization that helps troubled men and boys change their lives in the Green Bay area.

Instead of taking on opposing linebackers as a lead blocker or teaching a young running back the intricacies of the West Coast offense, Sydney's mission was to help others.

"After I was fired with Ray Rhodes' staff, I looked at my life, at what I was doing," Sydney said. "I knew I had more life after football. It doesn't matter what happens to you; what matters is how you deal with what happens to you."

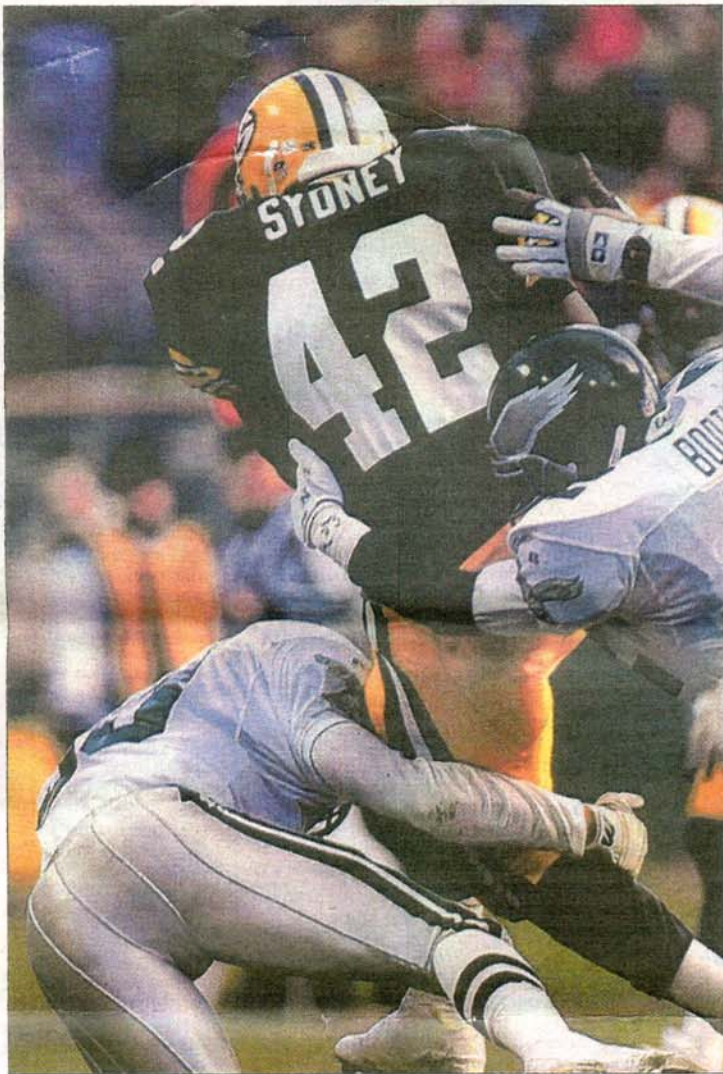
Sydney took his life in a new direction.

"The NFL stands for 'No Family Life,'" he said. "I missed out on some things with my kids, and I realized that the man upstairs blessed me and had prepared me for things to come, like My Brother's Keeper."

He worked as a financial advisor before establishing the non-profit organization in 2003 with his wife, Madonna. Sydney personally has mentored several hundred males, ages 11-65, to overcome obstacles and lead successful, productive lives.

Sydney had first-hand experience. He grew up in Fayetteville, N.C., in less-than-perfect family circumstances. His mother was an alcoholic and his father, a former member of the Green Berets and instructor at Fort Bragg (N.C.), was at times abusive.

One night his mother shot his father in the leg during an altercation, and Sydney stood up to his



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Harry Sydney both played and coached as an assistant for the Packers in the 1990s.

father to end the domestic abuse. His parents divorced when he was a teenager, and prejudice was a harsh reality in the South in the volatile decade of the 1960s.

"I certainly didn't have a silver spoon in my mouth or a trust fund," Sydney said. "I was that guy. I had plenty of problems, just like the boys and men I see today. Most guys are like a duck — beautiful creatures on the outside. Underneath, they're paddling like crazy to get by. Sports were a positive distraction for me, my escape."

As a youth, Sydney dreamed of

escaping his life and becoming a professional football player. At age 6, he drew a picture of his dream.

"My mom and dad asked me what I wanted to be," Sydney said. "I said I wanted to be a football player, and I drew a picture of me. That was my goal and what drove me was the dream of being a professional athlete."

Despite his turbulent home life, Sydney starred as a football player in high school and earned a scholarship to the University of Kansas. He was an all-Big Eight running back in 1980, but achieving his NFL

## SYDNEY FILE

**College:** University of Kansas.  
**Packer year:** 1992

**Packer highlights:** Veteran familiar with West Coast system brought in from San Francisco by Mike Holmgren. Versatile fullback was third in receiving (49 carries, 384 yards, 1 TD), third in scoring with 18 points and fifth in rushing (51 carries, 163 yards, 2 TDs). Played in all 16 games in 1992 season. Also, he was a general assistant coach in 1994 and running backs coach from 1995-'99. Earned two Super Bowl rings with 49ers in 1987-'88 seasons and one with Packers in 1996.

**Other teams:** San Francisco 49ers, 1987-'91; Memphis Showboats, 1985; Denver Gold, 1983-'84.

**Residence:** Green Bay.

**Occupation:** Co-founder of My Brother's Keeper; radio show host on WDUZ's The Fan; head football coach at Green Bay West High School.

dream would be a seven-year odyssey.

He was the final cut by the Seattle Seahawks in 1980 and the Cincinnati Bengals a year later. He worked for two years at odd jobs — as a cook, pizza delivery man, forklift operator and truck driver — to survive before being signed in 1983 by the Denver Gold of the United States Football League.

After two seasons in Colorado, he signed with the Memphis Showboats in 1985, before the USFL folded. After a season in the Canadian Football League with the Montreal Alouettes, the team folded and he was back driving a forklift.

Sydney did not give up on his dream, and mailed every NFL team his resume. The San Francisco 49ers were the only team that invited him to try out. Head coach Bill Walsh remembered Sydney's performance against the 49ers in an exhibition game with the Seahawks.

"When I first got cut, I had to grow up and realize it wasn't all just about talent," Sydney said. "It was about preparation, studying film, not making mental mistakes. Working hard was not enough. I had to learn to work smarter. By the time I got to the NFL, I was 27 years old and had no room for error."

Sydney earned a spot on Walsh's roster in 1987 as a special teams standout and as a backup to Tom

Please see **SYDNEY, 20P**