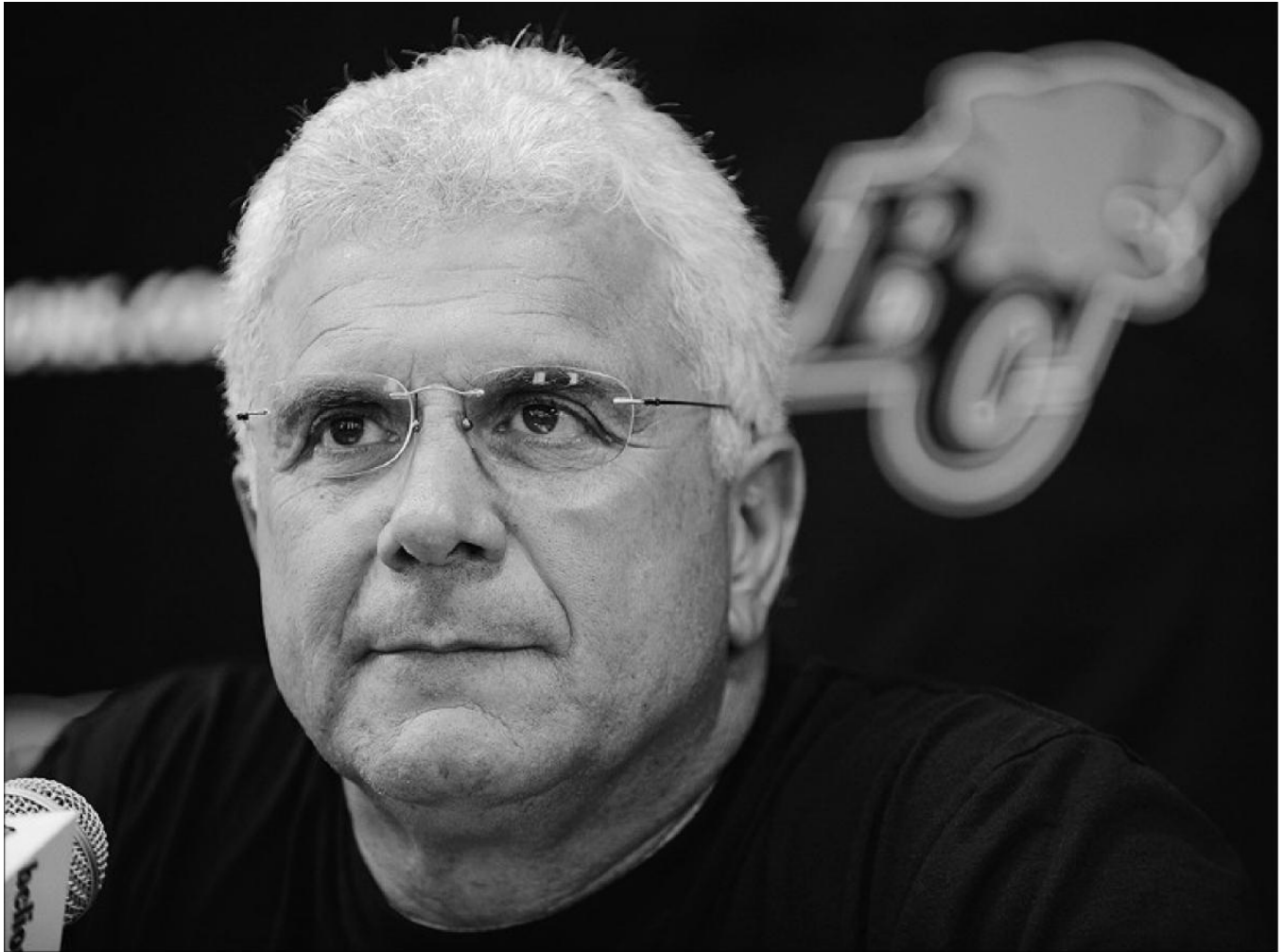


Buono refuses to be a bystander

Coach, players join campaign to stop violence against women

By Mike Beamish, Vancouver Sun July 8, 2011



B.C. Lions head coach Wally Buono grew emotional on Thursday when he talked about how his mother had been a victim of violence.

Photograph by: Gerry Kahrman, PNG Files, Vancouver Sun

Family is tremendously important to B.C. Lions head coach Wally Buono, as those who deal with him on a daily basis well know.

It's not unusual for the 60-year-old football lifer to pause in the middle of dissecting a game with reporters in his office to show off the latest picture of his grandchildren or to talk about their accomplishments, however small.

Buono's father, Michele, died much before his time when Wally was eight years old, five years after the family moved to Montreal from Potenza, Italy. His mother, Carmela, unable to speak English and without job skills, sent Wally and his brother, Rocco, to live as wards of the state -in a reformatory in the Laurentians north of Montreal -for two years, until she had the means and support to raise them on her own.

That background gives some context to Buono's support of an anti-violence against women project launched Thursday by the Lions, the federal and B.C. governments and the Ending Violence Association of B.C.

The "Be More than a Bystander" initiative focuses on curtailing and ending physical, sexual, emotional and verbal abuse against women -and there were a number of important and influential female politicians at the news conference to give it a kick-start.

Federal cabinet minister Rona Ambrose, who administers the Status of Women ministry, among other portfolios, pledged a Canadian government commitment of \$541,900. Mary McNeil, B.C.'s Minister of Children and Family Development, pledged \$320,000 from the provincial government toward the project.

Tracy Porteous, executive director of EVA B.C. (Ending Violence Association of B.C.) who has worked for a year to link her organization with the Lions, described the announcement "as a historic day in British Columbia, a proud day for me and hundreds of anti-violence organizations across the province."

But the most powerful testimony Thursday was delivered by men -Buono, who has three grown daughters, all married -and Lions players Angus Reid, Travis Lulay and J.R. LaRose, who will appear in radio and television public service announcements, on the scoreboard at Lions home games and in high schools and at amateur sports workshops to hammer home the sobering message and statistics.

One in three Canadian women will be sexually assaulted in her lifetime.

More than half of women in B.C. have experienced physical or sexual violence since the age of 16.

Every year in B.C., there are more than 60,000 physical or sexual assaults against women.

"Violence against women is not just a women's issue, because men commit the vast majority of violence against women in society," Buono stated.

"It is also a men's issue, and men need to get involved."

Those were Buono's words as they appeared on a prepared press release. But he felt the cause deeply and emotionally when he was at the lectern addressing the gathering at the Lions' training facility in Surrey.

"The more I think about this whole program, the more emotional you can get about this," Buono said. "[As an organization] we were excited when this was brought to our attention, because this is something that has been going on for years and years. I know, in my own case, there was a time that an incident occurred in my own house that I had to deal with. Fortunately, I was old enough that I could deal with it on my mother's behalf ..."

His words trailed off at that moment, a lump got stuck in his throat, and Buono took several moments to try to compose himself. He tried to start up again, the words wouldn't come, but he was finally able to continue.

"I spoke to our team about this today," he said. "One thing I emphasized to them is that these women who are being abused are our mothers, our daughters, our sisters, our wives. Sometimes, we forget that [his voice faltering again] ... It's good that we're part of this."

LaRose, who is half-Cree, and a mentor to aboriginal kids, said he was moved by his coach's humanity.

"It has affected a lot of people," LaRose said. "It's affected Wally, it's affected me, and I'm sure it's affected a lot of other young men and women out there. I think it's great that Wally could show his emotions in a public forum. We see the hard side of Wally all the time. But you can see that there was pain in his life. It's a tough situation for anybody to go through."

LaRose, who spends his offseason speaking to aboriginal kids in British Columbia and Alberta about making positive life choices, said he readily accepted the opportunity to be a spokesman against violence. He said there were 582 reports of missing or murdered aboriginal women in the province of B.C. in 2010 alone, a figure he notes in his public service announcement.

"I've witnessed it first-hand," he said. "I've seen my mother abused by a man. At the time, I wasn't able to do anything about it. Now, I'm able to speak up about it -and it's a reason I jumped on board."

Read more:

<http://www.vancouversun.com/sports/Buono+refuses+bystander/5070526/story.html#ixzz1RXNJLwt7>