

Dungy family mourns son

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Tony Dungy blinked back tears, straining to compose himself. The Indianapolis Colts coach buried his eldest son, James, on Tuesday, lovingly recalling the 18-year-old who died in an apparent suicide last week as a "mama's boy" with a "compassionate heart." Someone who loved to smile and have fun.

"Parents hug your kids every chance you get," he said. "Tell them you love them every chance you get because you don't know when it's going to be the last time."

Dungy spoke for nearly 20 minutes during an emotional two-hour funeral service attended by NFL stars, past and present, league officials, including commissioner Paul Tagliabue, the entire Colts team and four other NFL head coaches — Herman Edwards, Dennis Green, Lovie Smith and Jack Del Rio — along with University of Washington coach Ty Willingham.

Hall of Famer Mean Joe Greene and ex-Washington Redskins cornerback Darrell Green were also among the 2,000 mourners who came to Idlewild Baptist Church in this Tampa suburb.

Dungy dabbed away tears at times, but his message throughout was clear: His son was a "sweet young boy" who struggled with many of the same issues as others his age.

"As he got a little older, like all teenagers, he was searching for who that person was inside of him. Who he was going to be. ... And like most of us, I think he went through a time as a teenager that he wasn't sure his parents always had the best advice. He wasn't sure that we always had his best interest at heart," the coach said.

"My daughter Tiara said it best the other day. She said: 'I just wish he could have made it until he was 20. Because when you're 17 or 18, sometimes the things you guys say to us don't always make sense. ... When I got to 20, they started making sense again.'"

Tiara, the eldest of Dungy's five children, is 21.

Before leaving for the cemetery, Dungy made a brief statement outside the church and, on behalf of his wife, Lauren, and family, thanked friends and fans for their support.

"We loved our son very much, he loved us and we miss him terribly. James was

a good young man with a compassionate heart and we were glad to have him for 18 years. ... God has him now for the rest of eternity," he said.

Shortly before the service began, the Colts entered a side door to the main auditorium of the 5,200-seat church, filed past the open casket and took their seats to the right of the family section.

Dungy, with his right arm draped around his wife's shoulder, led the family in and stood in front of the cherrywood casket to say a final goodbye. The couple took seats in a pew a few feet away, then watched solemnly as the lid was closed and the service began.

Dungy left the Colts last Thursday, the day his son was found, and it remains uncertain when he will return.

A preliminary autopsy report indicated the teen took his own life, but the exact cause of death won't be released until a toxicology examination is completed in four to six weeks.

The coach addressed his players during the service, calling them some of the greatest role models in the country and urging them to reach out to young people.

"I want to urge you to continue being who you are because our young boys in this country, they need to hear from you," he said. "If anything, be bolder in who you are. Because our boys are getting a lot of the wrong messages about what it means to be a man in this world. About how you should act, and how you should dress, and how you should talk, and how you should treat people. They don't always get the right message, but you guys have the right messages."

He also cautioned parents against taking their children for granted. He recalled Thanksgiving, which was the last time he saw his son, as the teen rushed off to the airport.

"I said, 'I'll see you later.' I didn't get to hug him. I knew I'd see him again pretty soon, so it didn't really bother me very much," Dungy said.

"We talked on the phone a lot the last few days. We're always talking about what was going to happen. The last few days he was saying — as the guys on the team know he would — he was saying: 'Dad, we're going to the Su-

per Bowl, and when we do, will I be on the field?'"

Dungy nearly broke down again, then finished his thought amid applause.

"And I said: 'Yeah, man. You know the hard part is getting there, but if we do, you know you're going to be on the field.' ... But I never got to hug him again. That's one thing I'll always think about and always remind people to do: Hug 'em every chance you get."

The Colts arrived aboard six chartered buses carrying players, coaches and staff.

Quarterback Peyton Manning arrived separately.

Players from the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, whom Dungy coached for six seasons, were among those present, along with owner Malcolm Glazer, former general manager Rich McKay, now with the Atlanta Falcons, and former Buccaneer and Dungy neighbor Warren Sapp.

The coach even had kind words for Glazer, who fired him after the Bucs lost in the first round of the playoffs in 2001.



Indianapolis Colts head football coach Tony Dungy, third from left, and his wife, Lauren, second left, are surrounded by friends and family after the funeral for their son, James, on Tuesday at the Idlewild Baptist Church in Tampa, Fla.

— Purpose • KUUMBA — Creativity • IMANI — Faith • UMOJA — Unity • KUJICHAGULIA

Self-Determination • UJIMA — Collective Work & Responsibility • UJAMAA — Cooperative Economics • NIA

UMOJA — Unity • KUJICHAGULIA — Self-Determination • UJIMA — Collective Work & Responsibility • UJAMAA — Cooperative Economics • NIA — Purpose • KUUMBA — Creativity

BLACK POWER
A SHOW THAT WILL INFORM, STIMULATE, AND EDUCATE YOU...

BLACK POWER
A SHOW BUILT AROUND THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF KWANZAA...

BLACK POWER
A SHOW THAT YOU HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR...

FRIDAY 9AM
ON KCEP-88.1


BLACK POWER
A HALF-HOUR OF SPIRITED AND THOUGHT PROVOKING DIALOGUE...

TODAY'S HOT TOPICS

BLACK POWER

TUNE IN AND CALL IN!
702.647.3688
702.647.2145 FAX
E-MAIL: BLKPWR4US@YAHOO.COM
WWW.POWER88LV.COM

Hosted by
RAMON SAVOY



BLACK POWER

• KUJICHAGULIA — Self-Determination • UJIMA — Collective Work & Responsibility •