

arts & entertainment

'That Championship Season' a Playhouse winner

By Robert Thurber

Winning has been, and always will be, everything in our society. As the late Vince Lombardi put it "Winning isn't everything, it's the only thing."

This curious passion Americans have for being number one is the theme around which the Lincoln Community Playhouse's latest production *That Championship Season* revolves.

This significant drama, by Jason Miller, is a past winner of the Tony Award, the Pulitzer Prize and The New York Drama Critics Review as the best play of the 1972 Broadway season. And for good reason. *That Championship Season* is a powerful play, deep in insight and rich in dimension. It is perhaps the most important dramatic work to emerge on the theater scene in the past decade.

Common bond

The subject matter of *That Championship Season* deals with the relationships of five men who are held together by a common bond; the past glories of their youth.

Following their annual custom, the five men—a retired high school basketball coach and four members of the team he guided to a state championship 20 years previous—

meet for a reunion. What follows is a gradual decline into desperation.

These former high school heroes have digressed into pathetic characters. One of them has become the inept and corrupt mayor of the town, another the high school principal and the mayor's mediocre campaign manager, the third a successful businessman who spends his spare time sleeping with everyone's wife, and the fourth has become a wandering alcoholic.

Coach survives

As the evening progresses everything that these men are or were is put under the microscope for dissection. We are allowed to examine, with humor and compassion, the fate that has befallen them. The only one who seems to survive this scrutiny is the coach who, after all these years, still has the determination and integrity that he had in his prime.

It is exciting that the Playhouse would take on the demanding task of producing such a difficult production. *That Championship Season* relies on a finely timed group effort from the actors.

Leading the cast is Phil Heckman, as the coach. If not for Heckman's inspired performance, the production would have been

a shade this side of lackluster, but his control of the stage and his finely detailed characterization held everything together.

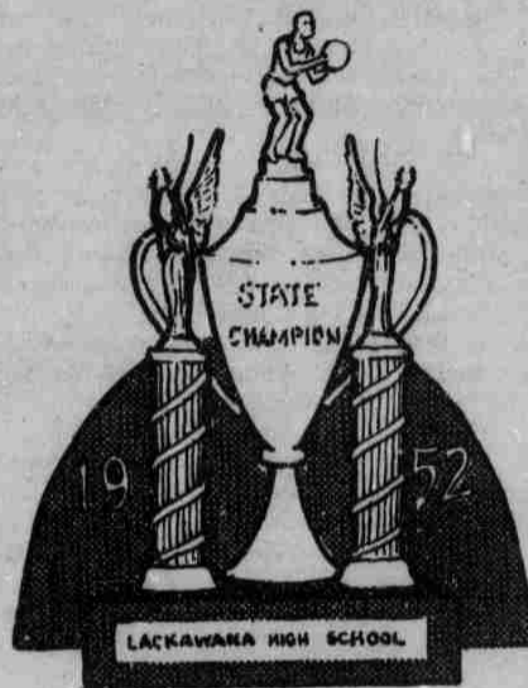
Scott Root, who was last seen at the Playhouse in *Arsenic and Old Lace*, holds down the role of the alcoholic with fine touches of humor, marred occasionally with muffed lines and mis-timed pauses.

Lawrence T. Zoucha, as his brother the high school principal, was the weakest member of the cast. His character lacked the depth and emotional impact that it sorely needed.

Rod McCullogh and Don Pedersen, in the roles of the mayor and the businessman respectively, interacted well with each other, but the intensity required to sustain these tragically flawed characters was uneven.

That Championship Season is an ambitious effort by the Community Playhouse, one that might have benefited from stronger directing and a somewhat more creative approach. Still it is a production that is worth seeing, if only for the crassly prosaic script by Miller.

That Championship Season continues through December 14th at the Playhouse, 2500 So. 56th.



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