

VINCE LOMBARDI: “Football is like life—it requires perseverance, self-denial, hard work, sacrifice, dedication and respect for authority.”

Jason Schwab greets his guests outside the office at Schwab Dairy in Delevan, N.Y. If you're visiting, by now you've noticed the Schwab Dairy sign, which sports racing flags in the farm logo. It's a nod to the competitive past of Jason's father, Gary, who raced cars on Saturday nights as part of his living, back when the dairy was only a fraction of the family's income. You may have driven through Yorkshire to get here, where at Pioneer High School, the athletic facility bears the name of Jason's brother, Tim.

Sport is not a specter in the Schwab family, not just an echo of past glories. It's business. Jason quite literally views his role at Schwab Dairy as head coach. And whether by intention or intuition (likely both), Jason follows, pretty much to the letter, the philosophies and processes of some of the most successful coaches in the sport. It's no secret that some of those philosophies and processes translate well to business, and to life.

You won't find him arguing, then, with Lombardi's football/life equation—especially the part about perseverance. There is an empty chair across the conference table from Jason in the farm office. He gestures to that chair, looks at it, says: “If Tim were sitting there across from me, you'd see it ... he's probably 6 inches wider than me.” When Tim played football at the University of New Hampshire, his teammates voted him Most Likely to Bench-Press a Cow.

Jason is a big dude himself, so when he says Tim is that much bigger, that's saying a lot. Tim would occupy a lot of space.

And his absence leaves a big, empty space behind. “My brother's story is that he did what he had to do to try and help somebody,” says Jason, telling how, in 2010, Tim went into a manure tank to try and save the life of an employee. Both the employee and Tim passed out in the tank. The employee “was in there the longest, probably 15 minutes before Tim,” Jason says, “and was up walking around the next morning.” But Tim ... “My brother was put in the ground.”

That came only three years after Tim's father fell through the roof of a barn, suffering a concussion, but dying later in the hospital from septicemia. “So it was like, boom, boom, boom ... ” he says, trailing off.

But Jason perseveres—and prospers—piling on what his father and brother helped him build by keeping their competitive spirit alive in everything he does at work.

Jason came back to the farm from Missouri Valley College in 1994, one year shy of an environmental science degree but already wearing a NAIA football national championship ring. “I was starting defensive tackle,” he says. “The team was good, but the farm was upside-down.” Jason and his dad—who had the dairy passed on to him from *his* father in what Jason describes as a “rough transition”—worked to get things turned around, going from negative equity “to triple the upside of where it was,” he says, and doubling the size of the herd from 270 to around 450.

Tim was always planning to return to the farm, and did so in 2006 with a degree in dairy science. “He was game on!” says Jason, and growth exploded. “We built a business very soundly between the three of us, and now I'm just here running what we all installed as the groundwork.”

NICK SABAN: “We're not going to talk about what we're going to accomplish, we're going to talk about how we're going to do it.”

Today, the box score at Schwab Dairy is solid. They're up to 2,000 cows in the operation. Feed efficiency ratio—or pounds of milk per pounds of dry feed consumed—is optimal, “around 1.4, 1.5,” Jason says. And then there's the championship result: 100 pounds of milk per day, per cow, which puts Schwab Dairy in an exclusive club, what in football terms would be an elite program.

How did they do it? He's not going to open the playbook and publish it here—no good coach would do that. But he will say his team is focused on the process, not the result. “Our goals are pertaining to cows: cow production and cow comfort,” he says. “No financial goals are put up. Everything we do on this farm relates back to how comfortable a cow is.”

That's true even on the crop side, growing 1,000 acres of haylage and 1,200 acres of corn. It's not about yield, but quality. “If you screw up the haylage, it might not show up for 12 months, but my herdsman is in there saying we have a seedy feed and it's wet and it's not good. So do they have goals? They're derived from cow performance.”

JOE NAMATH: “Football is a team game. So is life.”

In college football, it's called National Signing Day. In the NFL, it's the draft. Either way, it's recruiting, hiring, building a team. “My best story about hiring here is that probably everybody played a sport,” says Jason of some 20 full-time employees at the dairy. “Typically, if you hire a linebacker or a quarterback or a running back, they know what direction they're going to go when they get cornered.” >>