

## All-American Anthony Thompson helps United Way of Monroe County kick off campaign

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As a single mother raising seven children in Terre Haute, Anthony Thompson's mother often struggled to provide her kids with food, clothing and a sufficiently heated home.

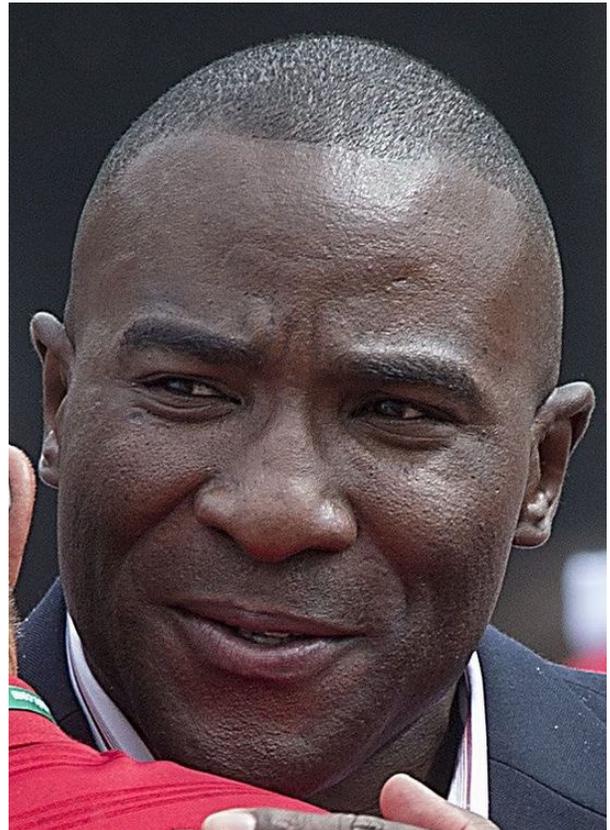
"When my mom could not make ends meet, the United Way was there for us," said Thompson, speaking Wednesday to a crowd of 150 people in the Henke Hall of Champions at a United Way of Monroe County luncheon kicking off the 2014-15 campaign. "When we could not pay the gas bill in the winter months, the United Way was there for us. When I and my three brothers and three sisters were eating our mom out of house and home, the United Way was there to provide us with food."

Thompson said when he and his siblings needed shoes, pants or winter coats, the United Way provided them.

"When our pants and shoes had holes in them, we were ashamed to go to school," he said. "By providing us with those things, the United Way gave us self-worth and made us feel like we had value. When we had no presents under our Christmas tree, the United Way was there with candy and gifts and G.I. Joe with the kung fu grip."

Thompson went on to become a star running back at Indiana University — a two-time All-American who finished second in the Heisman Trophy voting in 1989 and was later inducted into the NCAA Football Hall of Fame. Today, he is pastor of the Lighthouse Community Church in Bloomington.

"Before there was an AT, there was the United Way," he said. "Before there was an All-American high school football player, there was the United Way. Before I ever received a degree from Indiana University, and before all the awards and accolades for playing football, there was the United Way."



Anthony Thompson

Anthony Thompson, former Indiana University running back. David Snodgrass | Herald-Times

Thompson's throat then tightened up. He reached into his sport coat pocket and fished out a white hankie, using it to dab some tears trickling down his cheeks.

"I can't believe I'm standing up here bawling in Memorial Stadium, because this is the place where I made other people cry for their mommies," he said in a deep bass voice. "But if it had not been for the United Way's support, I would not be standing before you today. I would be on the streets. I really believe that."

Thompson told the story of a mother and her 8-year-old son who recently visited him. Thompson could sense right away that the youngster was troubled.

"His mother told me he had a reading disability and was struggling," Thompson said. "I saw that the boy had low self-esteem and didn't believe in himself, and I saw the ache in his mother's heart for her child."

Thompson took the boy onto the Memorial Stadium football field and showed him around. Then, he spoke to him man-to-man.

"Let me tell you something, son — when I was your age, I had the same disposition you have now," he said. "But I want you to know you can be anybody you want to be. You can go to college and earn a degree; you can play football at Indiana University; you can even be president. You just have to believe it right here (pointing to the boy's heart)."

Instantly, the boy's face split wide with a smile.

"I think that's what life is all about — lifting someone up," Thompson said. "And that's what the United Way does. It doesn't give people a hand out, but a hand up. The United Way helps you make something of yourself, and that's why I believe in the organization so much."

He concluded by telling those supporting the United Way as volunteers or donors that their impact on peoples' lives is incalculable.

"There is another Anthony Thompson out there who needs our help, and with your support and time and treasure, we can meet our campaign goal," he said. "You see before you a product of the United Way, and I'm not ashamed of that. It made me what I am today."