



Rocky Bleier, former Pittsburgh Steeler running back (left) and Rocco Scalzi, founder of Beating the Odds Foundation, have teamed up to make an impact on young people's lives, showing them they, too, can beat the odds and achieve a better life.

Beating the odds more than once

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Rocky Bleier is a name that almost all sports fans will recognize as a member of a state high school championship football team in Wisconsin, a star career at the University of Notre Dame and a member of the Pittsburgh Steelers, adding four Super Bowl Rings to his resume. Bleier is also a known war hero.

There is so much more to the story of this man that needs to be shared. Bleier is someone who will be the first to tell you that he has been blessed. Even more importantly than telling people, Bleier has been showing and sharing with people how he has beaten the odds and that they too can beat the odds and become a success in life.

During a recent interview with Bleier, he shared how things in his life came together, the major obstacles that he needed to overcome and what he is doing now to see if he may be able to help others beat those odds similar to the way that he did.

Growing up in Appleton, Wisconsin, Bleier was very much like many other children. High school sports were important to him and he worked very hard to become the best he could be. He was successful at this. When it came time to graduate, Bleier had the University of Wisconsin and The University of Notre Dame both offering him a scholarship to attend their programs. At the last minute, one other school joined in the offering process: Boston College.

When asked how it was he made his decision to accept the offer to attend and play for the University of Notre Dame, Bleier smiled and said, "My mother was Catholic and that made her decision very easy, thus making mine easy too, as that is where she wanted me go."

Moving past the great college career at Notre Dame, Bleier was drafted into the National Football League by the Pittsburgh Steeler organization. "I was thrilled and could not have been happier," Bleier said.

“Then in 1968, I was drafted into the military and my career was placed on hold. I was told that most likely they would place me in the National Guard for a year of service. My football career would be fine,” Bleier said. But with things that people really cannot control, that is not always the case.

The Vietnam War was in full swing and things had really escalated. That is when Bleier received the word that he would be shipping out to serve in Vietnam.

During a major battle, Bleier was severely wounded, but continued to aide his men and help protect those in order to evacuate the area. For this, Bleier received the Bronze Star and the Purple Heart.

“My foot was extremely damaged and during my stay in the army hospital, I was told by the doctors that I would never be able to play football again. I was devastated,” Bleier stated.

It was not too long after that Bleier received a note from Art Rooney, owner of the Pittsburgh Steelers. “The note I received from the chief said, ‘Rock, the teams not doing too good so we will need you back,’” Bleier shared.

Bleier had a choice to accept what he was told, that he would never be able to play again, or he could work hard and beat the odds. Bleier elected the second alternative and worked extremely hard to get back.

“In 1972 I made the team as a running back. I was on the Pittsburgh Steelers again. I was a part of the team that would win four Super Bowls in the next six years — something that may never be accomplished again,” Bleier said, in that soft, humble voice.

It was not too long thereafter that Rocco Scalzi of Altoona came calling on Bleier. Scalzi was the founder of Beating the Odds Foundation here in Blair County. He spoke with Bleier when they met 30 years ago on the concept, helping kids and young adults make positive changes in their lives by beating the odds.

They decided to give it a try and their first attempt brought 15,000 kids into Three Rivers Stadium in Pittsburgh to hear how they could beat the odds and change their lives. It has continued ever since, having made a positive impact on so many young people throughout Western and Central Pennsylvania.

Beating the Odds has been so successful that Bleier and Scalzi have been working with the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections and go around to state correctional facilities, talking to those younger inmates on how they, too, can change their lives and beat the odds.

Bleier will be doing a one-man play at The Mishler Theater, “A Great American Story,” for two evenings, Monday, December 17, and Tuesday, December 18 at 7:30 p.m. The play is for adults and children 10 years and up.

In a special arrangement, individuals can call the ticket office at The Mishler and tell them that they heard about the play by reading this article in *The Daily Herald* for a 50 percent discount on the ticket price (see the ad for the play on page 8 of today’s *Daily Herald* for more details.)

Bleier has beaten the odds in his own life. Now he is dedicated with helping others to beat the odds in their own lives and to turn things around.