

## **No stress here: Dungy fishes because he loves it**

BROAD RIPPLE, Indianapolis - Precious few things can distract Colts Head Coach Tony Dungy from football on a Saturday before a game. So when he called to say he had about a four hour window between practices and meetings before the Baltimore Ravens game, and would like to spend it smallmouth fishing, it was clear that fishing ranked pretty high on his list of priorities.

Dungy and his 10 year old son Eric arrived at the Broad Ripple Park boat ramp on the White River with hopes that they might catch their first Indiana bass. Over the course of the afternoon however, it became apparent that the real value of the outing for both, was the opportunity to fish together as father and son.

“My dad was a school teacher in Michigan with summers off. He used the break to take me fishing a lot. I’m sure that’s why I love to fish so much, and why I like to take my own kids fishing,” Dungy said.

In fact, wherever he coaches, Dungy takes time to investigate the fishing opportunities. Often, he is with one of his five children, or his father, who just recently retired. And while he was more than willing to compare the five cities he coached in based on their football programs, both he and Eric were more eager to rank them based on their fishing.

Not surprisingly, Minnesota was a top choice. Only a short drive north put them smack in the middle of the country’s best northern pike and walleye fishing. Dungy also said a couple of the downtown Minneapolis lakes had great bass fishing, if fished on a week day.

Without hesitation however, both Eric and his father said Tampa had the best fishing. “It was easy to head right out into the flats and catch a 15 pound snook or a bunch of redfish. And let me tell you about the tarpon fishing!” Dungy said. When his football career is over, Dungy would like to retire in Tampa, due in large part, to his love of fishing there.

Now it was time to sample some Indianapolis fishing. With the patience of a seasoned veteran, Dungy worked a four inch tube jig around the rocks, hoping to coax a smallmouth into eating. Three hours and not one bite later, the coach hadn’t given up, but Eric was starting to lose a little interest.

“Ooh, I’ve got one. No, it’s just another stick!” said a disappointed Eric. Dungy sensed Eric’s frustration, and used the opportunity to huddle him close and talk about how good sportsmanship can apply to any situation, including fishing. A difficult concept for most bored 10 year olds, but Eric got it, and went right back to fishing.

Opportunities to teach those kind of life lessons come easily when fishing with a child, says Dungy. Which is why he recently met with The Dirty Dozen, a downtown Indianapolis hunting and fishing club, to talk about how he and The Colts could help in introducing more inner city kids to the outdoors.

### **Fishing is life**

“It is very important that all children are exposed to as many different places, experiences and pastimes as possible. If I take a kid fishing that might have never been without my help, it could change the direction of his life,” Dungy said.

Delivering the outdoor experience is difficult in a city as large as Indianapolis without partnerships between clubs like The Dirty Dozen and celebrities like Dungy. Dungy and The Colts have the ability to help with sponsorships and raise awareness of the club, and in turn, the club has the facility and volunteers to deliver several inner city fishing excursions throughout the year.

While coaching in Tampa, Dungy and his wife helped chaperone a trip to South Africa with several children and adolescents who probably would have never had the opportunity otherwise. He said they took those kids on a wildlife safari, and it probably changed some of their lives forever.

“You would be surprised how much just a day fishing on The White River can influence the choices a child makes, especially when they are older, have their own kids and are looking for something to do,” he said.

With clouds rolling in and the prospect of getting rained on looming, everyone decided it was time to concede defeat to The White River, and head home having caught no fish. But despite not so much as even a bite all afternoon, Dungy started reeling in his line and said, “So when can we do this again?”

There is no greater test of a person’s love for fishing than when he eagerly looks forward to going again on the heels of a fishless outing.

But then, just as he was slowly dragging his tube jig back to the boat one last time, Dungy hooked a fish. A last minute reprieve from the river. Without hesitation, he handed the rod to Eric, who fought valiantly, but lost the fish before anyone could see what it was.

It didn’t matter to either one of them. What mattered to Dungy was that one day Eric would remember to take his son fishing, and hand him the rod holding the last fish of the day.