

## *Friedman, Roman shine in Players' 'Lombardi'*

By Marty Lash 7:00 PM, Sep 11, 2012

<http://www.greenbaypressgazette.com/article/20120912/ADV01/309120152/Friedman-Roman-shine-Players->

Vince Lombardi hardly needs any introduction in this part of the world. How he brought a failing, uninspired Green Bay Packers football team to greatness is legendary.

While fans know what he did with the Packers, how much is known about the man himself? Eric Simonson's play "Lombardi," which opened last week at Peninsula Players, allows us to find out who he really was.

Based on the David Maraniss book "When Pride Still Mattered: A Life of Vince Lombardi," the show depicts Lombardi's marriage, his relationships with key Packers players at that time and how he thought and led.

Much of the play centers on a fictional reporter, Michael McCormick, who works for a magazine. McCormick is trying to get a story on Lombardi and the team. Lombardi does not trust the press and makes the reporter's job very hard. Lombardi even has McCormick wonder if journalism is what he should be doing.

Aside from Lombardi himself, the other central character in the play is his wife, Marie. According to the play, she was a devoted wife who just wanted her husband to do what pleased him.

There is a telling scene, set before Lombardi got the Packers job, where he is actually considering becoming a banker and is trying to get his wife to make the decision for him. They talk a lot about how wonderful it would be to for him to have a "normal" 9-to-5 life.

For a moment, Lombardi flirts with the idea as he seems frustrated that he has yet to be offered any significant position in football. Probably his pride was a factor. But when he gets the call from the Packers, the idea of banking goes out the window and his wife happily, but somewhat reluctantly, goes along with his decision.

The play shows that Lombardi was quite tough with his players. When he becomes the team's coach, he meets with Dave Robinson, Paul Hornung and Jim Taylor. He has no tolerance for Hornung's need to party and also is annoyed when Taylor wants to use an agent. Robinson wanted the African-American players to be treated with respect.

In some moments the play has us see that Lombardi could be a bully to the players, but also respectful and how he managed to gain their confidence. It seems they recognized that he might be what the team needed.

Lombardi's unique drive and boundless passion for football is what makes the show interesting. He had a certain way of thinking that clearly made the difference. The play gives us the chance to see how he operated.

Players regular Neil Friedman takes on the central role and is perfect for the part. In fact, I cannot imagine the role being played better. Friedman has remarkable stage presence, and I find that his portrayal of Lombardi is very believable. The part calls for strong, forceful acting and Friedman nails it perfectly.

As Marie, Carmen Roman, too, is wonderful. The show suggests that the Lombardis had a tempestuous relationship, and Roman gives her all in moments when they are fighting or disagreeing. Yet there is also unmistakable warmth in Roman's depiction.

"Lombardi" runs through Oct. 14 at Peninsula Players Theatre, 4351 Peninsula Players Road, Fish Creek. Curtain times are at 7 p.m. Tuesdays through Sundays, except for 4 p.m. Sept. 16 and 23 and Oct. 14. Individual ticket prices are \$33 to \$39; group rates are available. For tickets or more information, call (920) 868-3287 or visit [www.peninsulaplayers.com](http://www.peninsulaplayers.com).

**Marty Lash is a member of the North American Music Critics Association and American Theater Critics Association. He regularly writes reviews and stories on music and theater for Your Key to the Door Weekly. Contact him at [lash-marty@aol.com](mailto:lash-marty@aol.com).**



Neil Friedman and Carmen Roman as Vince and Marie Lombardi in the Peninsula Players production of "Lombardi" on stage through Oct. 14.