True leaders are in short supply. Today, the Republican Party has no leader. The Obama administration has unsuccessfully tried to make Rush Limbaugh the head of the party, but he doesn’t want the job. The pay cut would be too drastic. But the Democrats are no better off than the Republicans. Chaos exists in Washington, and I predict it will only get worse. Leadership is a vital component to being successful whether you are working in a company, serving as an elected official, or coaching a football team.

I met Mike Vincent one night when we had both arrived at Fugler-Hammet Hall, a girls’ dormitory, at Delta State University. We had escorted our girlfriends back to their dorm, and I must say that we had picked the two prettiest girls on campus. Back in those days, the girls had to be in by ten o’clock. After our dates had gone inside, we stood and talked for a few minutes. To tell you the truth, he looked like he belonged in the physics department. He was tall, wore a flat-top, and had on glasses. If he had been older and had worn a bow tie, he could have been confused for one of the professors.

He was soft spoken and easy to like. I asked him if he played any sports, and he surprisingly told me that he played football. “What position?” I asked naively. “Quarterback,” came the reply.

Now this is where youth and perhaps dumbness works overtime. “Do you think you’ll get to play any Saturday night?” I asked. “I hope so,” he replied, “but there are some very good quarterbacks on the team, and this is our first game. Maybe Coach McCool will let me play some.” My mind was telling me that he probably played third or fourth team.

As I peered down from the stands, I saw my new friend standing on the sidelines, his arms folded, his helmet Lord knows where. Delta State received the kick off and the team ran three plays and punted. The other team took the ball and promptly marched down the field on six plays for a touchdown.

“It’s too bad,” I thought. “I was hoping that Mike would get to play some.” But this time when I looked down to the DSU bench, things had changed. Mike was standing next to the coach, and he had his helmet on. He was going in. The opposing team kicked off, and the Statesman took over at about their own 23 yard line. Now Mike was in the game.

I began to notice little things happening on the field. The wide receivers seemed to have more life. The linemen seemed energized. The tight ends seemed a little more eager to play. Mike took the snap from center, dropped back seven steps and let the ball fly.
Forty yards down field, the wide receiver was making his cut. Just as he opened up, the ball hit him in the chest. First and ten. “I didn’t know that Mike could throw a football like that,” I muttered.

On the very next play, a motion play as I recall, Ray Morgan, one of the fastest players on the team, got behind the defensive back, and Mike threw a strike that hit Ray in the hands for a touchdown. Now, we had a new ballgame. When the dust had settled, Delta State had won the game by a one-sided score, and Mike Vincent had given a clinic on how to run a passing attack. The strange thing was that to my knowledge, Mike never started a game the whole season. “Coach always starts the player who has the best week in practice,” he told me. Starting a game was not important to Mike—finishing the game was. He was a great one, the best quarterback in Mississippi that year, and later, he was drafted by the Miami Dolphins.

He was more than an excellent athlete with extraordinary skills. He was a leader. I once asked what Mike told the players when he checked into the huddle. One of his teammates said, “Well, he just comes into the huddle and asks us if we’re ready to score? It’s not hard to figure out the answer to that question.”

Leaders make a difference. They inspire other people to do their best, to accomplish goals that seem impossible, and they do it in many different ways. Leaders are confident and poised. They put in the extra work so that they understand what it is that they are supposed to do. They are not afraid of setting goals and making decisions. They utilize the strengths of their teammates and never make themselves out to be smarter, more important, or special. They have high moral standards. They earn the respect of their peers and subordinates. They always do what is right.

There have been some great quarterbacks to play at Delta State University. Some have set school records and gone on to play at the pro level. I don’t know how Mike Vincent would compare to these modern-day quarterbacks, but my guess is this: the other great quarterbacks would probably run the first series of plays. Then the coach would tell Mike to put his helmet on and get into the game. From their position on the bench, the modern quarterbacks would witness history being made. They would, also, be witnessing leadership in action.