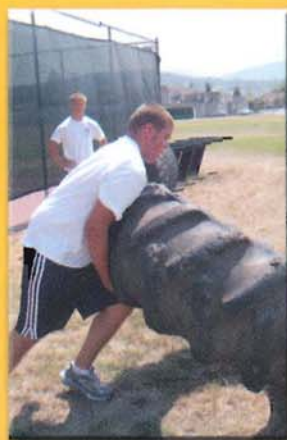


SEQUIM HIGH SCHOOL **WOLVES**

WHEN BEING GOOD IS JUST NOT GOOD ENOUGH



How Sequim High School took its football program from bad to good to great

After nine losing seasons, Sequim High School finished its 2003 season at 7-3. It was the team's best showing since 1978, and their record even included two victories against previously undefeated teams. The players from this 3A school in Sequim, Washington, were thrilled with their performance – and rightly so. But Erik Wiker, who was promoted to head coach after that breakout season, wasn't ready to settle for a good year; he wanted a great year.

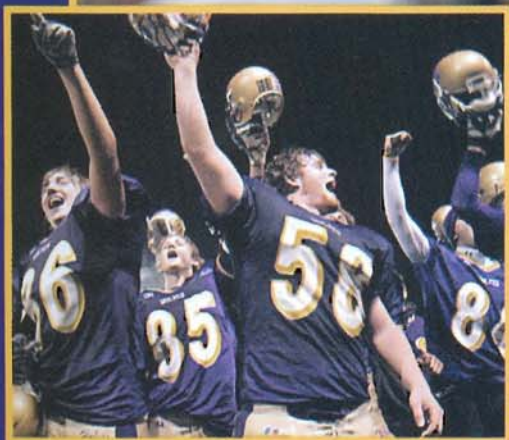
"Last year we'd had a six-game winning streak at the end of the season," says Wiker. "I thought that

if the team had been sold on working harder in the preceding off-season, they would have played better in those first four games and would have had an even better record."

Wiker was determined to get his team into peak condition for the 2004 season, but he had his work cut out for him: At Sequim it wasn't just a case of getting the players to work harder – for many it was a major challenge to get them to just show up! "When I was the offensive line coach and strength coach at my previous high school, I would have 50 guys in the weightroom, four days a week. When I



**In 2003
the Wolves finished 7-3, their
best season since
2003. Last year
they took their
program to the
next level with
a 10-0 record.**



first came to Sequim, I would see 10, maybe 15 guys. Many players I wouldn't see for three months, and some not until the first day of practice – and some of them didn't even show up for that!"

When Wiker took over the program, he set about increasing interest in off-season training by establishing an awards system. He called it the *Wolf Deeds* program, and it involved recognizing off-season activities by awarding stickers that are placed on the back of the players' football helmets. "What I did was give the players off-season points for everything they did, such as lifting weights, participating in spring ball, our summer football camp, other sports and academics," says Wiker. "For workouts, they would get one sticker for every four workouts they completed. Soon we were averaging 30 guys in the weightroom a day."

In addition to getting the players involved in off-season training, he also implemented an intense in-season program. Wiker said it was a shock for many of the players to learn that during the season they would be lifting on Monday and Wednesday mornings. "A lot of them were saying, 'Oh man, I thought it was going to be like last year when we didn't do that stuff,' to which I would say, 'We did all right last year, but don't you want to do better than that?'"

To reinforce this message, Wiker used a quote he heard at the BFS clinic that inspired pro baseball player Tagg Bozied, "If you want something you've

never had, you have to be willing to do something you've never done." The team also did goal setting. "They said they wanted to finish 10-0 and be league champs, and we haven't been able to accomplish those goals since 1978. To achieve such success, to go on to that next level, I told them they couldn't do things the same way they did before."

In all these activities, from goal setting to off-season training to in-season training, all the players worked hard and complimented each other. The results? In 2004 the Sequim Wolves not only continued their winning ways but also succeeded in finishing the regular season undefeated: 10-0. In the playoffs, competing against Franklin-Pearce from Tacoma, Washington, they lost 35-36, with the winning point decided by a field goal that bounced off the uprights and went in.

The Nellie Factor

When Wiker took over the Wolves, one thing he wanted to use to jump-start the program was a BFS clinic. He asked a former coach and long-time friend of his, Coach Bruce Shearer from Burlington-Edison High School in Burlington, Washington, about the idea. Shearer agreed that it would be a smart move. "Bruce said do it, for sure! From there Wiker talked to John Rowbotham and ended up scheduling a two-day clinic with over 80 participants, both girls and boys. "Before the clinic none of the other teams



One of the keys to the Wolves' success was an increased emphasis on weight training, not just off-season but also in-season.

wanted to help or had much interest, but that changed after the clinic." One reason was John Nelson.

When Wiker first called to schedule the clinic, Rowbotham thought that he wouldn't be able to make it because he'd be attending his sister's graduation that Thursday and also would be taking care of his friend John "Nellie" Nelson. Nellie, an assistant football coach at Pacific Lutheran University, is paralyzed from the neck down from a disease called arthrogryposis. "John said that if he could bring Nellie, he could do the clinic." So Nellie came, and on Saturday Nellie got the opportunity to address the participants as a group. "Nellie touched so many kids – it was awesome. He talked for about a half an hour, and it was really a great experience for everyone."

One of the training concepts that Wiker got from the clinic was the value of variations of BFS core lifts such as the towel bench and box squat. "We had never used the towel bench or box squat, but now we're doing these all the time, and now all the other sports want to join in and have me help them. The box squat really helped us a lot to stay strong during the season. On Wednesday mornings I had all the kids box squatting a lot of weight, but they recovered really fast – I know because we always had our toughest practice on Wednesdays, and I never heard anyone say, 'Coach, I'm really sore from my morning workout and I feel tight.'"

Another insight Wiker gained from the clinic

was the importance of always emphasizing good technique, especially in the squat. "There's a big difference in how much weight you lift when you do the squat right and hit true parallel," says Wiker. "After the clinic I erased all our old lifting records, because I wanted to have our athletes doing the lifts the right way." Even with the new judging restrictions, Wiker still had two athletes squat over 400, and he's seen the number of athletes power cleaning over 200 increase from two to eight. "And you have to understand – when we started we were so weak that we had linemen who couldn't even bench press 200!"

United We Win

As he develops his team for next year, Wiker says he doesn't agree with the motto "If you stay, you play." "Adopting such an attitude doesn't motivate a kid to work out hard – a freshman can beat out a senior. That being said, I believe loyalty is huge. If a player works harder in the off-season than the starter in that position from last season, I could put that player ahead of the starter during our first practices. But I'll tell them, 'I'm giving you this shot because of your work ethic, but the position is yours to lose. If the other kid plays better than you, then he's going to start because it's for the good of the team.'"

Having a strong junior varsity team is important to Sequim High School, but at first Wiker had to



All athletes, male and female, have access to a super weightroom and great coaching at Sequim High School.

convince the JV players to agree with that philosophy and work hard. He shares the experience of a kid who felt that he was wasting his time because he didn't make the varsity team. "I said, 'What are you talking about? Our JV team only lost one game, and you did really awesome, and you got to play some on varsity – we just happened to have a senior-loaded team.' It was hard for him to see that because he didn't get all the benefits – kids want to be the stars. I try to tell them that the best thing for some of them is to be on JV so they can play a lot, and not just sit on bench on varsity. And they don't see that all the time. They want to be on varsity; that's a huge thing for them. A couple days later that kid came to me and said, 'I see how selfish I was being.'"


Wiker's concept of team unity is reflected in his zero tolerance policy towards hazing. "We treat everybody with respect at Sequim High School, and just because you're varsity doesn't mean you're better or more important than the freshmen. We don't have freshmen carrying the bags of seniors or doing all the cleanup – in fact, I'll often ask the team captains or the older kids to clean up after practice. And when we do activities, we try to get the whole team involved."

During games, Wiker also insists on treating his opponents with respect. One way he shows it is by not running up the score in easy victories, even if it means a higher state ranking. "Even though we were undefeated this year, there were other teams in front of us with one loss and two-loss records because they

happened to beat somebody bad."

"I tell my players, 'To improve our ranking on a piece of paper from Seattle is no reason to run up the score. Those kids work hard over there too, and they don't deserve to be humiliated in front of everybody by the score – that's not what it's all about.' My first year here, a team we were playing was up 54-0 as time was running out at the half, and then they called a time out so they could kick a field goal. Nothing good came out of that game; our kids were totally devastated."

Asked about what he thought of the movie *Friday Night Lights*, Wiker replied, "I don't think that is the average high school, and from a coaching point of view I believe the coach shouldn't have allowed that parent to yell at his kid and come onto the field. That's really humiliating for the kid to have that happen, especially in front of everybody. The coach should have said to that parent, 'Hey, parents are not allowed on the field at practice, and please don't address him this way at practice.'"

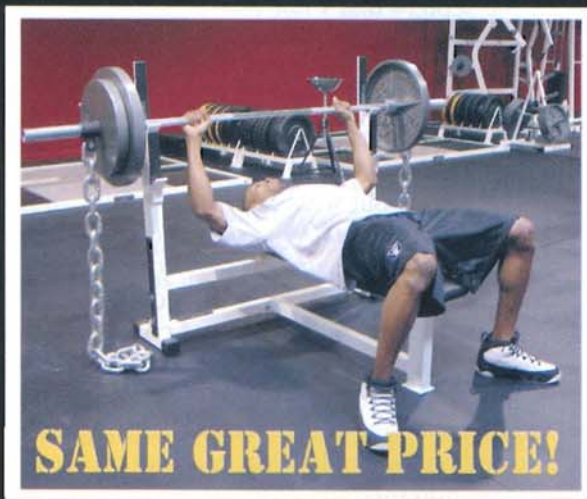
Wiker also says he was also bothered that the movie gave the impression that football is everything. "Football is not life, but a vehicle for kids to learn about life. After we lost the playoff game, I told my players that this loss would help them overcome obstacles later in life. I told them that they are champions, and champions don't dwell on disappointments forever – they bounce back to greatness." 

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