

# SP

Sparrows  
Point



# THE MIRACLE SEASON

*When you're 1-39,  
it's time for a change*

Until recently, it would have been difficult to imagine a football program as mediocre as that of Sparrows Point High School in Baltimore, Maryland. How bad was it? Prior to 2003, the school had landed only one victory in 40 games, and that win was a forfeit! Contrast that with this season, in which the team finished the regular season 9-1 and then



matched their most wins ever in school history by winning the regional semifinal game 27-0.

Was this 2004 season a fluke or not? Ask coach Eric Webber, who took over the football program in 2003. "Sparrows Point is a small school and it was difficult to generate

interest in the football team; but the biggest difference is that as soon as I took over the program, we went to BFS." As Webber discovered,





photo: Bill Gates

**Prior to 2003, the football team at Sparrows Point High School had a 1-39 record, and that win was a forfeit! This year the team finished the regular season 9-1. Pictured are Billy Blevins (#34), David Brady (#8), and Evan Pritchett.**

the change required a huge learning curve for his athletes.

"I didn't have any weightroom records for the power clean, because most of the players didn't know what a power clean was!" says Webber. "And even though they were doing squats, I know they weren't going parallel because I had a lot of kids complaining my first year about having to go down so low."

Besides lifting, the key was getting the players sold on the attitude they could win; but that's nothing new to Webber. At his previous high school the team progressed from winning only three games in two years to a 5-5 season, followed by three winning seasons (7-3, 7-3, and 6-4). "The biggest thing with that team was dealing with the 'We can't win' attitude," says Webber. In his first year at Sparrows Point, the team made a modest improvement by going 3-6, but Webber says they were competitive in just about every game. "There were only a couple of games that we got blown out, but after that the program really took off. This year our kids dedicated themselves to winning."

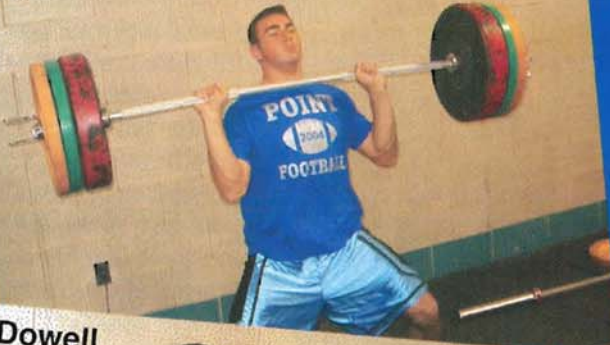
That attitude adjustment was reflected in the weightroom. "At first it was hard to get kids in the weightroom, but it's getting easier and easier, and the weightroom is pretty full in the summer," says Webber. "Success breeds success."

## Multi-Sport Mania

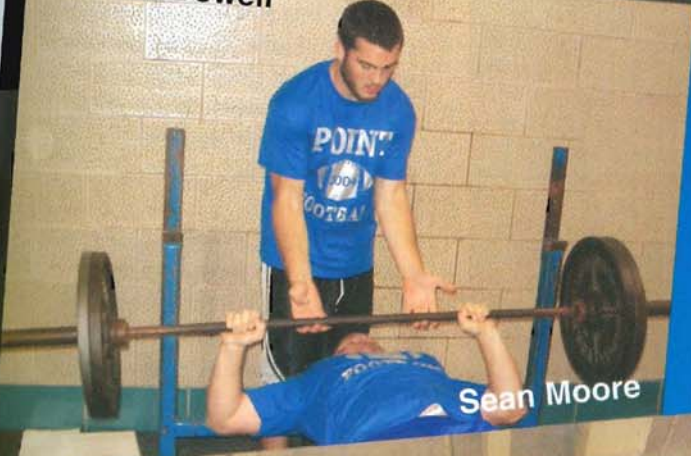
Webber firmly believes that high school athletes should play multiple sports. "I have no one-sport athletes on this football team; and if we did, the other sports would just die," says Webber. "In fact, 9 of my 11 starters are three-sport athletes, and they find time to get into the weightroom." Helping run things smoothly in the strength department is Scott Lenhart, the weight training coordinator, and an enthusiastic group of weightroom assistants who coach other sports. "I have an assistant who is a wrestling coach, I have an assistant who is an indoor track coach and I have an assistant who is a baseball coach," says Webber. "They know the value of in-season training,



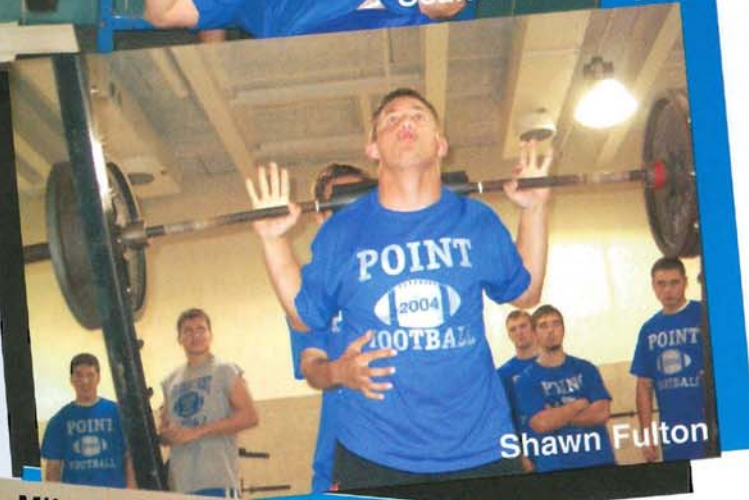
David Brady



John McDowell

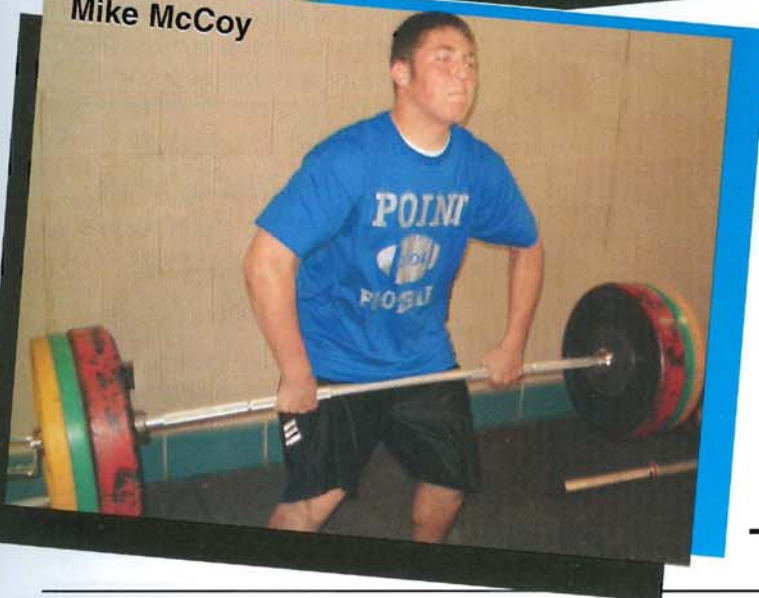


Sean Moore



Shawn Fulton

Mike McCoy



so when let's say wrestling practice is over or baseball practice is over, the kids are in the weightroom."

Workouts are conducted in an activity room that measures about 60 feet by 40 feet. Because of its relatively small size and the large number of athletes who want to train, Webber had to do a little creative organization. "What I did was institute a weight-training-for-athletes course for the school, and I was able to get a lot of football players in the class. With 27 varsity and 37 JV, being able to have some athletes lift during the day really helped out. Also, practices for all the other sports end at different times, so it's not a big problem for them to get in their workouts."

Webber designed the weightroom to follow the BFS program, so his equipment includes three squat racks, three power clean stations, three bench press stations, and one deadlift station. This enables him to have 30 kids training at a time. Although several girls use the weightroom, he would like more girls to get more involved. "The girls who train are in my weight training class, and they work hard and see the benefits; but most of the girls want to lift by themselves instead of having guys in the weightroom. Next year we'll try to institute a weight-training-for-female-athletes class, which will gradually help them become more willing to train in a coed environment."

Two specific methods Webber uses to motivate his players are record boards and T-shirt promotions. Each athlete gets a tag with their name on it corresponding to how much they lift, and they are awarded T-shirts - "They knock themselves out for these T-shirts" - for reaching certain levels in their four core lifts: power clean, parallel squat, bench press and deadlift. Why four lifts, and not single lifts? "We don't want to encourage bench press monkeys who just want to bench. Power for playing football comes

**Last year only one football player on the team could bench press 250; this year there are six. Also, most of the athletes have added at least 50 pounds to their squat and have dropped .2 seconds off their forty.**





from the hips, so we're going to make certain our players do all the core lifts."

Webber's program has paid off in the numbers. Last year he had only one football player bench press 250, but this year he has six. He's also seen most of his athletes in the off-season add at least 50 pounds to their squat. "The squat is the lift that has gone up the most, partly because kids didn't like it and didn't do it before we took over." As for team speed results, Webber believes emphasis on the squat and ladder drills have helped tremendously, with the average player this off-season dropping .2 seconds off their 40. Says Webber, "I truly believe that the parallel squat is the speed lift."

Asked if he ever considered copying college programs, Webber replies, "There are schools in our district that are doing things I believe are a little too complicated, but they happen to believe you have to be complicated to be successful. I don't think that way at all. BFS is what I know and in fact it's all I've ever done. The high school I attended followed BFS, and when I started coaching I was an assistant coach at Fort Hill, Maryland, which uses BFS and has a dominant program."

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**Sophomore running back Mike McCoy uses the power he developed in the weightroom to break a tackle.**

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### **A Tradition of Caring**

Widely regarded as the "best-kept secret in Baltimore County," Sparrows Point High

photo: Bill Gates



school was established in 1908 and is located on a peninsula that flows into Chesapeake Bay. "It's a beautiful place to go to school because we're basically surrounded by water," says Webber. "But what's great about this place is a lot of kids' fathers and mothers went to Sparrows Point; their grandmothers and grandfathers went to Sparrows Point. And because teachers never seem to leave Sparrows Point, there's a good chance that your mother or father was taught by the same teacher. That's really cool!"

In the Baltimore County School District, there are 24 schools. Webber considers the area's uncrowded campuses greatly advantageous because "kids tend to get lost in the big schools, which I believe can lead to behavior problems." At Sparrows Point, says Webber, students have the benefit of being a part of a big school system but yet having small class sizes. Such a system is effective, as 60 percent of graduates go on to college. In fact, thanks to a dual enrollment program, seniors can get a head start by earning up to 15 college credits before they graduate.

Webber says that he has a supportive administration that has helped him and his athletes achieve their goals, such as building a new athletic

stadium, First Mariner Field at Sparrows Point. "The working relationship among the staff is what keeps me here and is what keeps this school going strong.

Russell Lingner, our athletic director, has been especially helpful and worked with me to make my weight-training-for-athletes class happen."

Asked what his basic philosophy of success is with turning around a lackluster program, Webber doesn't bat an eye as he replies, "It's simple. Kids want to be loved. On the football field I tell my players I love them all the time, and I have no problem saying that. If your players know you love them, you're not going to have many of those discipline problems you'll

find at other schools."

This year was indeed a miracle season for the Sparrows Point football team, a season that brought with it a deep sense of pride. Although it will be difficult for the 2005 team to repeat this year's accomplishments because they will be losing 18 seniors to graduation, Coach Eric Webber says the JV team is hungry and he is confident they will work hard. "They see what the benefits of hard work brought this year's team, and they are inspired to reap those benefits also." **BFS**

*This year was indeed a miracle season for the Sparrows Point football team, a season that brought with it a deep sense of pride.*

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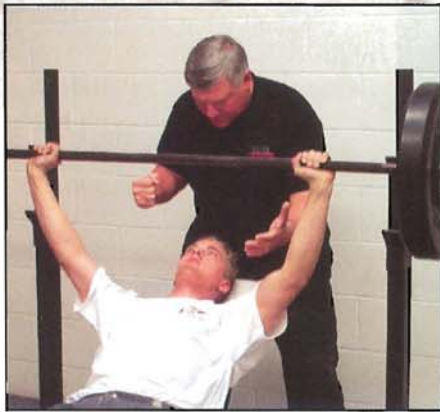
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cinch up tight!

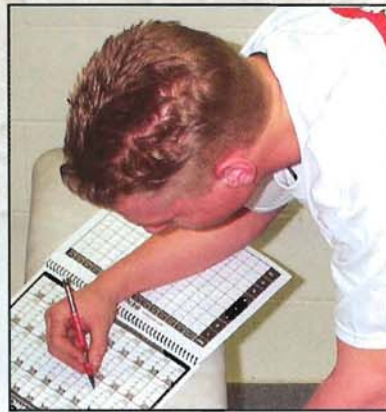


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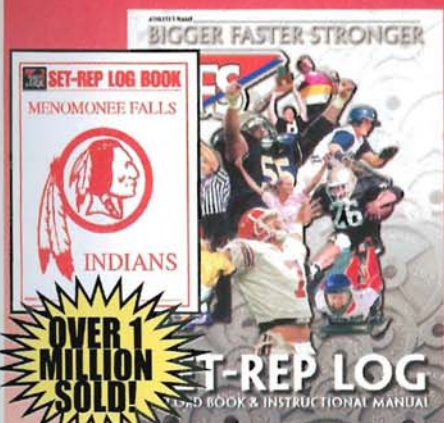


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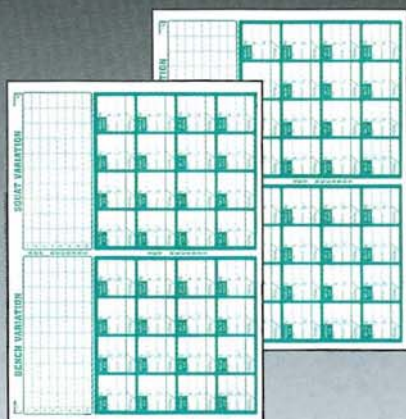
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