

There's a lot more to running a successful high school football program than X's and O's. Playmaking ability is important, as is having good practices, but success often has a lot to do with what happens off the field. Establishing a sense of team pride and building community support can be just as important as knowing whether to run the ball or throw a pass. A case in point: **Williamsville East High School in Williamsville, New York.**



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There's a new sense of pride being built at Williamsville East High School

Until last season, the Williamsville East Flames had established a solid reputation for mediocrity. Over a span of almost 30 years, the best any Flames team could produce was a five-win season — and don't even ask about playoff berths or championships. Whatever approaches were tried in the past just hadn't worked, and it was time to try something new. **That something new was Coach Henry Fumerelle in July of 2003.**





A car wash was one of the fundraising events that helped Williamsville East build its new home stadium.



"I had two primary goals when I took over the program at Williamsville East," says Fumerelle, who has been coaching for 14 years. "First, I wanted to establish a home-field advantage and second, upgrade the weight training program." Because he was hired just two weeks before the start of the season, he had to put both these goals on hold. When the season ended early with just two victories, Fumerelle put his plan in action.

The Flames Are in the House

Fumerelle's approach to achieving his goal of gaining a home-field advantage was simple: start by getting a home field! Because of not having adequate varsity facilities, the Flames played their games at a district field. "There's a huge sense of pride in having a home field, and it just didn't sit well with me that first year to see us play our homecoming game against rival Williamsville South on their turf," says Fumerelle. The Williamsville East football program was ready for an upgrade, big time.

With some funding from the school district, donations from the Booster Club and proceeds from a lot of car washes and other fundraising activities, the school got new bleachers, a new press box and a new sound system. They also had an event called "Build Our Own House Day," in which the athletes, boosters and coaches provided the elbow grease to paint the visitors' bleachers and the goalposts. Says Fumerelle, "These physical additions gave us a huge sense of pride, even more so because so many great people were involved in making it happen. It was a team effort that included boosters, the athletic director and the principal. I can't thank them enough."

While all this fundraising and building was going on, Fumerelle also worked on developing a stronger off-season program. "My feeling is that championships are built in the off-season. Our players would show up in August and wanted to win just as badly as any other team, but they needed the will to prepare to win with a strong work ethic in the weightroom prior to the season."



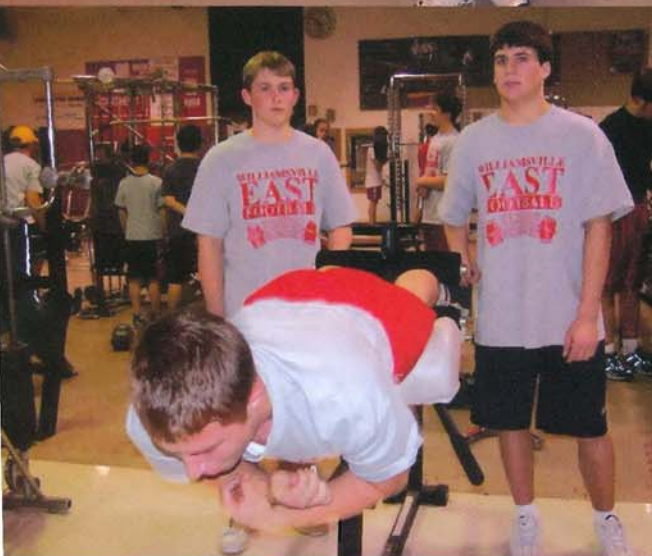
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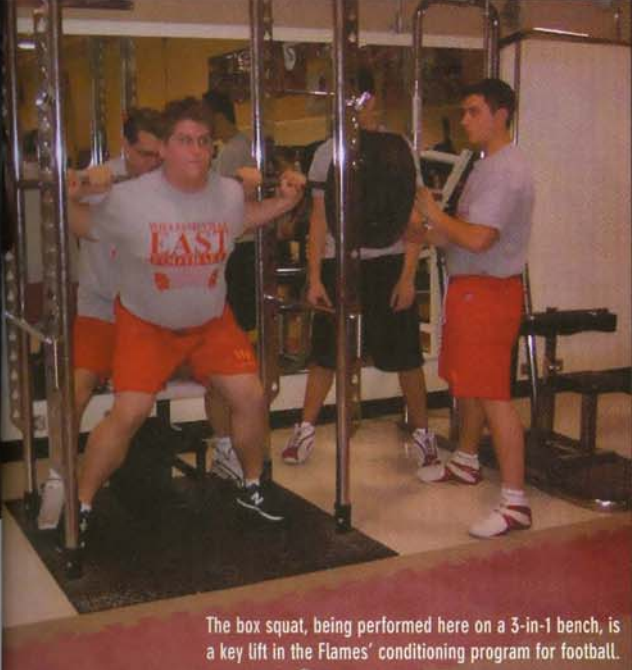
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To help kick off his first off-season, Fumerelle held a Be an 11 Seminar last April with BFS Clinician Jim Brown. "We were going to hold it in a hotel because it was scheduled for a Sunday, but the principal opened up the school for us. Our varsity and JV teams came, and it was terrific – and from that point on I took the BFS program and just spring-boarded it right into the weightroom – the weight program really took off after that seminar."



What types of improvements have the Flames made since implementing the BFS program? "We've made great strides in our speed, strength and explosiveness – it's the strongest team we've ever had. Just to give you an idea, out of the 32 boys who tested we had 15 bench press over 200 pounds, which is twice as many as the year before. We also had 16 kids run 4.9 or better, and seven run 4.7 or better – we've never had that



The box squat, being performed here on a 3-in-1 bench, is a key lift in the Flames' conditioning program for football.



kind of team speed."

Two of the keys were plyometrics, which Coach Fumerelle implemented after buying a set of plyometric boxes from BFS, and the Dot Drill "The plyometrics really helped our explosiveness, and the Dot Drill helped our change of direction." Fumerelle says this combination of speed, agility and strength resulted in a marked decrease in injuries. "During my first year we got beat up very badly with eight season-ending injuries; this year we had one unfortunate injury in the ninth game of the season, but everybody else was virtually injury free. I'm convinced this had to do with the new program."

To motivate his players in the off-season, Fumerelle awarded T-shirts and distributed monthly newsletters that discussed off-season success and the success of other school programs, in which many football players are involved. "Also, this year we are going to our first "every-team" camp in July, which everyone is looking forward to."

Home field Advantage

The Flames opened the 2004 season against Kenmore East. "We had a really good crowd, especially since the game actually took place before school had started. It was a really exciting day for us.

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We were successful with a big win – it was a great way to christen our home field.”

More good news followed, as the team finished the season with six wins – the most ever in the 30-year history of the football program – and a place in the consolation playoffs. This year the outlook is even better. “We’re really anticipating next year, because in addition to the six wins from the varsity, our JV team had its best record in 12 years, with five wins, and played in the league championship. With those players coming up, and with the participation in the weightroom really taking off, we are very excited about this coming season.”

According to Fumerelle, the success of the football team has brought them up to par with the other strong Williamsville

East athletic programs. “Our programs are strong all the way through.”

Fumerelle’s emphasis on a strong work ethic in athletics has also had a favorable effect on academics. For the second year in a row, the Flames have had at least 10 athletes make a grade-point average of at least 90 percent. “This year, of the 32 players on our team, we had 14 achieve 90 percent. “You know, I hear about other coaches saying, ‘Gee, I hope I can keep Johnny or Bill eligible to play football this year.’ Well, that’s something I never have to worry about because we have very high academic standards at Williamsville East.”

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