



Photos by John Herndon and Troy Young

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Home Sweet Home: **Anderson County High**

How this 7-44 football program went 11-1 in 2007

They say you can't go home again; but when Mark Peach was offered the opportunity, it seemed the axiom should have been "Maybe you *shouldn't* go home again."

Since graduating from Anderson County High School in 1989, Peach had coached many winning programs at both the high school and college level. But back at his high school alma mater, located in Lawrenceburg, Kentucky, the Bearcats had won only

seven games in the previous five years. At best, coming home would be, as the positive thinkers would say, a challenge.

Coach Peach had great memories from when he played for the Bearcats. In his junior year his team finished 10-0 in the regular season, the first 10-win season in the history of the school. The next year they again had 10 victories and won their first-ever playoff game. But in recent years the Bearcats had

struggled. Yet when the opportunity arose in 2005 for Peach to return to Anderson County High and become head football coach, it was one chance he could not pass up.

"I had two children: a daughter, age 11, and a son, age 7; and at the time I was coaching at Campbellsville University. When you're a college coach, you have to keep one bag packed at all times. Did we really want to move all over the country, every

year or every other year?” As a family their answer was no, but Peach did want to continue coaching. He says, “It just worked out that the current principal at Anderson County High had hired me when he worked at Paul Lawrence Dunbar High. Also, my mom and dad still live here; this is a great school and a nice place to raise a family.”

Peach’s return provided a classic example of the “You can’t come home again” truism: His first season could be aptly classified as a disaster – they finished 1-9. “If you’re a competitor, you want to go out and do your very best you can; and so to be honest with you, that season wasn’t a whole lot of fun,” says Peach. “My staff and I knew that if we were going to be competitive, the only way we were going to be able to do it was with a lot of hard work.” But first, they needed a weightroom – badly.

Just how bad was the weightroom? “Put it this way,” says Peach, “the weightroom that was here when I came back to Anderson County was the same weightroom we had when I played here. It was dirty, really dirty, and cramped.” But thanks to a supportive administration, when Peach took over, the wheels were set in motion to build a 4,000-square-foot weightroom. “We decided to go with BFS equipment, which I think is one of the best decisions we ever made.”

The reason Peach was so concerned about the weightroom was that their team wasn’t fast and they certainly were not strong. “I don’t think

I realized until I got into it just how bad it was at that time,” says Peach. “We had only one kid who could bench press 200 pounds; that’s how weak we were. And no one could do the Dot Drill in less than 60 seconds; that’s how slow we were.”

For the 2006 season, the team worked hard and their efforts paid off



Coach Peach gives instructions to quarterback Jake Russell.

with a 6-4 record, their first winning season since 1999. “Our community was really excited about our success,” says Peach. “We wanted to build on that success, so we brought out BFS clinician Tom Sullivan to give a Be an 11.”

During that presentation, what took Peach completely by surprise was the part where the athletes had to come up with their own goals. “Their goal was to become regional champions, or better. Coming off the 6-4 season after going 7-44, as a coach you’re thinking, ‘That’s a great goal, but can we actually reach it? We’ve only been in one regional championship game in school history!’”

What also amazed Peach was how

focused his athletes became after the Be an 11. “Our players put down some very specific goals, such as ‘Run three extra sprints, take 25 extra snaps or catch 25 extra balls after practice’ – those were some of the goals they put down. What was so great was that they did all these things by themselves; I didn’t have to say anything.

When you’re willing to do all those little extra things, to go above and beyond, good things will come your way.” And they certainly did.

Miracle Season

In 2007 the Bearcats clawed their way to an undefeated regular season, only the second team in their 57-year history to do so. They won their first district title since 1972 and won their first playoff game in the history of the school, defeating South Oldham 49-7. Against Oldham County, they missed a

heartbreaker, 21-22. These accomplishments are even more impressive when you consider that they moved up from the 3A division they had played in during the previous season to the 5A division.

What advice would Peach give to a coach who was inheriting a struggling program as he did? Says Peach, “If you can improve your weight-training facility, that’s number one. If you don’t have a lot of talent running through your school, you have to take the kids you’ve got and develop them. Make them stronger. Make them faster. Make them more agile. That’s what we did here at Anderson County.” Then, continues Peach, there’s leadership.

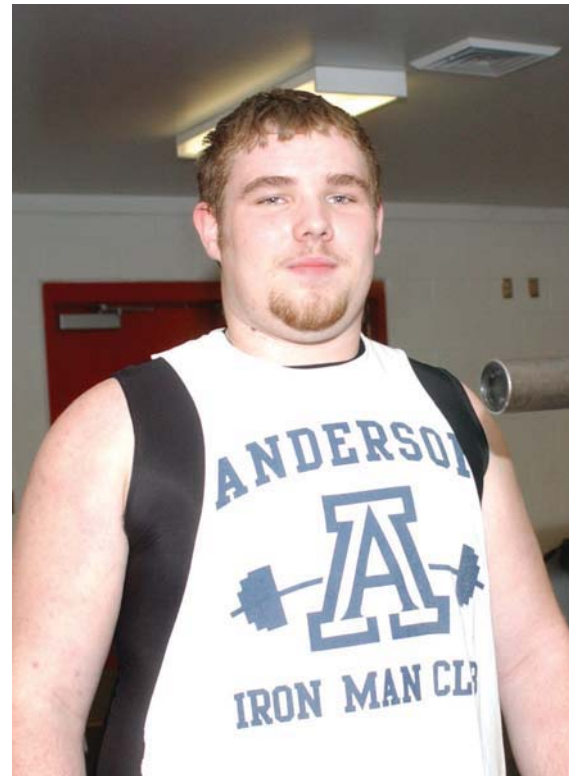
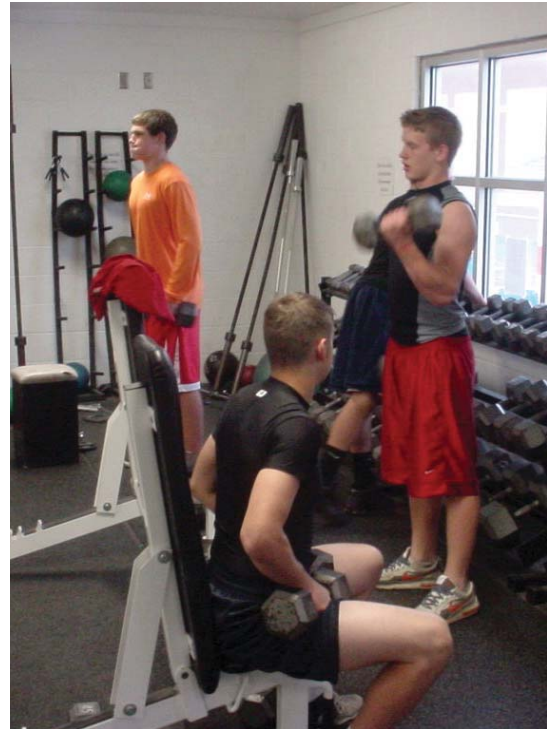
“Our four captains were two-way starters as sophomores, and now they are two-way starters as seniors,” says Peach. “All four of them have been with us in the off-season in the weightroom, leading by example. And

when other kids on our team saw the leaders on our football team continually in the weightroom and working hard, it encouraged them also to work hard to become better athletes.”

Coach Mark Peach has succeeded in turning around a team that in recent years had been expected to lose. From 7-44 to 11-1 – now that’s a feat worth going for. Sometimes you *can* come home again **BFS**



- 1 - Kendrick Harvey
- 8 - Ricky Baker
- 10 - Ben Walker
- 19 - Alex Barnett
- 23 - BJ Robinson
- 38 - Nick Satterly
- 53 - Austin Hammons
- 57 - Shawn Murphy
- 70 - Austin Corn
- 71 - Steve Heilman
- 77 - Zach Ruggles



When Coach Peach took over the Bearcat program in 2005, there was only one athlete who could bench press over 200 pounds; now over half the athletes on the team can do it, including two over 300. Pictured bottom right is Steve Heilman, who tied the school record at 365.

Go Bearcats!

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