

Staying Strong at Baker High School

Winning big in Montana



It's very impressive to learn that the football team at Baker High School in Baker, Montana, took the state championship last year by winning 11 games, scoring over 50 points in three of those games, and having two shutouts. Impressive, yes, but to those who have followed Spartan football it comes as no surprise. In the past nine years the Spartans have made it to the state semifinals in the playoffs every year, earning five state championships; and they've won a total of 239 games since Don Schillinger took over the head coaching job 26 years ago.

What is Baker High School's secret to success? According to Jay Shumaker, the head coach of boys basketball, a winning program starts in the weightroom. "All our coaches are on board with the weight training program, working together to achieve the same goals. We also have two teachers who do the weight classes, and they are consistent in what they do." Says Schillinger, "In football, if your players are strong and can run fast, you have a good opportunity for success."



Carole Bettenhausen Photos

Another factor that can't be overlooked in the Spartans football dominance is the emphasis on having athletes play multiple sports.

At one time, Baker High School had 250 kids; but as families have left this southeastern section of Montana, enrollment has decreased to only 128. "We're one of the smallest class B schools in the state, so we have to encourage our students to be athletes year-round and go out for three sports," says Shumaker. "That's the only way we can be competitive because of our school size." Adds Schillinger, "Most all of our players are playing both offense and defense and special teams – we have no choice. This year we only had 32 students out for football; in 1999 we had about 70."

It's important that athletes play multiple sports, Schillinger believes, not only to enable the school to have a greater base of players to work with but also for the athletes to learn how to perform under

Head football coach Don Schillinger has won 239 games and five state championships at Baker High.



pressure. "We want our football players to participate in other sports because, when it's all said and done, you have to learn how to compete. And the more times you're involved in hard competition, the better off your football team will be when the playoffs come and the state championship comes – your players won't

both sides of the ball, Schillinger says he sticks to a basic offense and defense, but that doesn't mean he can't put some surprises into his game plan. "As long as you have a base package that kids understand and you've taught them the fundamentals of the game well, you can run some different offenses and

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Head football coach Don Schillinger

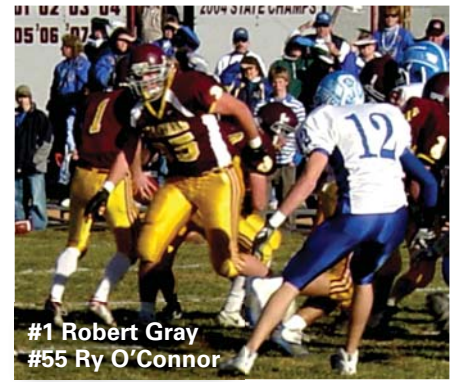
have to go through the nervousness, the tension, that can happen when playing at a high level. So we push our kids hard to go out for three sports, and I think we've been as successful as anybody in our area at having multiple-sport kids."

With so many athletes playing on

defenses – or at least parts of them. We run some shotgun and wishbone plays, for example, and they don't cause much of a problem."

Whenever a football program wins a state championship, there is always a concern that players will become over-

2007 State Champions!



confident and not prepare as hard the next season. Schillinger has developed an effective way to deal with this possibility. “I tell my players that it’s not like their opponents are going to roll over and die for them on the field, but in fact that they will be playing their A game against them. I also tell them that a lot of players responsible for much of the success from the previous season are not going to be around, so it’s their job to step up.”

Another part of the strategy to help Baker’s football program keep its edge is to hold BFS clinics. Last spring, for example, they jump-started the football season with a Be an 11 seminar. “Rick Bojak was the presenter, and he did an excellent job,” says Shumaker. Schillinger adds that the material presented in the seminar paralleled his own coaching philosophies, and he points out that often it’s good to have someone from the outside come in and

reinforce your ideas to your players.

When asked if kids today are different from the kids he coached when he first started more than three decades ago, Schillinger replies, “Not really – I believe that all kids want to be good athletes. They want to be good 30 years from now, they want to be good 10 years from now and they want to be good now. And, in most cases, they are willing to do the work that is required to be successful.” **BFS**



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