



Photos by Carole Bettenhausen



Success at Last at Sickles High

How this Tampa school turned around its football program

It's one thing for a team to have a slump, but it's another to be a doormat. The student body and community don't come to games, parents and administrators question the

competency of the coaching staff and jokes are made about the team. Worst of all, the players eventually reach a point where they believe they can't win. Such was the case for the football

team at Sickles High School in Tampa, Florida.

Just how bad was it at Sickles High? Since opening their doors in August 1997, the Gryphons had had

10 straight losing seasons, winning only two games during the 2005 and 2006 seasons. But head coach Pat O'Brien's passion for the game, and for his athletes, enabled him to overcome all obstacles. It's a great story.

Located in the Tampa suburbs, Sickles High School is part of a school

teers, and my volunteers work their butts off," says O'Brien.

Another challenge was motivating players to put in the time and work effort needed to be successful. "I hear parents say that they want their sons to go to college on a scholarship, but they do not encourage them to work out

To help get his message across, when O'Brien came back to Sickles he brought out BFS for its total program clinics and Be an 11 seminars. O'Brien says that he told his staff and players, "There are all kinds of different ways to work out, but BFS is a proven product. It's been around since the

"I hear parents say that they want their sons to go to college on a scholarship, but they do not encourage them to work out during the off-season and play other sports."

COACH O'BRIEN

district of 25 schools. At one time a rural farm town, Tampa is now a sprawling, metropolitan area.

Sickles has a solid reputation as a top academic school, and it competes in the 5A classification. This year's class – approximately 2,800 students – was the largest in all the schools in Hillsborough County. But the school attracts the most attention by its 175-member marching band, two jazz ensembles, concert band, symphonic band and wind ensemble. This "Wall of Sound," as it's called, has made the Gryphons' football games known more for the band's halftime shows than the team's on-field athletics. It's great to have game-day entertainment, but Coach O'Brien wanted the bleachers filled with people who wanted to watch his team.

O'Brien has been a coach for 23 years and has spent nine of them as part of the school's 11-year history. O'Brien says he was basically born into coaching, as both his parents were high school coaches. Due to family and economic reasons, O'Brien left Sickles for two years. When he returned, one of his toughest struggles was getting the coaches on staff to put in the additional hours needed to have a winning program, "so I had to recruit volun-

during the off-season and play other sports. What we are trying to do now is get all our kids and their parents to understand the commitment level it takes to be successful." O'Brien adds that college scouts lose interest in athletes who do not participate in other sports or do not put in the work during the off-season.

'70s, they've grown and changed, and we don't have to reinvent the wheel." Bringing in BFS was, says O'Brien, a commonsense solution.

In addition to bringing out BFS clinicians to teach and motivate, O'Brien also outfitted his weightroom with BFS equipment and acquired log books and testing equipment needed



Head football coach
Pat O'Brien

to properly implement the BFS program. And as far as he was concerned, one of the most important goals of these presentations was to discuss the importance of off-season training.

“There is no reason to start an in-season workout program if you do not have an off-season BFS program leading into it – you have to learn how to do things properly,” says O’Brien. “I’ve had kids tell me they

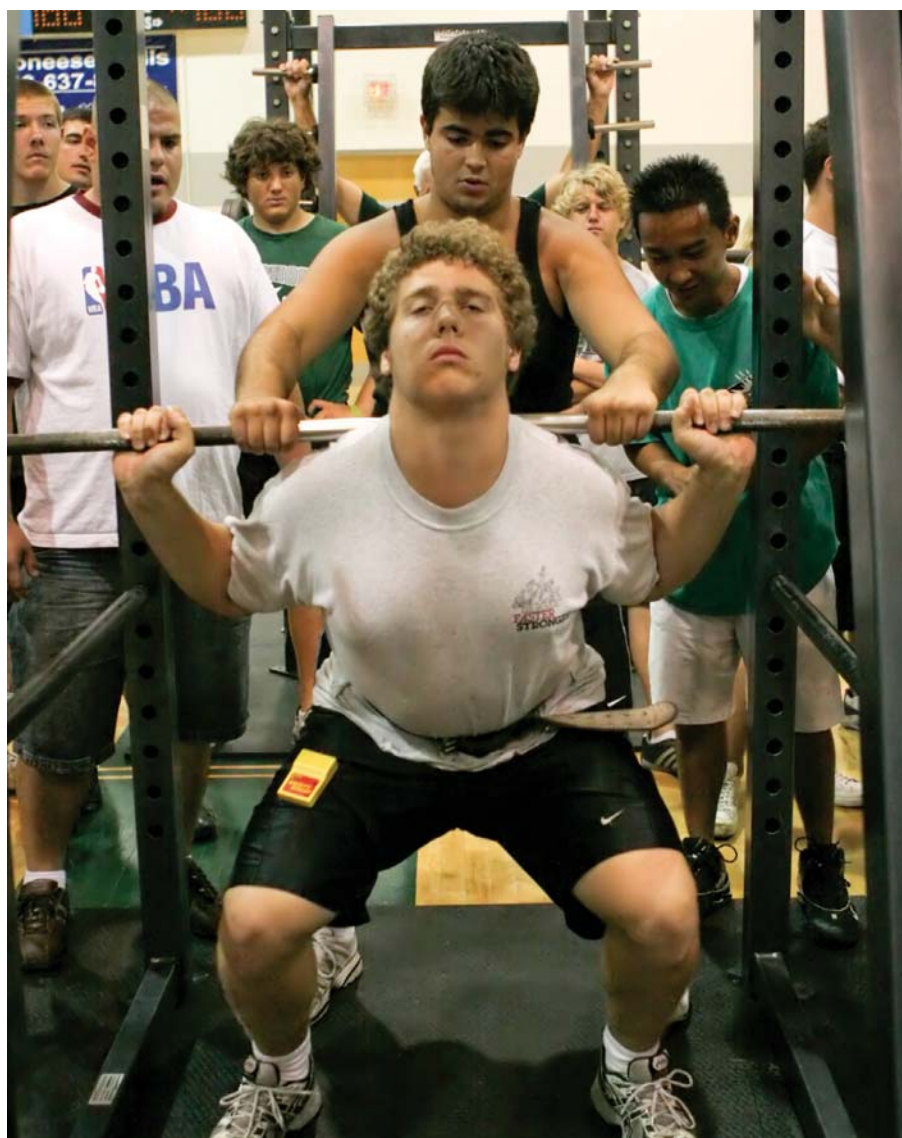
don’t want to commit to five-days-a-week training in the off-season, that they just want to play in the fall. Or they will work out a month before the season starts, then stop training in-season.” That, says O’Brien, will just not do.

How does this story end? Quite well. The Gryphons’ football team had their first winning season last year, winning seven games, and for

the first time in school history they made it to the playoffs. Likewise, other sports at Sickles High School did very well. The volleyball team made the regional semifinals last year, the boys basketball team reached the state regional quarterfinals, the hockey team won the state tournament, and the girls track team won the district title while the boys team placed third. There’s more.



“Our program has gained recognition for turning around more than just the win-loss column,” says O’Brien. “The attitude change on the field has been recognized by the West Coast Officials Association in the Gryphons’ winning of the Outstanding Sportsmanship Award of 2007. This is a tremendous accomplishment, and we’re excited to see what happens next year.” BFS



BFS Clinics helped Sickles High School turn around a team that had never had a winning season into one that made the playoffs. Shown lifting is Mike Mastermaker.



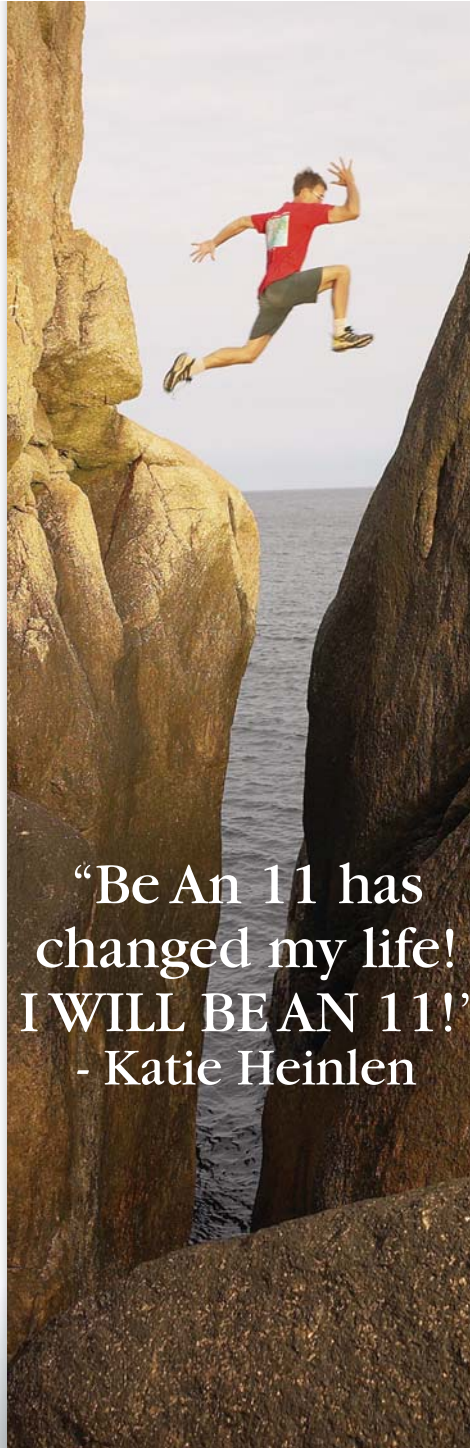
#63 Taylor Drane



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The Gryphon seniors lead the team out of the end zone.



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