

# 28-0!

## Eden Prairie High School

The Eagles are proving that  
working hard can be *fun*



# STATE CHAMPS

**W**ith 3,100 students, Eden Prairie High School is the largest high school in Minnesota. Last year the school was ranked by *Newsweek* in its list of the top 1,200 high schools, and 71 percent of the school's teaching staff hold master's degrees or higher. Athletically, last year *Sports Illustrated* said Eden Prairie had the best athletic program in the state, and their success has earned the Eagles 26 state championships since 2002. If you're a football player who's fond of winning, you can't find a much better program than the one at Eden Prairie.

Much of the recent success in football for the Eden Prairie Eagles is due to the efforts of Mike Grant, son of former Minnesota Vikings head coach Bud Grant, who led his Vikings to four Super Bowl appearances. And this is definitely a case of "like father, like son," as Mike Grant has led his teams to six state championships and they are currently enjoying a 28-0 streak.

Grant, who also serves as athletic director, played football at St. John's University in Minnesota. He had the opportunity to be coached by, and coach with, John Gagliardi, the winningest coach in the history of college football. Grant also has a strong BFS connection, as in 1979-81 BFS president Bob Rowbotham was his assistant football coach at Forest Lake High School in Forest Lake, Minnesota. In fact, Grant has brought out Rowbotham on several occasions to jump-start the school's program with BFS clinics.

Knowing that Eden Prairie has one of the most successful large-school high school programs in the

country, along with some of the best mentors in the sport, we wanted to spend a few minutes with Coach Grant to see what he has learned.

**BFS:** *What do you remember most about John Gagliardi?*

**MG:** John not only has a brilliant understanding of the fundamentals of the game but also knows how to put the whole program together. He taught me how to make kids believe in your system.

**BFS:** *Were there any special challenges as an athlete, or as a coach, in having such a famous father?*

**MG:** One of the things that happen when you are the son of a coach is that no one ever thinks that you earned the right to play or coach – that you're just handed a starting position or a coaching job.

**BFS:** *Why did you decide to become a football coach?*

**MG:** Actually, I wanted to become a history teacher first, and I've coached a lot of sports other than football, such as tennis and softball. I would say that I got into coaching because I love being around kids.

**BFS:** *On paper, it doesn't seem like you had any close games during the regular season. Is this something you worry about going into the playoffs – that your players might not be able to handle the pressure if they don't have a big lead in the fourth quarter?*

**MG:** Yes, that's a problem, but it's better than the alternative! But you have to understand that over the past 12 years we only lost eight games and we won six state titles, so our kids



Head football coach Mike Grant has won six state championships at Eden Prairie.

are used to that and they know what we are trying to accomplish.

**BFS:** *So your focus is not about getting big numbers in passing or rushing, or breaking records?*

**MG:** We are not about stats – we usually don't have the leading rushers or passers. Our goals are to win our league conference championship, which we believe is the best conference in the state, and to try to play for game 14. Our kids understand that we often have to take them out to keep them healthy. We have 114 kids on our varsity team, and I think of our 14 games last year we played just about everyone in nine of them. What we try to do is get up on our opponents and run out the clock so we can be ready for the playoffs.

**BFS:** *How many athletes participate in football at Eden Prairie?*

**MG:** We have almost 300 kids in our program. We have a varsity, sophomore, and three freshman teams, an A team and two B teams. The school only pays for one freshman team, so we had to raise enough money on our





Quarterback Ryan Grant, who power cleans 280 at a bodyweight of 215, led the Eagles to two undefeated seasons.

own to have two more teams. And all our teams play a full schedule. Our goal is to have every kid play significant minutes every week, because that's how you get better.

**BFS:** *Do you get a lot of support from the community for your programs?*

**MG:** Football is a big event here on Friday nights, and it's a whole community event. We often sell out, and we average about 6,000 fans per game.

**BFS:** *What has changed about high school football since you've started coaching?*

**MG:** One of the biggest changes is that a lot of people want a piece of the kids to make money off them by training them. Not that what they do is necessarily bad, but everything they need to do they can do right here in our weightroom. What hap-

pens is that we charge \$40 to be in our weightroom for the summer, and those people may charge \$600, so the parents think that the \$600 program has to be better. Then the next person comes along and says they charge \$800, and then one of the recruiting sources says they'll do it for \$2,000.

**BFS:** *Is there any special emphasis you have in your conditioning program?*

**MG:** We don't put much emphasis on size, and we're always being outweighed by everybody we play. Our emphasis is on speed and agility and explosive strength, so we focus on the Dot Drill and plyometrics and the power clean. Our kids really focus on the clean, and in fact we can correlate the success of our teams with their cleans. We know, for example, that if we have a lot of kids cleaning between 240 and 280, then we are going to have a pretty explosive team.

**BFS:** *What are the major tests you use for your athletes at the beginning of the season?*

**MG:** The clean, bench press for reps, Dot Drill and vertical jump. The vertical jump is a great way to measure explosiveness, and we use the BFS Just Jump pad, so it's really fast – just step up, jump and give us a number. We don't test on the 40 because if a kid hasn't done the squat workouts the way they should, they could have a hamstring issue. Plus, I'm more interested in how quick an athlete is on a 10 rather than a 40.

**BFS:** *Can we assume that a big bench press doesn't mean that much to you?*

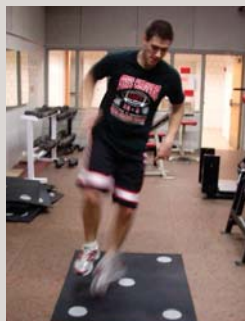
**MG:** A big bench press doesn't impress me much, but often the kids who can bench press a ton can do so because they have big chests and short arms. Last year our quarterback, who weighed 215, could clean 280 – that is an explosive athlete.

**BFS:** *With your success, is there a temptation for kids to only play football?*

**MG:** Actually, no. My son was a quarterback, and he was also the captain of the basketball team and the captain of the track team. Our starting fullback is the starting third baseman, our starting tailback competed in track, and our all-state left guard is on the basketball team and is a pitcher on the baseball team. In fact, on our baseball team, which was the runner-up in state last year, out of our nine starters, six were football players.

**BFS:** *What value do you see in encouraging kids to play multiple sports?*

**MG:** Every time you compete in another sport, whatever sport it is,



Squats, Dot Drills and deadlifts are some of the basic exercises used throughout the year to keep the Eagles faster and stronger than their opponents.

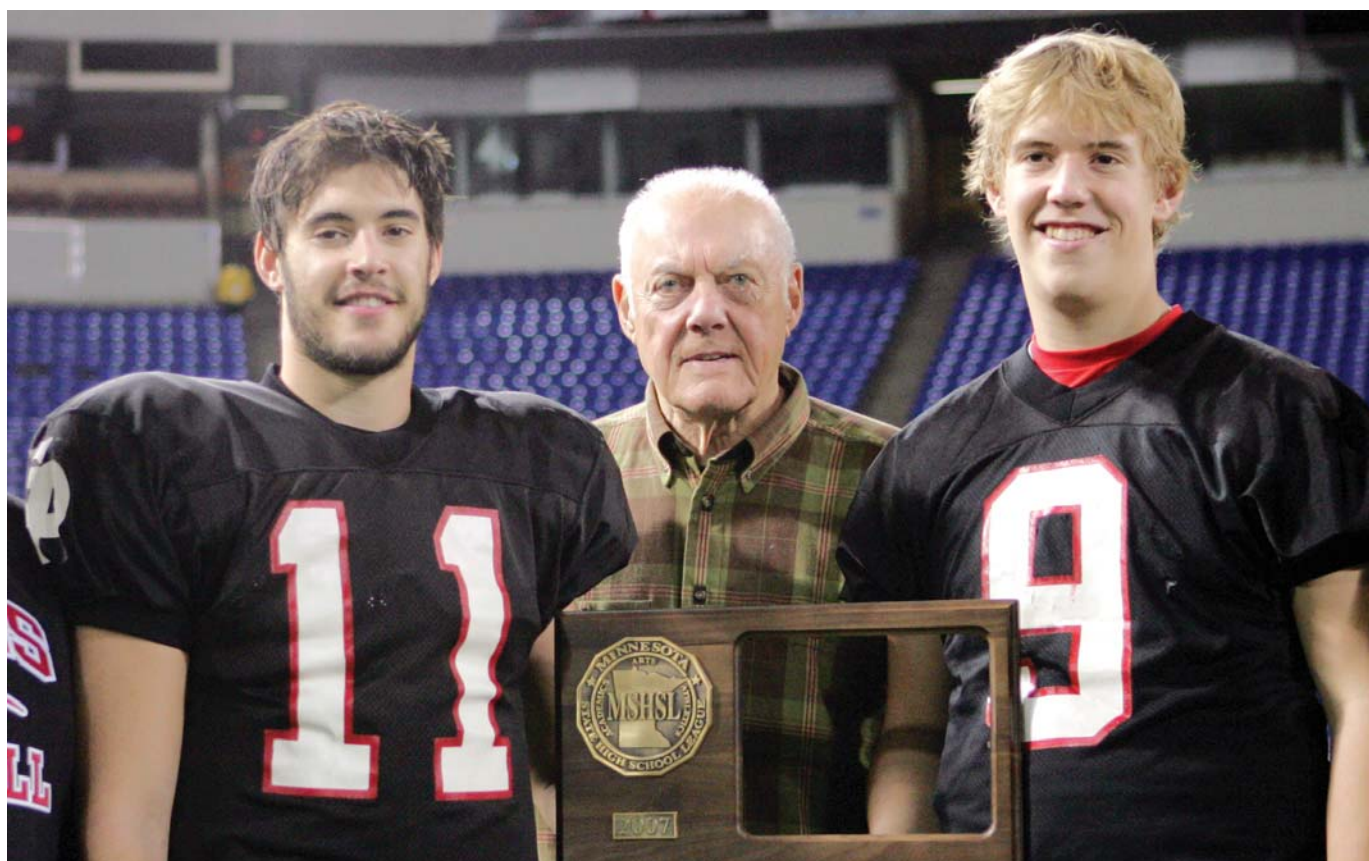
you become a better football player because it teaches you to be able to deal with the stress of playing at a high level. One year we only had three kids who had ever played in varsity competition in any sport; and when they went on the field for that first game, they were nervous and lacked confidence.

**BFS:** *What type of advice would you give young coaches?*

**MG:** If you're going to be a coach, you've got to be in it for the right reasons. You have to want to coach because you will have great relationships with kids and have fun – we always ask our kids, "If this isn't fun, then why are we doing it?" Some coaches get into this profession and yell and scream at kids to play better, but I think that behavior has the opposite effect and will make them play worse.

**BFS:** *How long do you think you're going to continue doing this?*

**MG:** I honestly don't know. I have another son, a sophomore, who is going to be a good football player, and I enjoy coaching him; and every day I go to practice it's just such a great joy because we have tremendous kids here at Eden Prairie. So I don't anticipate being done for quite a while. **BFS**



The tradition continues as former Vikings Head Coach Bud Grant is shown with his grandsons Ryan and Taylor.



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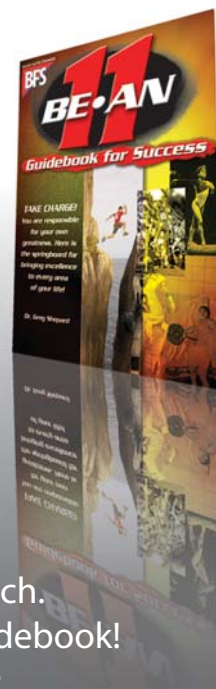
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