

# Reflections of a BFS Clinician

## *Rick Bojak*

A frank look at the changing face of high school sports



In 1995 Bojak was named Utah Teacher of the Year, an award that earned him a trip to the Oval Office and congratulations from the president of the United States, Bill Clinton.

BY BFS CLINICIAN **RICK BOJAK**

*Rick Bojak has enjoyed a career in high school sports first as a coach, for 28 years in high schools and for six years at state universities, and now as a board member for the Jordan School District in Sandy, Utah. Here he reflects on how high school sports have changed and what the future holds for our young athletes.*



## On Athletes Today

Today's high school athletes are stronger and faster and have more overall athletic ability than the kids I coached when I first became a coach. This is true in large measure because there are so many camps, clinics and other opportunities with trainers and mentors who can help kids develop their potential. Even so, fewer kids are playing sports today.

## On Participation in High School Sports

One of the major reasons for the decrease in participation in sports is that there are so many distractions from technology. When kids get home after school, they get on the Internet or their cell phones and don't go outside. Also, parents today want to be buddies with their kids instead of being true leaders who will guide them. As a result, kids think all adults are that way – like peers

to get paid, whether they are helping to keep score at a basketball game or taking tickets.

Another change I've seen that is discouraging high school coaches is that the student bodies and the local communities tend to be less interested in sports nowadays, so you don't see the fans filling up the bleachers as they did in the past. And, of course, kids often prefer to do things on their own at home. Kids today also seem to have a lot more self-interest and as such have less interest and pride in their schools.

## On Childhood Obesity

Obesity is a major concern nationwide, and our schools are no exception. Right now 13 percent of all children are obese. This statistic represents a phenomenal number of children at risk: *Many of those children may not outlive their parents* – that's just crazy! Compounding the problem is that

enue these vending machines bring to the school.

## On the Role of Administrators

When I coached, I often used to think, "Why can't our administrators get this or that done?" But now as a board member, I'm seeing things about their jobs that I didn't realize years ago, what with red tape and dealing with budgets and certain parents who monopolize your time.

## On College Scholarships and the Decline of the Multisport Athlete

At BFS we emphasize the importance of kids playing multiple sports, and it made me sad when a high school girls basketball coach told me that not one girl on their school's volleyball team went out for basketball. Not one! Instead, after the high school

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– RICK BOJAK

instead of parents – so there is a lot less respect shown to authority figures.

## On How Coaching Has Changed

When I'm asked how the responsibilities of coaches have changed, one thing for certain is that there is much more paperwork that coaches have to deal with. I know many former head coaches who resigned their positions to become assistant coaches because their responsibilities were too overwhelming. To make matters worse, there are fewer people outside the school who are willing to help out, and everyone wants

many school districts in the nation are reducing their support for physical education, forcing many schools to cut it out completely. On a positive note, there are some political leaders who are trying to help out, such as California governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, who worked to get candy and soda pop out of school vending machines. And as a school board member I am trying to do the same in my district, replacing sugary snacks with healthy drinks and foods. The kids may not buy them at first, but I think they will eventually adapt. This change will help to deal with the obesity problem without eliminating the rev-

volleyball season was over, the girls moved on to play club volleyball. The problem is that those club people have convinced the parents that their kids will have a better chance of getting a scholarship if they play on club teams, as it's more likely that college scouts will see them. That may be true, but high school coaches can still promote their athletes to colleges, and college scouts will still come to see high school athletes and watch their films. You have to hand it to the clubs, as they are making money and having fun coaching, but it's still a racket and parents are falling for it.

### On the Effect of the Economy on High School Sports

The economy will dictate much of what happens to the future of high school sports. PE departments and athletic departments usually have separate budgets, but as budgets get cut, there will be less money spent on weightroom equipment because so much of the PE budget goes to replacing equipment used in classes, such as nets and balls. And I read a recent article in *Education Weekly* that predicted that many schools will have to drop sports altogether because of budget cuts.

### On Knowledge about Strength and Conditioning Methods

In the area of strength and conditioning, when I started we didn't have the knowledge about strength and conditioning that we have today, nor did many coaches recognize its importance in sports other than football. When Coach Shepard started giving clinics 30 years ago, perhaps one in five teams was into weight training programs, but now everyone is pretty much caught up. And because of the media attention given to every aspect of elite athletes' backgrounds, not just coaches but also athletes and parents understand what it takes to develop a premiere athlete.

That's why I don't think the problem is lack of access to information about what to do in the weightroom; it's more a case of a lot of coaches not caring enough to learn. If each school did have a strength coach on staff, I'm sure that coach would be up-to-date on the best ways to train athletes. But coaches who don't know what to do yet resist learning will fear the weightroom and stay away from



In addition to conducting clinics for BFS, Bojak is also a board member for the Jordan School District in Sandy, Utah.

it. Not every coach, of course. I had a situation at a school where I coached where the head basketball coach came to me and said, "Rick, I've had enough. Other teams are beating us up because our athletes are too skinny and not strong enough, and the refer-

ees are letting them get away with it. Whatever it takes, teach them." And since then, our teams have been on the BFS program. So there is hope.

Hope is what keeps me going. I just keep doing what I know works – the rest is up to the next generation. **BFS**

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