

State Champs!

Heritage High School

A Colorado football program has what it takes to win it all



#13 Mitch Griebel

For the past 28 years Mike Griebel has been coaching football at Heritage High School in Littleton, Colorado. His football program has had its ups and downs, but after winning only three games in the 2004 and 2005 seasons, and four games in 2006, Coach Griebel knew he had better make some changes because, obviously, what they were doing wasn't working. And the place where he thought the biggest change should be made was in the weightroom.

Now understand that Heritage High School has a beautiful, 10,000-square-foot weightroom. Coach Griebel has been working on it since 1983 to make it one of the best in the state. So, facilities and equipment were not the issue.

The problem, he felt, was that the strength and conditioning program wasn't preparing his players to compete at a level comparable to other schools in their division. Consequently, four years ago he implemented the BFS Beat the Computer program. To say he was pleased with the results would be an understatement.

In 2007 Heritage won 10 games, became league champions and made it to the state quarterfinals. The following year they produced an identical 10-2 record and once again made it to the quarterfinals. But in 2009, after losing their opening game of the season, they reeled off 13 straight victories and won their first-ever state title at the Denver Broncos' Invesco Field, defeating Longmont 42-28.

Coach Griebel took a few minutes out of his busy schedule to talk about how he turned around his program and what it really takes to make it as a successful head football coach in high school.

BFS: *How have your athletes traditionally measured up to their competition?*

MG: Until recently, we have always been like David facing Goliath in the way our sports classification is set up; since I've been here, we've always been the smallest school in terms of numbers. So it would be easy for our kids to play with kind of a chip



Head football coach Mike Griebel has been coaching at Heritage High School for 28 years.



#33 Blair Zimmerman
#12 Sean Hercher



In 2009 the Heritage High School football team won 13 games and their first-ever state championship.



#16 Shane Opitz



#56 Blake Shaffer
#52 Rhys Brennan
#73 Taylor Suta
#77 Logan Steppan
#55 Cortlin Couture

on their shoulders. But our showing has always been respectable, and we've earned a reputation that "You'd better be ready to play Heritage or they will beat you!"

BFS: *How long have you been using the Bigger Faster Stronger program?*

MG: This is our fourth year.

BFS: *What motivated you to try it?*

MG: I needed something fresh, something new. We'd just gone 1-9 and 2-8 – we'd never had that happen to us before – and then we had only four wins in 2006. We've always been at least 500, so I said, "We're going in the wrong direction." As a result, I needed to do what a new coach would do if he came in here. I knew that BFS had a good program, but I'd never felt the need to try it because our system wasn't broken.

BFS: *How did you get started?*

MG: I got the Beat the Computer program and started implementing it. The seniors who were on this state championship team have been using it since they got here.

BFS: *Has the economy affected your program?*

MG: We are all getting hit. I haven't had much of an increase in my football budget in 10 years. Although the school district doesn't have the capability of increasing my budget, they know I'm not going to let the football team fall on its face and I'll go to the booster clubs to get the money the team needs. And the fact is, in recent years our booster club has raised 80 percent of the money the team has needed to function.

BFS: *Is it a shock to young coaches coming in to schools that a lot of their time*

will be spent on fundraising and getting involved in a lot of activities that are not directly related to coaching?

MG: You hit it right on the head – if you are not able to handle fundraising, then you should probably stay at the college level because your program won't thrive. And I'm a coach who wants our kids wearing top-shelf equipment because this is the NFL for my guys. I may only have five percent of my kids going on to play college football, so this is it. I want to make it really special for them.



A 10,000 square foot weightroom has helped Heritage High School maintain a competitive athletic program.

BFS: *Do you encourage your athletes to play other sports?*

MG: Because we are usually the smallest school in our division, it's hugely important for our athletes to play multiple sports. I can't afford to have our best football players not involved in other sports – our school would get crushed. We have to have our best athletes on the field.

BFS: *Is it a problem with parents being tempted to send their kids to outside strength and conditioning organizations to try to give their children an edge?*

MG: Not at Heritage, and that's because we have such a top-flight strength program. We have a 10,000-square-foot weightroom, and I believe that if I run my program

efficiently and get results, the athletes have no reason to look for other trainers.

BFS: *What is the difference in student-athletes now?*

MG: I think the kids are much savvier, more worldly and more mature now. Physically, we've been using the same testing battery of speed, agility and strength. The one thing I can tell you is the average scores of our athletes have gone up – the players are dramatically bigger, faster and stronger.

BFS: *What are your thoughts on the fitness of non-athletes?*

MG: I'm a PE teacher, and I would say if our schools had to hold the non-athletes accountable for physical testing as they did for the academic testing, our schools would fail miserably. It's a case of the haves and have-nots – the kids are either in shape or they are not. American kids are beyond the couch potato stage, and it's causing our obesity rates to climb.

BFS: *Do you take any special steps to minimize the risk of injury in your classes?*

MG: Definitely. One of the classes I had to take to get my master's was about safety audits; Dr. Marc Rabinoff was my professor and he taught me well. In fact, his son is in my weight training class right now, and believe me, I make certain our classes are safe!

BFS: *Last question: When you had a 10-2 season last year, did your kids get a little complacent in their training?*

MG: No – in fact, it was just the opposite. They were so devastated about not getting past the quarterfinals that I didn't have to motivate them one bit! They were determined to get to the big dance and win the whole thing this year. **BFS**

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