

# Conway Springs High

## Training with the Best

A look at a powerful football team that intends to stay on top

In 1999 *BFS* published an article about the success of the football program at Conway Springs High School in Conway, Kansas. It was an amazing turnaround story, because when Mark Bliss stepped in as head coach, he inherited a program that had had only one winning season in seven years. Bliss's restoration program began by installing an aggressive weight program that used many BFS principles. It was a good move.

The following year the team finished 11-1 and made it to the semifinals of the Class 3A State Championship. Says Bliss about that game, "It gave us a good taste of what it feels like to play in front of 6,000 to 7,000 people. The fire had been started and nothing was going to stop the burning. They continued hard in the weightroom with visions of the next year's state championship in the backs of their minds, and they knew they had to work harder than ever to achieve this dream." And they did just that, going 13-0 in 1998 and winning the school's first-ever Class 3A State Championship. But that's not the end of the story.

They also won in 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2008 and 2011 – seven titles in all! They even had a string of



62 straight wins beginning in 2001. According to current head coach Matt Biehler, who took over the program in 2009, the 2011 Cardinals were strong on both sides of the ball. Their single wing offense averaged 52.6 points per game, averaging nearly 400 yards a game rushing; their defense grabbed 21 interceptions and 17 fumbles and held their opponents to 9.8 points per game and 3.7 yards per play! Biehler says that support of the student body and community has been a tremendous blessing, and during playoff games the motto for the community is "Last one out of the

town turns the lights out!"

Along the way, Biehler, who was an assistant coach when the Cardinals won that first breakthrough state championship, has been instrumental in developing one of the most physically strong teams in the country. Last year eight of their players bench pressed 300 pounds, 10 power cleaned 300 pounds (with a school record best of 360; and one 190-pound player at 345!), and 10 players squatted 400 pounds. Several athletes from Conway have gone on to the next level with college scholarships.

"Our strength program is a critical

area in the success of our football team,” says Biehler. “We have four strength and conditioning classes every day for 56 minutes. Each class has 25-30 athletes involved. I currently run the daily strength classes, but we have four assistant coaches dedicating time and passion to our summer program in preparation for the fall.”

In addition to the high school

program, Biehler says his staff works with the feeder middle school athletes, focusing on getting them a head start by teaching proper lifting technique and also working with them on speed, jumping and agility. “We will have 150 seventh- to twelfth-grade athletes preparing during our summer workouts.” Biehler says that with this program the older players “take the younger players



Head football coach Matt Biehler

Football photos Nate Jones, Wellington Daily News



14 – Tanner Wood  
52 – Trenton Ebersole



9 – Brian Doffing



14 – Tanner Wood  
22 – Jordan Ast  
40 – Cory Misak



14 – Tanner Wood  
22 – Jordan Ast







**Brian Doffing**



**Matt Seiwert**

The Cardinals had 10 players clean over 300 pounds last season, with a best of 360 pounds.

under their wing,” and he believes this environment has helped avoid the hazing and bullying problems faced by many other schools.

Although known for its football dominance, the Cardinals have enjoyed success in many other sports. Here are their state titles:

- Girls Volleyball: '97, '00, '01, '02, '05
- Girls Track: '00, '01
- Boys Tennis: '04, '05, '12
- Girls Basketball: '01

- Men’s Track: 1951
- Girls Powerlifting: '08, '09, '10, '11
- Boys Powerlifting: '10, '11, '12

As for advice he would give to new high school football coaches to help them emulate the success at Conway High, Biehler says, “Develop a philosophy for your program and the type of outcomes you desire, then try to absorb as much information as you can that you can implement into your program.”

Biehler recognizes that because of the program’s success, they need to

keep their momentum by using a different strategy from when Coach Bliss took over the program. Then, they were underdogs, but now, as he says, “We’re not going to sneak up on anyone.” These days, Biehler acknowledges, they have to be wary of complacency in training. “We tell our players that our opponents will be gunning for them and will put up their best game. So we also tell them, ‘Tradition never graduates,’ because it’s hard to get on top, but it’s even harder to stay on top!” **BFS**



Since 1998, Conway Springs High School has won seven state championships and has had a string of 62 straight wins. Shown is the 2011 team.



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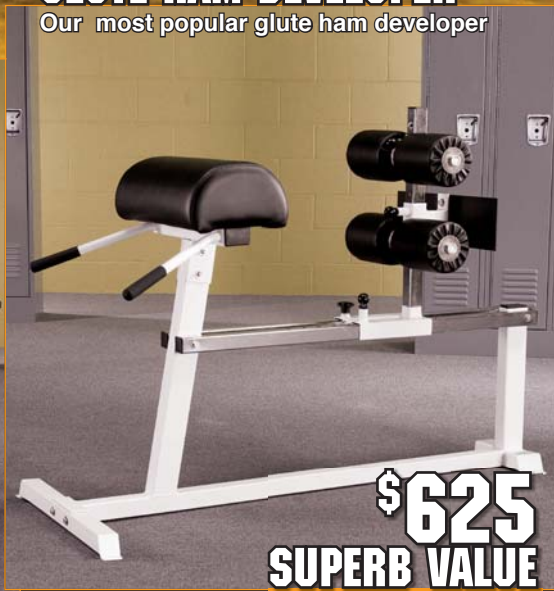
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