

SOMETHING SPECIAL

LASALLE HIGH SCHOOL Cincinnati, Ohio

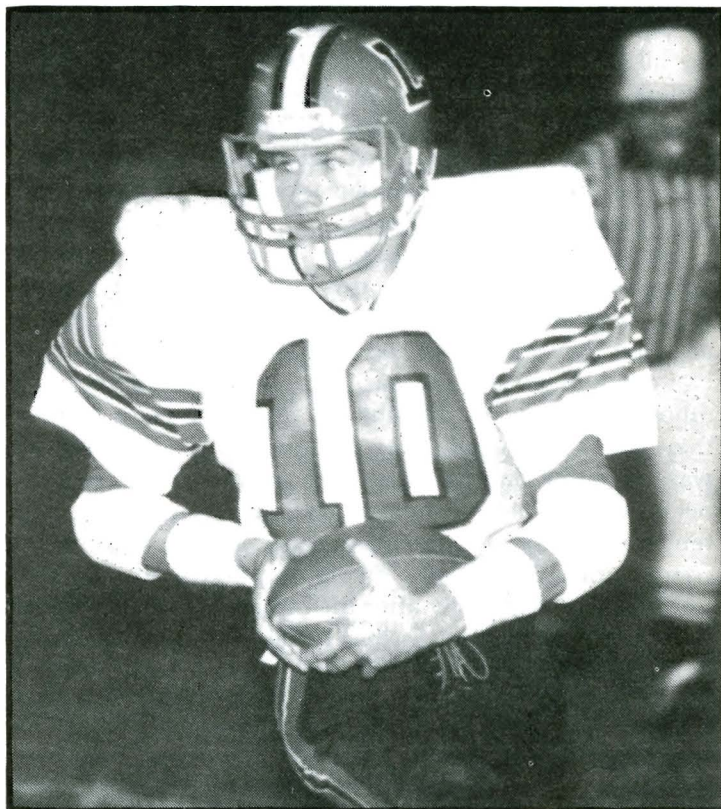
By Greg Shepard

Junior LaSalle Quarterback Doug Shields handed off to his powerful running back who twisted and turned and scampered for 32 yards. An official pulled his flag and the play was called back. "Fifteen yard penalty — Holding!" the official bellowed. Shields goes back to pass and throws a perfect strike to All-League LaSalle receiver Matt Sanders. Sanders jukes his way up field for 28 yards. The same official pulls his flag. "Fifteen yard penalty — Holding!" he bellows again. The opposing team drops back to punt on 4th and eight. LaSalle All-League defensive end, Tim Kreimer roars in and attempts to block the punt. The punt gets away and Kreimer lightly grazes the punter's shoulder on the way by. The punter acts as if nothing happened and runs down to cover the punt. Again, the same official pulls his flag and barks "Roughing the Kicker — Fifteen yard penalty — 1st and ten." The opposition's drive is kept alive by that official's call. That night that same official from the opposing team's hometown would call 150 yards in penalties against LaSalle High School. How would you react?

I was going bananas! I was there, right on the sideline. I was in Cincinnati to do a BFS Clinic the next day. As an impartial observer from Utah, I was slowly building up a rage at the injustice of the calls. However, it was not my place to say anything; only to observe, only to watch and listen carefully. It was my job to help LaSalle High School through the BFS clinic any way I could the next day. However, what I witnessed, was truly remarkable. Remarkable not by what the official did but remarkable by the reactions and actions of the LaSalle High School Coaching Staff and players. Here is their story:

Head football coach Ray Heidorn, Assistant Coaches Tom Grippa and Ken Barlag set up the clinic on Sept. 14th during the football season. It was my first BFS clinic for this time of year. I spoke to the student body at an assembly on Friday before the game. Everyone was psyched. The 865 boys who attended the assembly were very courteous and attentive. To get an idea of the spirit of the school staff and student body, I stood in the halls and watched them enter into the assembly room. I talked with kids as they sat down. Something unusual was happening. I did not hear any negative or abusive language towards another person. I did not hear one swear word. Even at an all boys Catholic School, I didn't expect that kind of great behavior.

After the assembly, the team invited me to Mass. Most of the team attended in a special room right at the school. I had never been to Mass before and it turned out to be a



QB Doug Shields — BFS Honorable Mention All-American. Doug passed for 1950 yards, completing 57% of his passes. Doug also dead lifts 500 and runs 4.6 forty.



Coach Shepard observing the special spirit at the LaSalle student body assembly.

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wonderful experience. Here was a group of about 60 athletes and coaches trying to be the best people they could be, brought together by the game of football. The purpose of Mass was to put a spiritual perspective to life before the game.

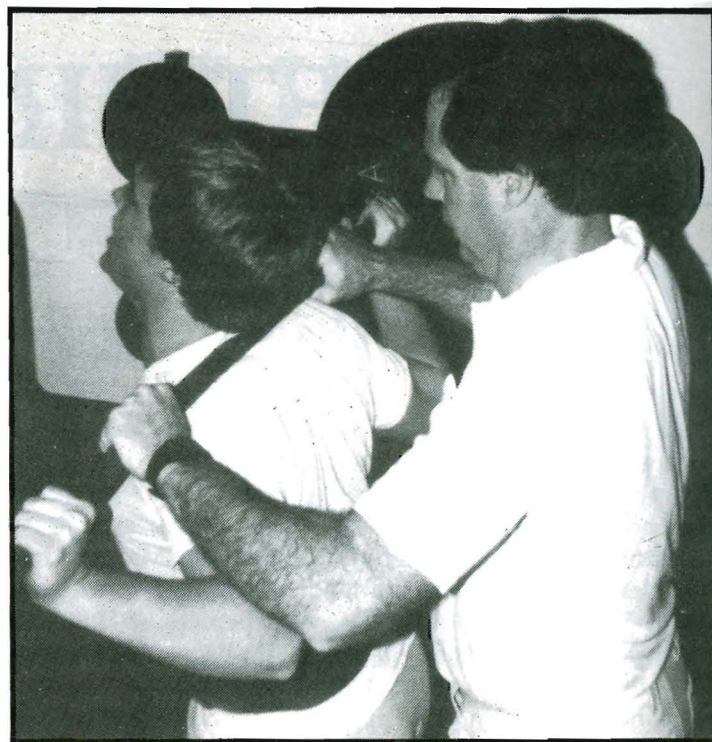
Soon it was time to start taping and make the last hurried preparations before the game. A team prayer was said and we all got on the team buses to travel to the game. The general attitude by all was serious as I overheard players talking about their assignments and game strategies. I thought this background was necessary on LaSalle High School before I explained the remarkable sequence of events which was shortly to follow.

As my rage was building at the completely lopsided officials calls (175 penalty yards compared to 20), I wondered how were the players and coaches reacting. It was amazing! Not one word was said to an official. Not one! Not one athlete said a swear word or said anything to an official. The coaches did not say anything. Here is what they did. They Acted: They did not React. Once the call was made, the staff was busy with the various key personnel on what strategies must be taken to overcome the current situation on the next play. Precious time and mental composure were not lost by ranting and raving. It was unbelievable, especially after the 5th and 6th calls. I came to motivate and inspire. Instead it was I who was becoming motivated and inspired. I became choked with emotion seeing these kids in such a noble fashion. Truly, this must be what high school athletics should be about.

I began thinking, "What can I do to help this team." I began observing everything. I asked the players on the sideline what quarter it was, and what was the down distance. I observed what happened when teammates came on and off the field. Were there always 11 men on the field, especially when the kicking units were on the field? Plus a number of other things. These observations would be discussed after the game and during the clinic.

However, the game was still in progress and what could have been a disastrous outcome became a 3 touchdown victory for LaSalle as they finally exploded in the 2nd half. After the game in the locker room, I discussed my observations. I expressed my deep feelings of how I was thoroughly touched by their sportsmanship displayed under such adverse conditions. It was hard not to get emotional. We discussed how important it is for everyone to know the quarter, the down and distance and the situation. Some players did not know and this might cost the team a victory later in the season. Players were instructed to watch their positions when off the field and then pat their teammate on the back for good things done and discuss any problems which might be happening. Also, the player who forgot to go in on a punt said it would never happen again.

The next morning the players came in for their in-season workout. Several things were discovered on how to make this time more profitable. Then the BFS clinic began. It was great, but it almost seemed anti-climatic. Tom Grippa, who runs the weight program with total dedication, began to put the clinic suggestions into the program.



Head Football Coach Ray Heidorn spotting his player on the squat.

Then, two weeks later tragedy befell LaSalle High School. John Wissel, a defensive tackle, crushed his spinal cord in a game. He was paralyzed from the neck down. John was a quadraplegic. The team and coaches were totally devastated. It could have been easy to quit. At first, practices were really bad. Then the team decided to do two things. First, they would have the best season possible and second they would help John Wissel financially after the season.

LaSalle blazed to an 8-2 finish and beat defending State Champ Princeton 22-21 by going for two in the last second of the game. Ohio has a computer point system, which determines who goes to the State Playoffs. They finished 4th overall in the state but 3rd in their region. Therefore, they did make the playoffs. Ironically, they amassed more computer points than did the eventual state champs.

After the season, as promised, a fundraiser was held. The whole town of Cincinnati responded. The Bengals, the Reds, Pete Rose and Johnny Bench helped in the noble cause. At this date \$75,000.00 has been raised to help John Wissel. Progress is slow for John but hopes are high as he was able to move his fingers slightly once.

Something special exists at LaSalle High School. The players and coaches have a special spirit as they have remained valiant in times of crisis. Our sincere appreciation goes out to them for sharing this special story. Also, our special good wishes go out to John Wissel and family and may God bless you in your recovery.

SPECIAL UPDATE

At this writing, LaSalle has lost only one game. A heartbreaking 35-34 loss to National Power Moeller High school. A last second two point conversion fell one inch short.