

MASSILLON TIGER FOOTBALL

**By Greg Shepard
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In continuing our series of featuring the elite high school football programs in America, we are proud to present Massillon Tiger Football. (Massillon is sometimes called Washington High School of Massillon.)

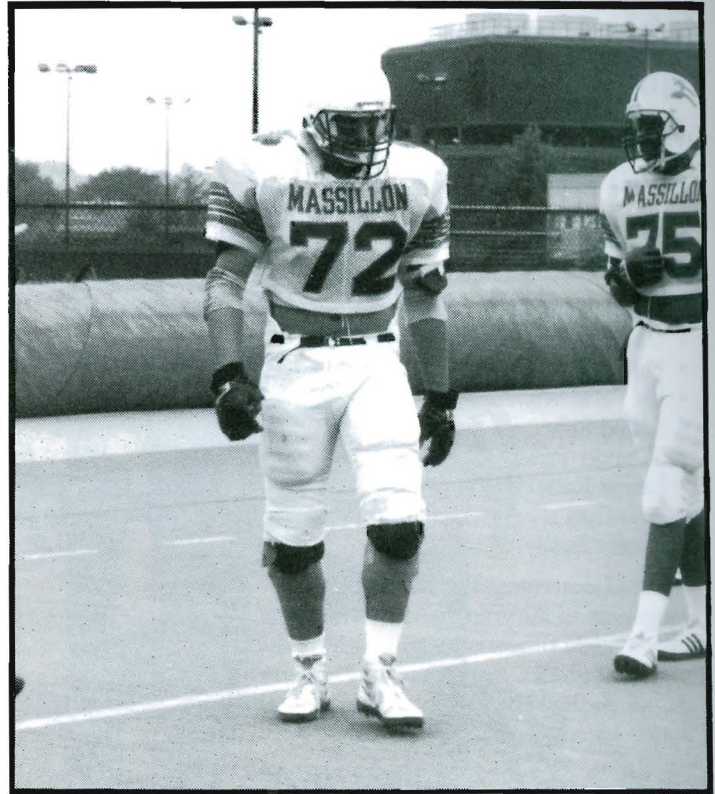
Football at Massillon is a way of life. There is probably more tradition in football than anywhere else in America. It is rich. It abounds in pride throughout decades and decades of football. They were the first school to reach 600 victories. The first victory that began this historical milestone was won before the turn of the century.

The legendary Paul Brown got his start at Massillon and their awesome stadium is named after him. It has been a tradition for coaches at Massillon to become head coaches in the college ranks. Chuck Mather, who went 57-3 at Massillon, became the Head Coach at Kansas. Bob Cummings went on to Iowa just before Hayden Fry. Leo Strang who was the first to introduce decals for helmets in 1959 became a Head Coach at Kent State. Earl Bruce, Ohio State's football coach, was also a Massillon coach. Even ex-players have gone on to become coaches. The most famous: Don James, Head Football Coach at the University of Washington, was Massillon's QB in 1949.

The media guide adds to Massillon's rich tradition. This 72 page guide has added color and flair to the program for 37 years. That's longer than any school in Ohio. Massillon even boasts of its own souvenir store filled with Massillon Tiger memorabilia such as hats, shirts, pennants, jerseys, etc. The orange and black Tiger store is owned by the Studer family which lives for Tiger football. Steve Studer is the Strength Coach at Massillon. His dad owns the store and Steve does double duty between the store and the weights.

Attendance at games is another awesome tradition. Massillon people can be heard saying, "We are the fourth biggest draw in Ohio: behind Ohio State, the Cleveland Browns and the Cincinnati, Bengals." The Massillon Paul Brown Stadium can hold 20,000 fans. (The record is 22,645.) However, one time in 1945 Massillon played Cleveland Cathedral in Cleveland in front of 51,000 people! Massillon prefers not to play in a league but to be an independent. You see, that way they can play an 8 game home schedule and charge \$36.00 for a season ticket. Multiply that by 12,000 and you can begin to see the enormity of the program. (That figure does not reflect tickets sold at each individual game.)

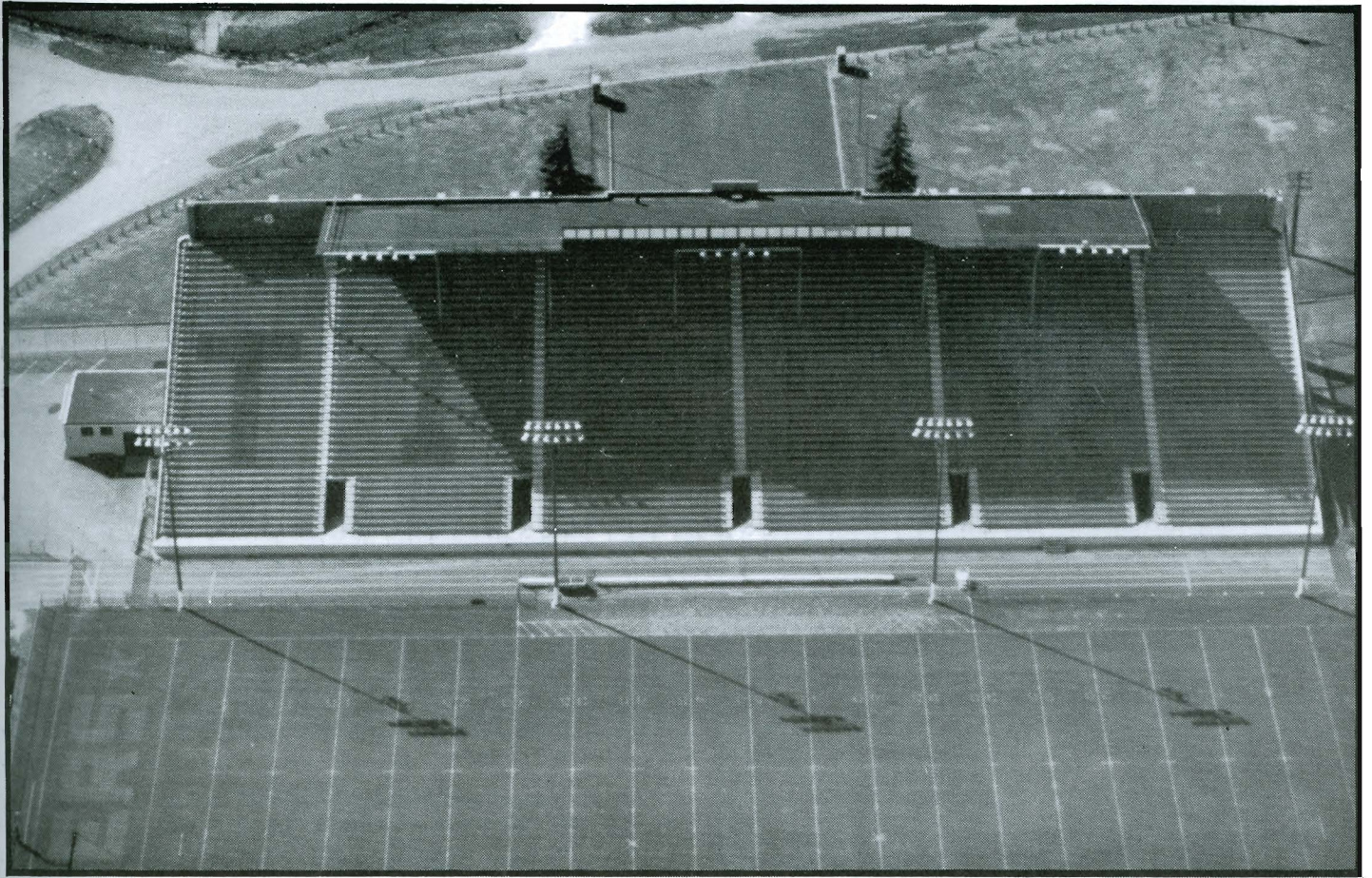
When games are sold out like the near 100-year-old rivalry between Massillon and Canton-McKinley, you'll find live TV coverage.



SR Standout, Lance Hostetler



Strength Coach, Steve Studer, Greg Shepard and Head Football Coach, John Maronto in new weight room.



Paul Browns Stadium: Massillon High School. This is only part of the complex! Ohio State Coach, Earl Bruce coached at Massillon's biggest crowd of 22,645.



The 4500 square foot Weight Training Complex. They wanted a 10!



The BFS Clinic at Massillon High School

The Booster Club at Massillon is absolutely amazing. Membership numbers 5,000 in the Club. One thing that helps keep it from getting out of hand is that all senior executives are past presidents. Steve Studer's dad, for example, is a past president. The Booster Club is just part of Massillon. It's like a family. Their main consideration is "What can we do to help?" It is not a "Dad's Club."

The present Head Coach is John Maronto who is in his second year at the helm. Coach Maronto and I have been friends for a number of years. John came to Massillon from DeLaSalle High School in Detroit. I first got to know John after a BFS Clinic at Madison Heights High School in Detroit. Jim Myers was the sponsoring coach and he and John Maronto were good friends. Incidentally, in my new novel "Quest For Greatness" one of the characters is based on part of Coach Myer's life. He retired this year after going undefeated in 1985. John Maronto was also enjoying great success and was looking forward to perhaps his best team ever at DeLaSalle. He had Allan Jefferson, one of the elite running backs in America returning. However, the Massillon job opened up amid some controversy with past Massillon Coach, Mike Currence. John Maronto wanted a crack at this prestigious and yet awesome football job. He took the job in July of 1985.

Coach Maronto called me right away for a BFS Clinic. He wanted the players to get ready to accept a great challenge and become united with a team attitude to support a new coaching philosophy. I thoroughly enjoyed my stay and to say the least, it was educational.

When John got to Massillon which is 45 minutes south-east of Cleveland, a press conference was held. The TV networks came down from Cleveland. A parade was given and there were hundreds of signs throughout the town saying "Welcome Coach Maronto." Naturally, John was

given a car which said, "John Maronto, Head Football Coach."

Since John didn't have a house yet, I stayed with Sonny Spielman, an Ex-Assistant Coach who now serves as athletic director with John. Sonny is the father of Chris Spielman, the ferocious Ohio State Linebacker. I stayed in Chris' room. It was fun looking at all his awards, one of which was being on the Wheaties Box for being the Top Player in America. Rick, his brother, was an All-American Linebacker last year at Southern Illinois. Chris is already becoming a legend and developing into a leader for the Buckeyes even though he's only a sophomore. Late this Spring in a football meeting, Chris suddenly stood up and made an announcement, "If anybody here takes drugs and I find out about it, I'll do my best to get you off the team. I don't want to play next to anybody on drugs!"

Isn't that great! All we need is a few more Chris Spielman's and we wouldn't need to bother collecting urine samples!

At breakfast before the Clinic, John and I were sitting at a local cafe. A man came up and said, "Coach Maronto, I'd like to welcome you to Massillon. I want you to know that I'm a 'Sideline Booster'." I mean this guy was really proud of being a sideline booster. I asked John, "What's a sideline booster?"

It's a special organization within the booster club. Each player is assigned to a sideline booster which becomes almost like a second family. Coach Maronto explained to me year later, "The 'Extras' or 'Luxuries' are good, if you keep them in the right perspective. (Shirts, shoes, etc.) The kids have to be responsible and they in turn owe something to the community. Football at Massillon is the rallying point of the town. It makes you feel special. It's amazing, everyone is excited about what you're doing. As a result,



you feel tremendous loyalty."

After the Clinic, I was shown the Massillon weight room. Before John got there, some Nautilus equipment was used in a small room. John put his office by it and opened up another small room which was adjacent. This was the free weight area. A new high school was being proposed and a new weight room was at least two years away. I was asked, "What do you think?"

I said, "Men, on a scale of one to ten, you haven't even got a five. Are you gonna screw around for two years or get the job done now?"

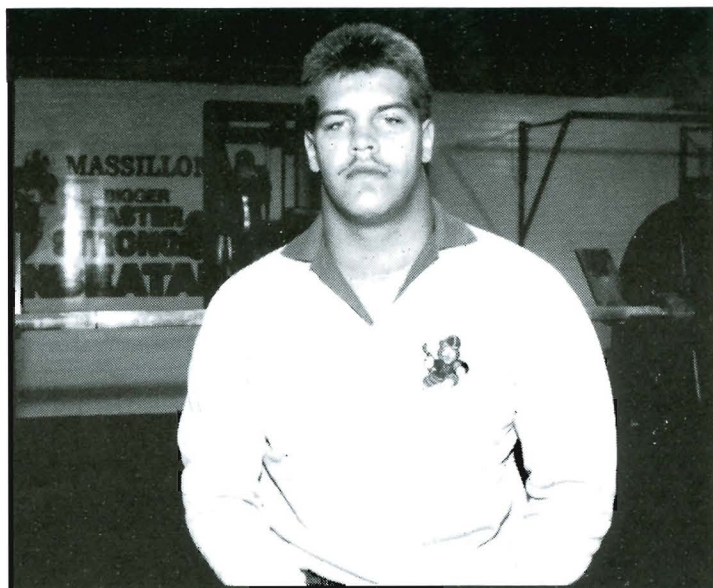
Well, I tell you something, the Massillon Booster Club wasn't formed to be rated a five. Steve Studer said "There's an old gym that's not being used anymore. It used to be the basketball arena and most recently for gymnastics. However, they're moving."

I said, "Let's see it!" We went down. It was perfect. It even had a jogging track up on top. It didn't take long before a luxurious super equipped 4500 square foot weight room became part of the Massillon tradition.

This event also plays a part in my new "Quest for Greatness" novel about high school football.

After looking at the weight room, I went to conditioning practice. The Tigers went through stretching, agilities, plyometrics and running. Some of the players worked so hard they puked. Now I didn't think this was particularly exciting but 300 fans did as they watched their every move in Paul Brown Stadium. Every minute, I saw or heard something amazing. Like when they told me that every year they buy a young Bengal Tiger and feed it meat everyday until by June it's a big, full grown tiger. Like when John told me he went to the principal to order something. He'd already ordered a bunch of equipment but wasn't sure if the principal would go along with an addition or two. You see, John was used to the old days. But this was Massillon! The principal just laughed, "What you gotta understand, Coach Maronto, is that you run things around here, not me. You order what you want." Like one time the superintendent and the football job opened up at the same time. The top priority was filling the football job which they did in the summer. In October, they got around to filling the "other" job.

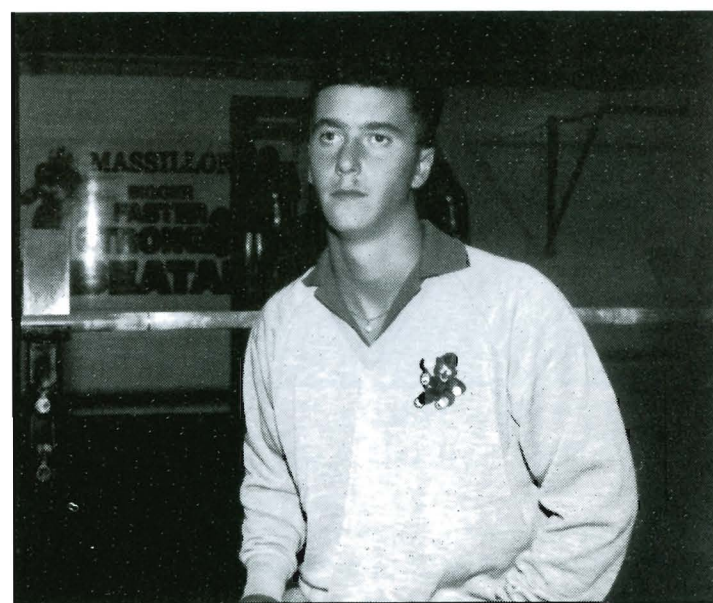
A year later, during July of '86, I returned to Massillon. I asked John to reflect back on the past year. "Massillon has given me the unique opportunity to run a program the



Jerrod Vance: Linebacker



John Miller: Quarterback



Matt Swank: Defensive Back

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best way possible. Of course, I don't teach and Sonny does most of my athletic director duties. This leaves me free to really concentrate on football. Also, the ability to create that weight room as quickly as we have was really unique. If I don't have something it's only because I haven't been able to think of it. Our administration has the most open lines of communication. I can call the principal or superintendent at home at anytime. It's the best conditions for teaching and coaching you could have. I've got 16 coaches at Pre-Season Camp and 12 during the regular season. I have a trainer and an equipment manager. Greg, in short, I've been given every tool imaginable. Now we have to do "whatever it takes" and "meet the challenge and win every game. 1986 is the year of the Tiger!!!" (Andre Horner did 14 reps at the BFS Clinic to represent winning every game: See page 79.)

Coach Maronto is a very special man in a special place. He is one of the greatest coaches in America today. John has four major areas that are really stressed. 1. Team Commitment. 2. Conditioning — Physical Strength. John's goal is to have the strongest team in Ohio. They do have 10 players who Bench 300 plus in strict style. 3. Attitude and Work Ethic, and 4. Academics.

As I was writing this article in September, I called John. Massillon was 2-0 and unscored upon. It was 11:00 p.m. Ohio time. I spoke to his daughter, "I hope it isn't too late. Is your dad up? Don't wake him." She laughed, "My dad isn't here. He always holds staff meetings after practice. He won't be home until 12:30." So I called the school. The Staff and John Maronto were there preparing for their next opponent. In my 14 years of coaching, I never did that, but then I never was at a place like Massillon.

Another special guy I have to tell you about is Steve Studer, the Massillon Strength Coach. I wish everyone could meet him. You can't help but love the man. He is so full of enthusiasm. He's always smiling. Steve is a super physical specimen and played college football after starring at Massillon. Coach Maronto had the foresight to hire Steve and he's amazing. Steve says, "I love Strength Coaching. I love this weight room. I could live here."

Then just to see, I told Steve, Alabama was looking for a new Strength Coach and they were paying \$35,000 a year. I think I could help get you the job. He thought I was serious and responded "I'll never leave. I love it here. I'm just doing what I can." You see from a Massillonian's point of view, they're already in football heaven. To go someplace else, is a step backward. After being there, it's hard to argue that point.

I then had an opportunity to talk with 5 Massillon senior players who were team leaders.

Name	Pos.	HT	WT	40	VJ	Bench	*Squat
Jerrod Vance	LB	6-2	225	4.7	28	350	550
Matt Swank	DB	6-0	187	4.4	29	310	570
Lance Hostetler	OT-NG	6-3	245	5.0	32	305	600
John Miller	QB	6-0	185	4.6	31	315	570
Mike Wilson	RB	5-9	180	4.38	29	300	570

*Not quite parallel.

The 40's of Matt and Mike were the fastest at the University of Michigan Summer Football Camp!

Coach Studer states "These kids have worked harder than any team that I've been associated with. All 120 of them. Greg, there were a lot of times I wish you could have been here to see the transformation these kids have made in one year. I'm awfully proud of them. It's time for all that hard work to pay off."

"What about it guys? How do you feel?" I asked. They all responded and agreed at the same time. "The new weight program has made a big difference. We are 100% more confident for sure! Now, we know we're stronger! We'd tell anybody just to keep at it. Keep workin' hard."

I probed further, "What about drugs and alcohol?" They unanimously said, "It's just not worth it." "Yeh," I responded, "but there are some great athletes who get drunk and snort a little. What about that?"

Jerrod's eyes flashed and remarked as he looked me straight in the eye, "But they're not true athletes. I feel if a Pro athlete goes out and blows it, they're nothin' to me. They're not goin' to influence me to do something stupid."

"But what about peer pressure?" I again asked. "What about parties?" John Miller, the Massillon QB, quickly rebutted, "There's not a problem with peer group pressure if you stay in the right group. We all try to do things together."

Everyone nodded.

I then left Massillon with a very special feeling. Sure, all that hoopla was great and fun to reflect upon. But here were five young men who could let all that stuff screw up their values, but they didn't. There seems to be a huge gamut of attitudes among today's youth. When I went to high school in the 50's, we didn't have nearly as many people out there on the fruit loop fringe. We didn't have people on drugs anywhere near what is happening today. But, I also can't remember kids being as squared away as these five. There are kids like these all over our country in every school. Our fast lane society has forced kids to make decisions and create a super value system in a manner unheard of in my days. I feel so fortunate to be able to travel to every area of the United States and see so many Upper Limit players who are trying to be the best they can be in a tumultuous society. I salute John Maronto, Steve Studer and the Massillon Tiger Football Team and Staff who have shown true greatness far beyond the gridiron.

MASSILLON UP-DATE

At this writing, the Tigers have five shutouts heading towards their annual showdown with Canton-McKinley on November first. To make the play-offs, Massillon must win. Canton-McKinley is ranked in the top ten USA National Poll. I will be there!

Coach John Maronto is very pleased with all aspects of the program. He was proud to point out the improvement in the players commitment to academics. Last year 78 players required special study hall time and this year that number is down to fourteen. Coach Maronto is a special coach who really works hard at transferring athletic disciplines to all areas of life.