

# FROM 0-10 TO CHAMPS A True Life Quest For Greatness Story

*"I'm Not Too Smart, But Psychologists Say That When You're Obsessed With Something You Get Good At It. I Think About Football All The Time."*

*Coach Don Nelson  
Dallas County High School*

August 15, 1990 was the first official day of practice for High School football in the State of Alabama. Every high school football coach and player shares the same dream, the dream of playing football on December 14, 1990 for the State Championship. This is a story of a team that fulfills that dream by going up against unbelievable odds, the Dallas County Hornets of Plattersville, Alabama. Dallas County High School, the oldest county school in the State of Alabama, is located in rural Plantersville.

Donald Nelson was starting his 3rd year as head coach at Dallas County. When he accepted the job, he inherited an 0-10 team and being in a rural area, this job did not attract many coaches. He was also the 4th Head Coach in four semesters.

Morale was down and school spirit wasn't very high. Coach Nelson was told by several people that the players could not be motivated, would not show up for practice because of the distance they lived from school (some living as far as 26 miles away) and that their work habits were not good.

Coach Nelson's first spring training with the Hornets saw 65 to 70 players but it was apparent changes had to be made. First on the priority list was practice attendance. If a player missed two practices without notifying the coach, they were suspended from the team. No one was

allowed to leave the practice field until the job was done. No one was allowed to use profanity including the coaching staff. Practice opened and closed with prayer.

One change that is often unheard of in rural Alabama was the fact that no smokeless tobacco was to be used by anyone.

Not long after accepting the job at Dallas County, Coach Nelson found out he had lip cancer caused by dipping smokeless tobacco. Thirty percent of his bottom lip had to be removed. Enough said.

Another change that the players were unaccustomed to, was a mandatory weight workout through the summer. The weight room was opened twice a week and a set number of days for attendance was given. Players not meeting those requirements were given extra running and drills when practice began in the fall.

Because of these changes, Coach Nelson saw his squad drop to 22 including seven freshmen.

The first season the Hornets were expected to win only one game but managed to come out victorious in the first three games. However, injuries took their toll due to lack of a weight program. We lost four starters in one game and the Hornets ended the season 4-6.

Now it was time to go to work. The off-season weight training program had to be kicked into high gear. Coach



# DALLAS COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL



Nelson had been told upon taking the job he would have athletes who could Squat 500-550 pounds. After viewing their Squats, he discovered the players were not even coming down 3/4 of the way much less to a full Parallel Squat position. After changing their procedure, it cut their total weight in half.

Much of the same was true on Bench Presses. In the past, players were allowed to lift their buttocks up from the bench.

Power Cleans and Auxiliary lifts had not been done, so this was added to the program. Dead Lifts came later. In previous years, the running program had consisted of playing checkers, cards, touch football, etc.

It was time for a change! Box jumps, pulling weighted sleds, running bleachers, running ropes, jumping heavy ropes, timing on the 40, running various types of quickness drills, including the BFS Dot Drill, wrestling, and viewing and implementing the stretching and flexibility video from Bigger Faster Stronger were key elements in Dallas County's becoming stronger and faster.

The second year the Hornets went 5-5 in regular season losing three games by a total of nine points, and making it into the first round of the state playoffs.

Then last year, during the off season, we added the Trap Bar to use for Dead Lifts. This was not well received at first, but after several weeks it became a favorite in the weight room because of the amount of weight that could be lifted and the motivation factor.

It seemed like Dallas County High School's football team had achieved a goal of becoming faster and stronger, but the bigger didn't seem to come. Our offensive line averaged only 165 pounds and the defensive line averaged 155 pounds. Most people laughed when the Hornets were warming up and some thought it was a Jr. High team. We did not have a man over 200 pounds, but

it was Dallas County that was going to have the last laugh.

The season would start off strong with two convincing wins but midway through the season the Hornets found themselves 3-3 with a disappointing loss to arch-rival, Maplesville! On Monday after the game, Coach Nelson called a team meeting. Several things were discussed but when the dust settled, the players had committed themselves to two things: winning the rest of the regular season games and making it through 5 playoff games to claim the state championship.

Momentum was kicked into high gear when Dallas County knocked off powerhouse "Southside-Selma" (20-19), which harbored the states #1 running back who had averaged 200 yards per game. During this game Dallas County held him to 43 yards. Dallas County was outweighed as much as 70-80 pounds per man. The quickness and speed of the defense and the game plan for Southside kept them off balance. The quickness of the noseguard Rodney Sharp (150 pounds) played a notable part in this game. Rodney box jumps 46- inches with a 15 pound weight in each hand. The passing of Andre Jones to Anthony Gutheridge and Sylvester Atkinson (named to the 3A All-State team and holds a 3.5 grade point average) also played a key role in the upset.

This was the tone set for the playoffs. After winning the 1st round 40-0, the Hornets biggest test of the playoffs would come against 44 year coaching veteran Glenn Daniels, a real southern gentleman holding the winningest record in high school football in Alabama. The score was 12-7 with the ball on the three-inch line and only seconds to go. Back-up cornerback and starting tailback, Derek Montgomery read the checkoff by the quarterback. It was quick pitch right and Derek met him causing the fumble and Dallas County secured the win in



# 1990 ALABAMA 3-A STATE CHAMPS

the final seconds.

It was Montgomery who ran wild in the next three ball games, averaging 165 yards per game. The 6ft., 170 pound senior has committed to Samford University in Birmingham. He Deadlifts 600 pounds with a Trap Bar, runs a 4.6 40 and maneuvers in traffic as well as any back in the state.

In the third round of the playoffs, the Hornets were matched up against Elba High School, the defending 1989 champs, who defeated the Hornets soundly the previous season in the first round of the playoffs. Once again the underdogs, the Hornets, were outweighed and outmanned. The Hornets shut out Elba 12-0 holding them to 52 yards total offense never allowing Elba inside Dallas County's twenty yard line.

In playoff game number four, the Hornets faced Lineville and once again there was a big size difference. Lineville was tabbed to have the best defense in Alabama's 3A classification. Although they shut the Hornets out in the 2nd half, it was not before Dallas County scored 21 points in the 1st half. The Hornets held Lineville from several scoring attempts to hold on to a 21-10 victory.

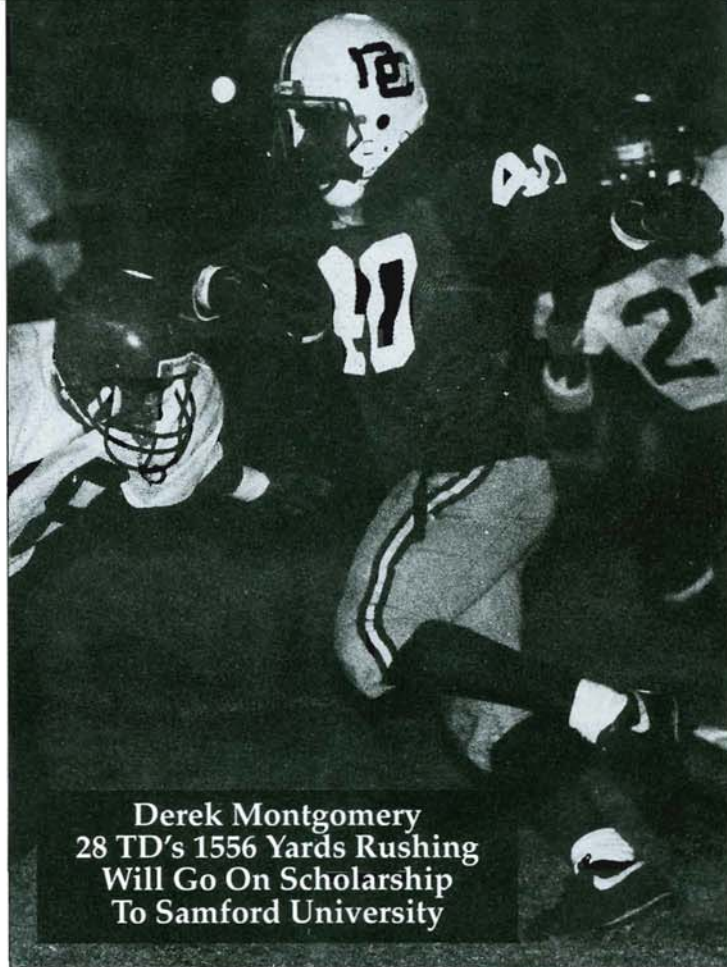
The only thing in the way of Dallas County and the state championship was Plainview, who had a record of 14-0. They had a line that averaged 230 pounds and was anchored by the 3A player-of-the-year, the number three college prospect in the state of Alabama and an All-State quarterback. They had averaged 35 points per game. In the backfield was the runner-up player-of-the-year and two backs with over 1400 yards each. People everywhere were preparing us for a loss, "You've had a great year, you've been lucky to make it this far," were some of the things the Hornets heard but the Hornets had something else in mind.

During the first day of practice each year, Coach Nelson always quoted a verse from the Bible dealing with faith, Matthew 17:20. To reassure his players of this type of faith, a copy of Matthew 17:20 was given to each player to be posted in their locker and read each day leading up to the "big" game.

The stage was set and everyone throughout the state had picked the Hornets to lose big. Over 4000 people were expected to be in attendance, the largest crowd to ever watch a high school event in West Central Alabama.

When the game started both teams were emotionally charged. Plainview kicked off and Dallas County ran 5 plays before it had to punt. Plainview had stopped Dallas County for the last time that evening. Plainview started its first drive and Dallas County gained its first victory. In fourteen games, Plainview had scored on its first drive twelve times, but a fumble recovery by Dallas County ended their first drive.

From then on it was all Dallas county, the offense scored on 6 consecutive drives for a total of 40 points. The



**Derek Montgomery**  
28 TD's 1556 Yards Rushing  
Will Go On Scholarship  
To Samford University

defense allowed Plainview into the end zone only once and held both backs to under 100 yards combined. The final score was Dallas County 40, Plainview 7.

Many sacrifices were made by both players and coaches during the season but nothing could surpass the sacrifice of Assistant Coach, Glover Towner. On November 30, 1990, he was told he had 75-90% blockage in the arteries around his heart and that he needed immediate surgery. He pleaded with his doctors to postpone his surgery until after the season. He believed our team could move a mountain and he was committed to being there. On Monday following the championship game, Coach Towner underwent open heart surgery requiring five bypasses.

One of the key reasons for the Hornets success was the support of the administration especially principal, Earl Griffin, who himself had coached the Hornets 18 years. Along with secretary, Ruth Walker, they handled all administrative duties leaving Coach Nelson to coach football along with assistants David Miller, Roy Brown, Glover Towner, Allen Shelton, and volunteer, Coach Kenny Benton.

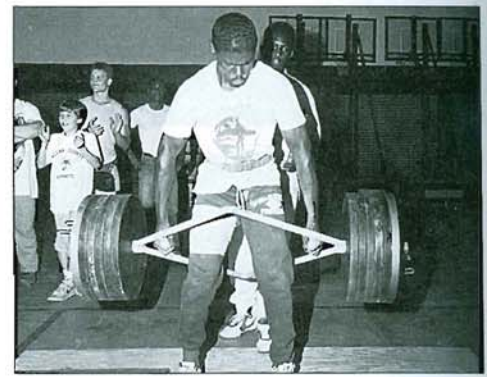
The team and its coaching staff had faith and commitment in God, in themselves and in a goal that led a team of small scrappy underdogs to win the Alabama State 3A Championship.



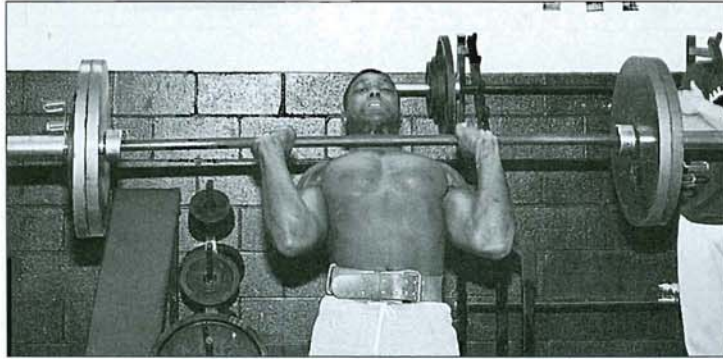


RB's Kerry Ford and Rodney Sharp pull weighted Sled

# FROM 0-10 TO ALABAMA STATE 3-A CHAMPS DALLAS COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL



Derek Montgomery 170 lb. TB Doing Trap Bar Dead Lift with 600 lbs.



Kerry Ford 165 lb. FB Power Cleans 245 lbs.



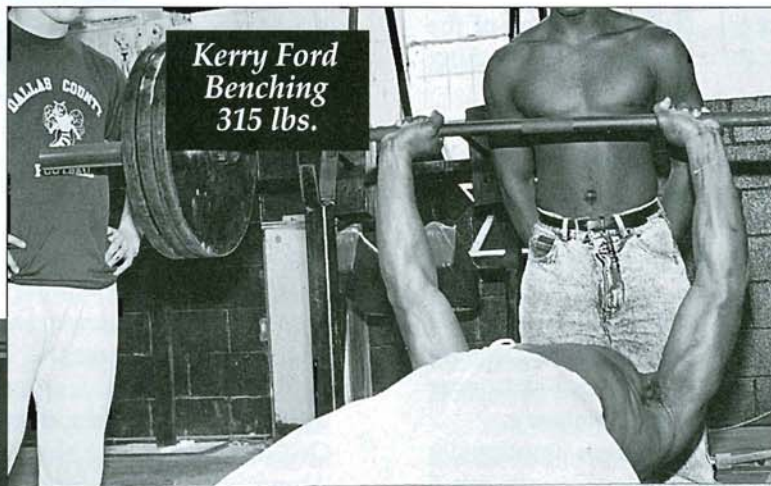
Richard Small Power Cleans 195 lbs.



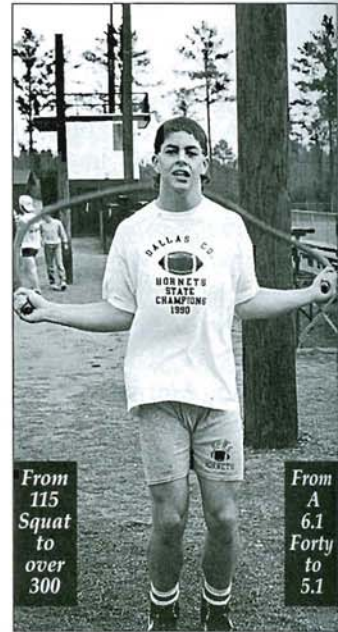
Rodney Sharp Easily Jumping a 46 inch Box. Got 4 sacks in State Championship Game.

*"When You Have Faith, You Can Move A Mountain, And Tonight We Moved A Mountain."*

Derek Montgomery  
Derek's profound quote after the final game demonstrating the powerful influence of the Lord's parable in Matthew 17:20



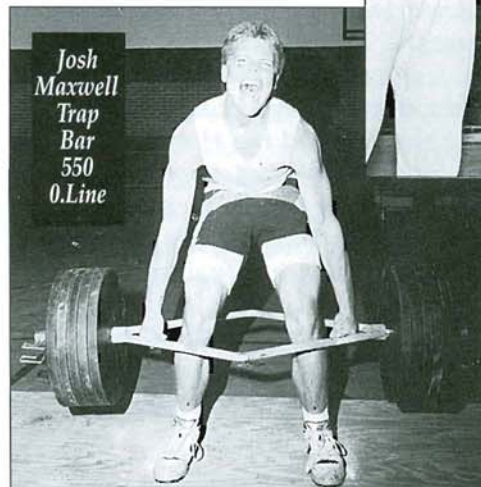
Kerry Ford Benching 315 lbs.



From 115 Squat to over 300

From A 6.1 Forty to 5.1

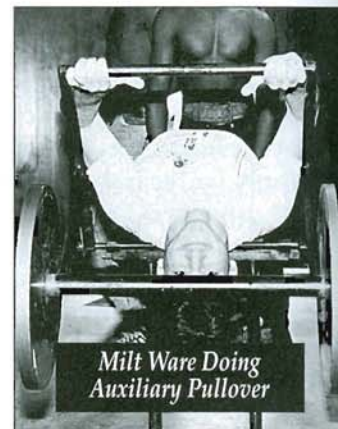
Starting Center Russel Lawley Played in band 2 years ago.



Josh Maxwell Trap Bar 550 0.Line



Brian Hester Parallel Squat



Milt Ware Doing Auxiliary Pullover



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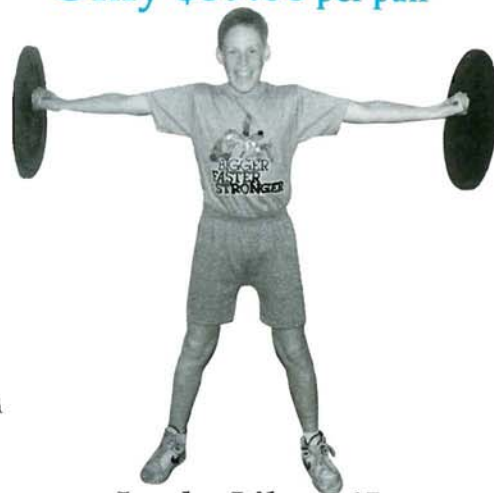


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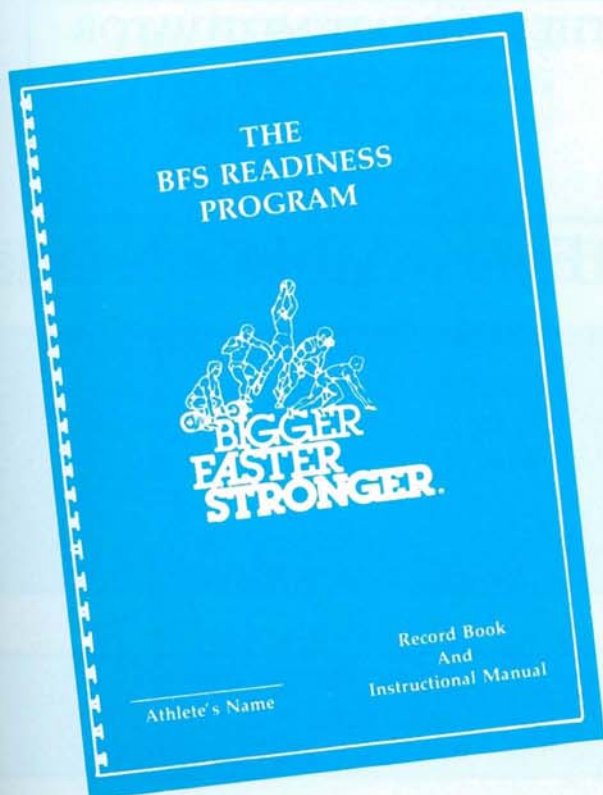
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