

Accountability Training at

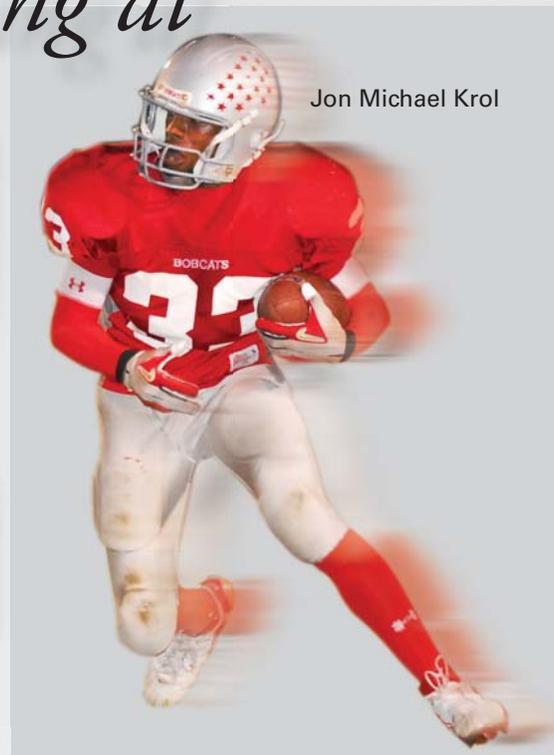
Central High

How an Arizona coach turned around a football team on the field and in the classroom



Jamita Steele-Taylor

Central High at Tolleson



Jon Michael Krol

Duke Photography

With eight years' experience as an assistant coach in successful high school football programs, Kevin Belcher thought he was ready to take his career to the next level. So five years ago he accepted a job as head football coach for the Bobcats at Central High School in Phoenix, Arizona, a team that had not won a conference title in more than two decades and had only won one game the previous season.

The program was so bad that the school was nicknamed the "Bermuda Triangle for Coaches," as no coach in the past 30 years had lasted more than three seasons. Belcher's own start was not auspicious; his first day on the job started a week *after* the season started. Even so, Coach Belcher thought he was up to meeting these challenges, until he actually started coaching and found out he was going to have trouble having enough players eligible to play.

One challenge was that the school

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district had an established a policy called *No Pass, No Play*, which means that if you are failing a class then you will be ineligible to participate in any athletic competitions. This policy is especially tough because it is reviewed on a weekly basis, which means that if on Thursday an athlete was failing a class the teacher would report the athlete ineligible to play the next Friday. “The following week the student can try to get that class up to a passing grade, but often kids who find themselves in that situation find it difficult to suddenly start passing a class,” says Belcher. Further, an athlete could be ineligible to play if one of their teachers thought he had a behavior problem. So, how bad was the football situation at Central?

When Coach Belcher was hired, 90 percent of the players on the football team had faced No Pass, No Play ineligibilities. “In our fourth week there were only 18 kids eligible, and by the last game of the year I was coaching just 12 kids, leaving only one player on the sideline in the largest conference in Arizona. This was overwhelming, and I questioned whether I had done the right thing accepting this challenge. But, I refocused my energy and as soon as that season ended we began preparing for our next season, by implementing the programs we couldn’t put in before our first season.”

Up from the Ashes

The first thing that Belcher set about doing to turn around his team was establishing a sound weight train-

ing program because, he says, “Our athletes were not as physically conditioned or trained as our opponents.” He decided he wanted a program he could easily implement so he could focus on the academic issues and negativity surrounding the team. “I got the *BFS* magazine; I spoke with some coaches who had used the program, and they were very enthusiastic about their implementation of the program. Then, Coach Rick Bojak came to our school to help us initiate our BFS program routines. Coach Bojak got me to believe completely in BFS. He spent three days with us, and did both a *Be an 11* workshop and a two-day lifting clinic. This helped motivate us into our off-season.”

The second year Belcher had another clinic with Jeff Surran, and the third year he did a coaches’ clinic with Dr. Greg Shepard to get the coaches more involved. “There are several main ingredients necessary to turn a program around, and one is that you need the athletes to be able to play. We used the BFS program because it was a template for success; it was straightforward and made sense – it didn’t dwell on just lifting, but hit flexibility and plyometrics and helped our multi-sport athletes still lift during the season.”

To administer the program, Belcher created a seventh-period interscholastic weight training class. “We use the BFS program and the *Be an 11* as a curriculum, using the *Be an 11 Guidebook* to help our players become accountable for their actions – to be able to tell the difference between right and wrong, to live the right way, and



Baron Steele

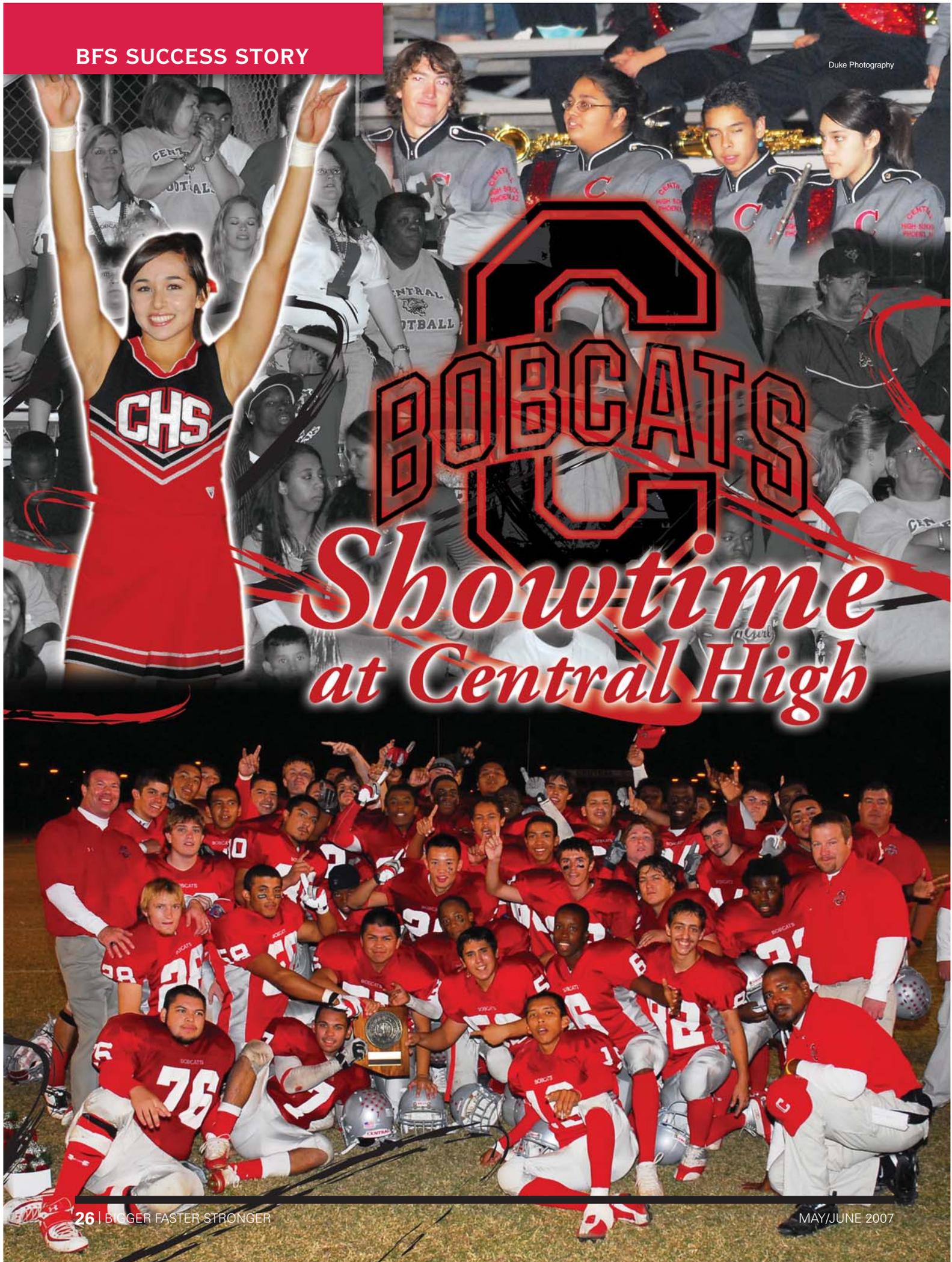
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to develop better decision-making and goal-setting skills,” says Belcher. Another idea he implemented was to develop mandatory study tables for his athletes. “We told our better student-athletes that they needed to help their teammates be eligible to play, week in and week out, or we’d have a different lineup every week, which kills continuity.”

Athletically, the result of these efforts was one of those remarkable turnaround stories *BFS* loves to share.

The next three seasons the Bobcats went 3-7, 2-8, and 6-4, and then earned consecutive playoff berths in 2005 and 2006, a feat that had not been accomplished in 34 years. They also became Metro-Region Champions in 2006, finishing 9-2.

In recognition of his efforts, last year Coach Belcher earned the Metro-

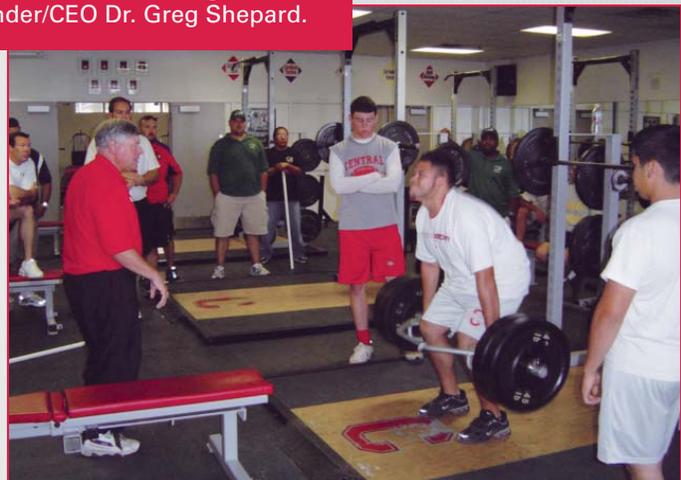


BOBCATS

Showtime at Central High



Central High has had three BFS clinics, including this coaches' clinic with BFS Founder/CEO Dr. Greg Shepard.



Region and All-City Coach of the Year Awards. Further, nine football players from the Bobcat program have been offered scholarship packages to play collegiate football. And because these are multi-sport athletes, other sport teams improved, such as the basketball team, which made it to the playoffs this year. But as impressive as these results are, they have been nearly overshadowed by the academic improvements in the Bobcat program.

Because of all their efforts, more student-athletes starting passing classes, they became more focused and started setting higher goals. And – get this! – only three percent of Belcher's players faced ineligibility problems last season, there were fewer behavioral issues, and the graduation rate for his student-athletes improved to 97 percent!

Reflecting on his five years with the

Bobcats, Belcher says, "This was not a pretty situation to walk into, and looking back I honestly didn't really understand just how bad it really was. But in a situation like this you can either bail out and say you made a bad choice, believing there's no way of doing this;

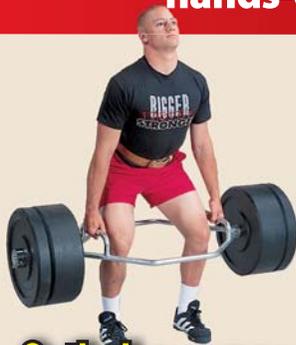
or you can do what I did and choose to stick it out." Turns out that Kevin Belcher made a very good choice five years ago – and because he did, today the student-athletes at Central High School are champions in the classroom as well as on the field. BFS



Shown on signing day, Chris Rodgers is one of the nine football players who have earned college scholarships under Coach Belcher. Rodgers signed with Ohio University, and was Belcher's first Division-1 athlete at Central.

TOTAL PROGRAM CLINIC

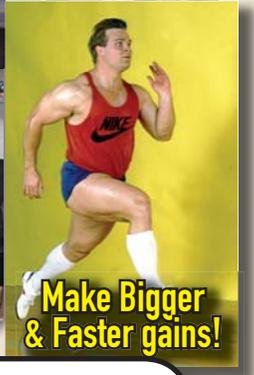
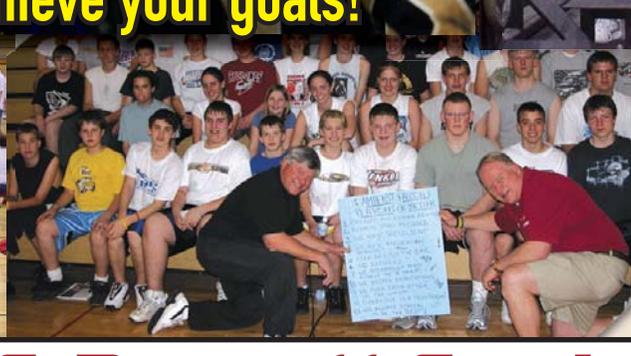
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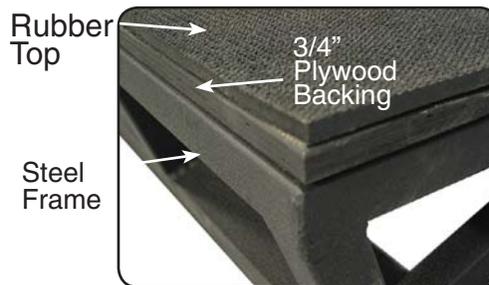


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