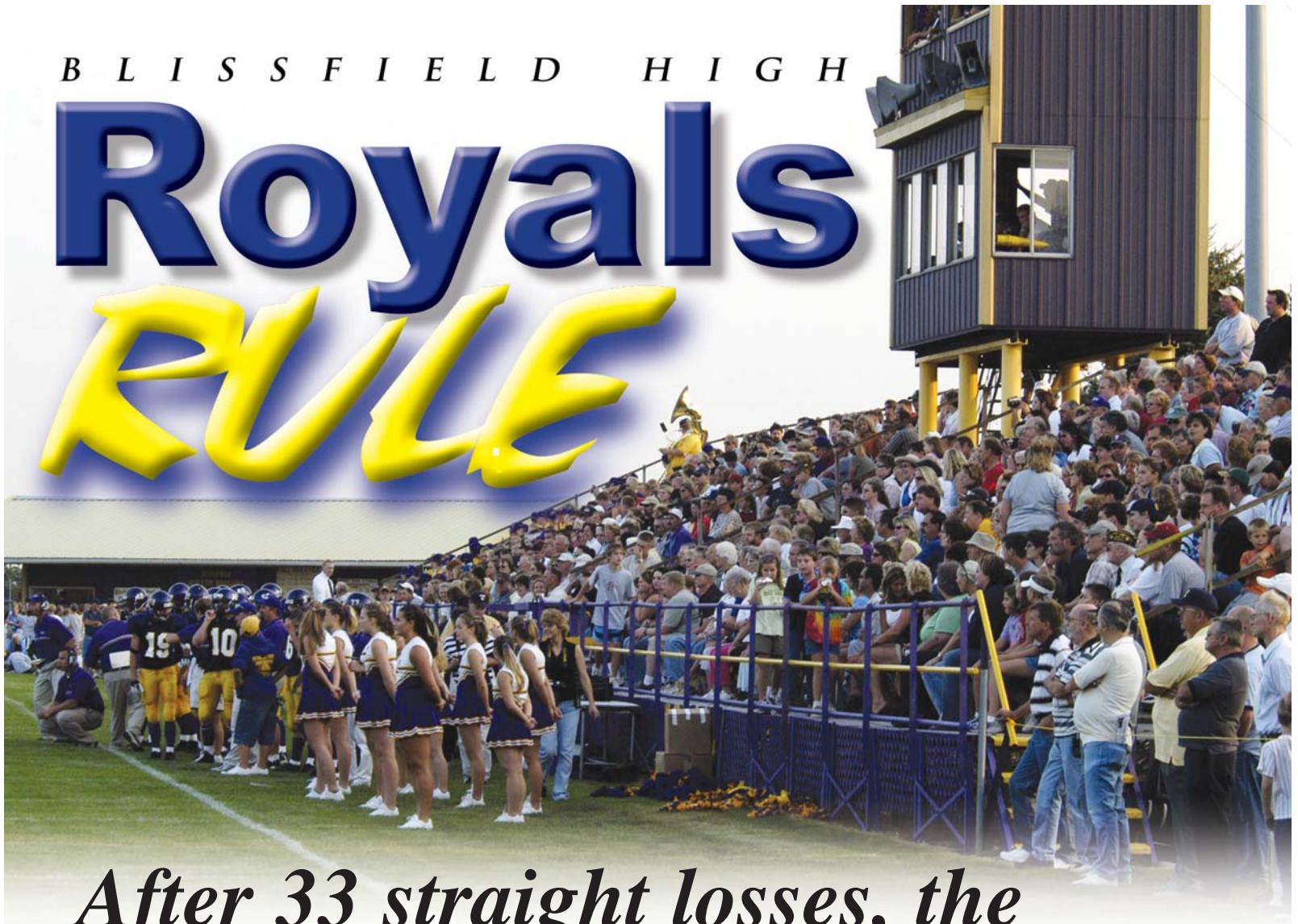


B L I S S F I E L D H I G H

Royals

BULE



After 33 straight losses, the Royals' football team decided enough was enough

by Doug Goodnough

Photos: Bobbi Jo Brown and Erica Demey

Just two years ago football at Blissfield High was riding an embarrassing 33-game losing streak. The future of the game at this Class C school in southeast Michigan didn't hold much promise, as interest in the program had dwindled to the point where there were too few players to field a junior varsity squad. That's when the Royals' coaching staff decided to have a BFS clinic.

This season, just two years after adopting the BFS program, the Royals finished with an 8-3

record. For the first time in school history, Blissfield High made it to the regional finals. Now, when the subject of Royals football comes up, everyone in town wants to talk about winning streaks.

Recalling the BFS clinic, head football coach Ron Estes mentions he had been pleased to find that the clinic covered not just physical conditioning but mental conditioning as well. "One day was strictly all about attitude," says Estes. Tapping into a positive attitude was the key Estes used to

turn the 33-game losing skid in the opposite direction. "The selling point for using BFS came at the point we found ourselves saying, 'We've wallowed around in the mud of losing for years and years and years. When are we going to get a group that says, 'That's enough! We're going to do something different!'"

With a new attitude and workout program, Estes and the others went to work, and the resulting weightroom numbers soon reflected their success. Two



Be An 11” . . . It’s our catch phrase. During training we wouldn’t do 10 pushups, we’d do 11. We wouldn’t run for 10 minutes, we’d run for 11. Everything is based on 11.”



years ago, in the midst of its losing streak, Blissfield had had only two players who could bench press 225 pounds or more. Now there are more than 30 players who have achieved that goal, with more than half of those pressing at least 250 pounds and several pressing 300. Injuries, which had plagued the football program in past years, have also decreased. “Now, in a clean, football way, we’re ‘putting the hurt’ on other people,” says Estes.

The physical changes have been crucial to competing, but winning takes more than brute strength. Estes concentrates on the mental approach just as much as the physical. He said the “Be An 11” ideal has worked wonders in his program. “It fit with what we’ve been trying to get across to the kids and reaffirmed what we were doing in the weightroom. BFS taught our kids how to be an 11, on a scale of 1 to 10, in everything that they do.”

“Not only did we get strong but we also became just so much tougher mentally,” Estes said. “Now anytime something goes wrong, we remember to say, ‘Hey, be an 11.’ . . . It’s our catch phrase. During training we wouldn’t do 10 pushups, we’d do 11. We wouldn’t run for 10 minutes, we’d run for 11. Everything is based on 11.”

Defying the Odds

Blissfield student Josh Watters wanted to play football. He found out just how much when he walked into the weightroom for the very first time.

At well over 300 pounds when he joined the football program, Watters has made perhaps one of the most remarkable transformations in school history. “Josh didn’t play sports,” says Estes. “He had no interest. He was someone you would have never, ever, envisioned playing athletics. No way. But last year, when I got the job, he said he wanted to try out.”

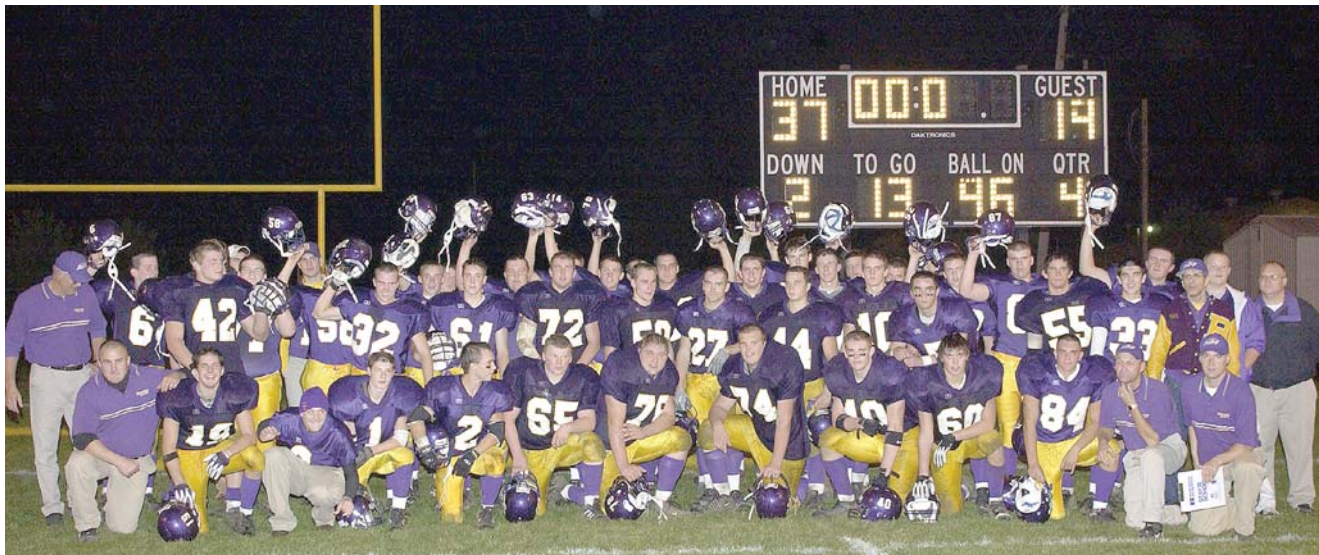
Watters hoped to contribute as a junior, but his conditioning would not allow it. “He couldn’t run on and off the field more than twice or else he would be gassed,” Estes

said. “I told him, ‘You’re not playing at that weight.’” Watters was determined, and he dedicated himself to off-season conditioning, which included joining Weight Watchers as well as immersing himself in the BFS training. Watters said, “I had a goal of starting and playing football, and I just thought I could make a difference.”

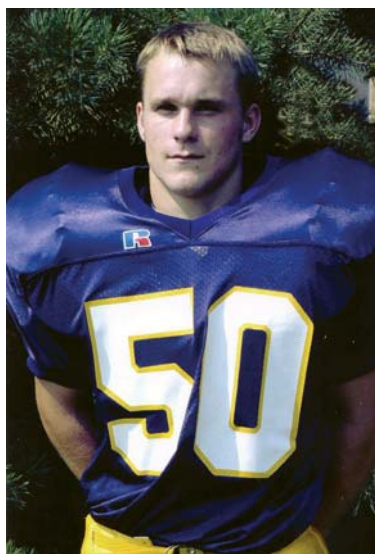
Mission accomplished. Forty pounds lighter and increasing his



Royals on the run, right into the hearts and minds of everyone in the community.



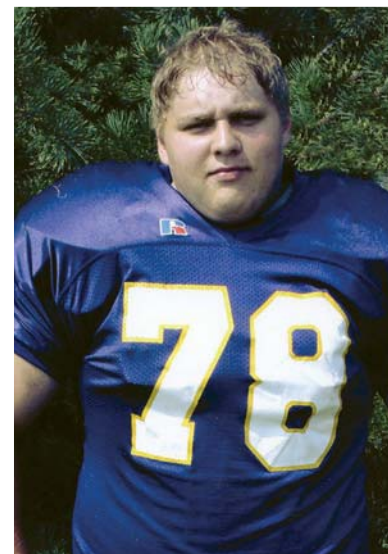
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Jesse Sieler

bench press from 150 pounds to 250, Watters earned a spot on the defensive line. “There’s a kid who wanted desperately to contribute,” says Estes. “In 21 years of coaching, I’ve never seen a kid make a turnaround like Josh has—he had a great year. He’s kind of a poster child of what we want to do here in football.”

Also on that poster should be senior Jesse Sieler. At 5-feet-8 inches tall and weighing anywhere from 165 to 180 pounds—depending on whom you ask—Sieler is a two-way starter at offensive guard and middle linebacker. But without weightlifting, Sieler would have a tough time even getting on the field, especially in the trenches, where he now thrives.



Josh Watters



Chris Saylor



Brandon Jones


"It's made all the difference," said Sieler, who is one of the team's leading tacklers and pound-for-pound is one of the strongest players on the squad. "At my size I'd never be starting. We worked hard in the weightroom, and without it we'd be hurting."

Estes says of his co-captain, "Jesse is a tough kid, but on his tiptoes he's probably 5-8 and weighs 165 pounds. If it weren't for him lifting weights and getting stronger, he couldn't play those positions. There are tailbacks in the league bigger than him."

Sieler, one of the first on board with Estes' new program, says that once a few of his teammates starting lifting the BFS way, others followed. "Everyone just wanted to pull together," he said. "We wanted to get the losing streak over with—we were tired of losing."

Staying Hungry

After the 2003 season Estes was recognized for his coaching efforts by being named the Associated Press Class C Coach of the Year in Michigan. He was also selected as Coach of the Year in the Toledo area and in Lenawee County as well.

Even though Blissfield has met its main goal of sending the first team in school history to the playoffs, Estes and his team are not satisfied. "It's never easy to maintain what you've accomplished," said Estes, who recently had 60 players from grades 9 through 11 attend a preseason goal-setting meeting. "It's not easy from the standpoint that you want to keep getting better at it, but it will be easier from the standpoint that the BFS program is established. The kids are sold on it. They know that BFS was a big part of what we accomplished." 

Play Hard, Play Smart, Play Together

We coaches are constantly on the lookout for strategies and techniques that will raise our team's level of play and ultimately lead to success. There always seems to be something new that promises to be "the answer" or something that has been around a long time that can be tweaked to give a team the upper hand over its opponents.

My name is Denny Thompson, and I have been coaching football at Blissfield High School in Michigan for 31 years. I have gone to numerous clinics and have read a tremendous number of articles to help find methods to help our football fortunes. A couple of years ago, I came to develop a simple philosophy of success: "Play hard, play smart, play together." I concluded that these were the major components in achieving a team's potential. This past season the Bigger Faster Stronger program came our way and reinforced all three of these areas.

The messages of playing hard and developing a tremendous work ethic jumped out at us through the BFS program. Our strength gains were nothing short of remarkable. The Be An Eleven program enhanced our mental toughness. We established a team philosophy, and our players pulled together to clearly formulate some obtainable goals.

Every aspect of the BFS program aided us in having a very successful season, and even better, our experience was not just a quick fix that will fade away. Thanks, BFS, for helping us find a program that truly works.

Sincerely,

Denny Thompson
Assistant Football Coach,
Blissfield High School

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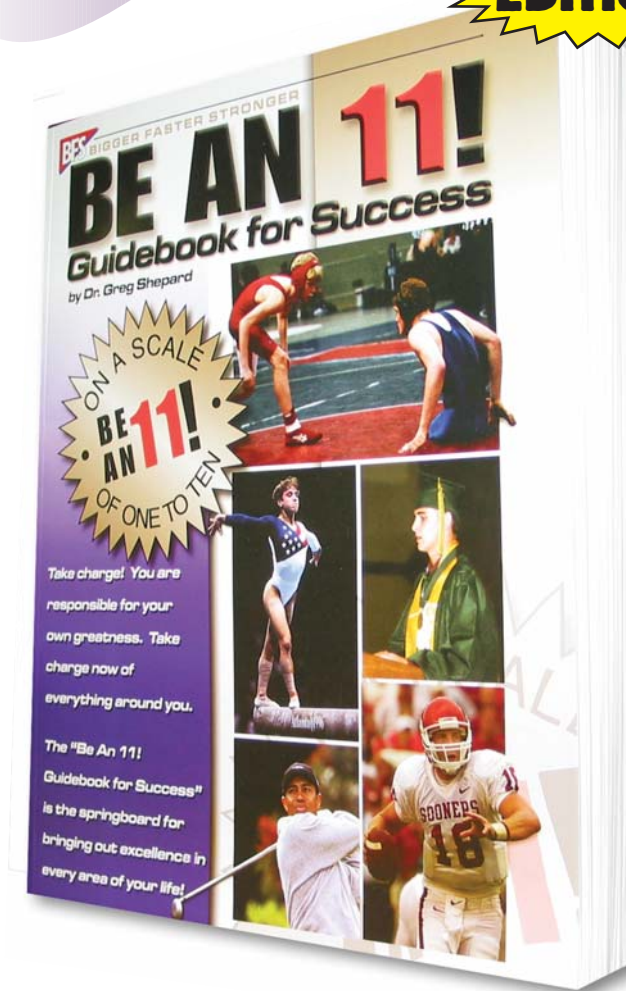
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