

Photos by William Hanson

*Badminton
and Beyond:*

Irvington High

*At last, the Vikings from Fremont
have something else to talk about*

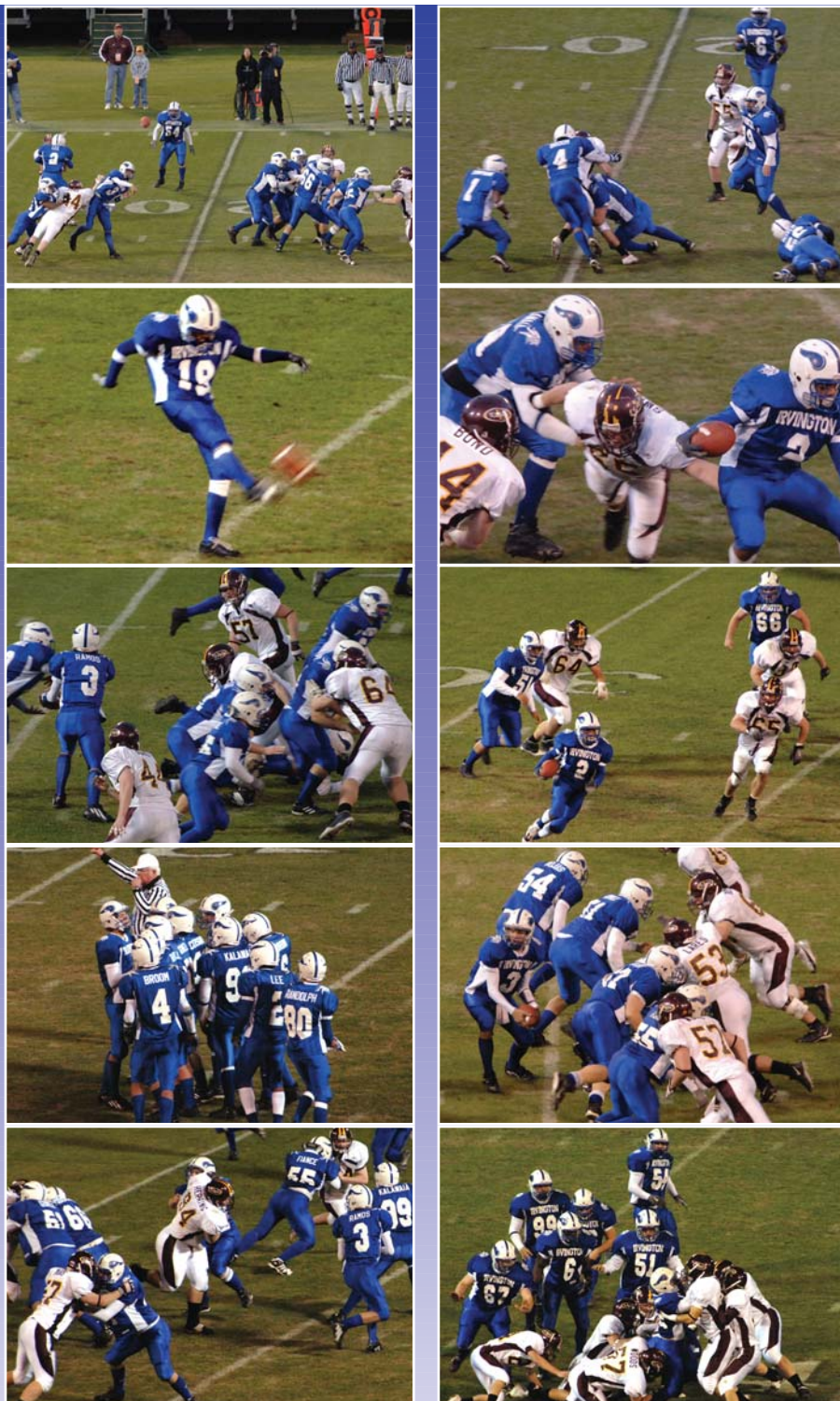
Never let it be said that Irvington High School lacks athletic excellence: the student body can point with pride to seven championship banners displayed in the gym. Of course, four of the seven banners are for badminton (no offense to shuttlecock aficionados), but hey, pride is pride.

Even so, most of the 2,000 Irvington High students would like to see at least some success in the major sports, especially football. Unfortunately, with only three league championships in 44 years, the Vikings' football team hasn't exactly been rocking the house for this Northern California school located in Fremont. That is, until Bob Spain found a way to turn things around.

A 1986 graduate of Irvington High, Coach Spain took over as the head football coach at Irvington in 1994, and the Vikings continued to perform with marginal results over the next several years. Spain's lucky charm turned out to be Jim Ingram, a coach who had been with a rival school before joining the Vikings' staff in 2004 and introducing Spain to the BFS program. Says Spain, "Jim had been using BFS at Washington for something like the last 30 years, and he said, 'You want to take a look at this.'" Spain did, and the school had a clinic in May of that year with Evan Ayres to kick-start the summer program. The previous year the team only won two games, so this would be a good test of the effectiveness of the BFS program. It passed. That season they won four league games, a feat they had not duplicated since the early '80s.

In 2005 it seemed that the previous season might have been a fluke as they started off 0-3. But then they went on to win nine games in a row and won the first two playoff games, making it to the sectional championship game against Los Lomas. They lost that game 21-14, but you wouldn't know that from their fan support. "The student body has been





Irvington High School had many outstanding individual performances in the 2005 season. Senior running back Steve Lee, #2, set the school career rushing record with 2,487 yards. Junior quarterback JT Ramos, #3, broke the school single season record for passings yards, 1,803. Junior wide receiver and running back Robert Turbin, #6, scored 19 touchdowns and was named the league's defensive MVP. And junior wide receiver Tyler Broom, #4, averaged over 19 yards per catch.

phenomenal,” says Spain. “The stands were packed for the playoff games, and we were told that the City of Fremont wants our kids to ride on a fire engine and wave to everybody in the Fourth of July parade – it’s a lot of fun.”

In terms of numbers, despite being primarily a triple-option team, Irvington averaged over 370 total yards a game, and Spain says they’ve “crushed” just about every school record from the last 40 years. Another bonus is that two of their players will be accepting full-ride scholarships. “In my 12 years here,” says Spain, “we’ve never had a four-year-scholarship athlete come out of Irvington High School.”

Building Vikings

For most of his coaching career at Irvington, Spain had to settle for a 25-by-25-foot weightroom. In 2001, however, they moved into a room that was twice that size and were able to add an additional six power racks to the area. Interestingly, last summer the school had to close the weightroom to retrofit the building, so the football team ended up moving all the equipment into the faculty cafeteria, a room about one quarter the size. But Spain said the team was focused on success and believed in the program; they were able to work hard and make great gains “that just carried over to the football season.”

Although his passion is football, Spain encourages his football players to compete in multiple sports. “We have to share our athletes – we just can’t have football-only kids. Our quarterback is our shortstop in baseball – in fact, our outside linebacker recently threw a complete game, 128 pitches.”

If there has been a change in Spain’s football coaching philosophy since adopting the BFS program, Spain says it’s prob-

ably his belief in playing against the toughest competition. A 3A school, with 4A being the highest classification, Irvington had played four 4A schools on their schedule in 2004, and last year they played six. Says Spain, “We didn’t do that before we were lifting as heavy as we do now, because we wanted the kids to feel that “Well, a win’s a win – no matter who it is.” Now we want to play against really good teams. Last year we lost our first three preseason games, but we knew that we were playing quality opponents and we were in those games. So even though we didn’t walk off the field with a victory, our kids felt really good about themselves.”

In the Fremont community, Spain says the focus has been on adult athletics. “We have a great sports complex for adult softball and soccer, but there’s not much going on here for the kids. Our youth football program in Fremont, which has been around since the early ’60s, still plays on an 80-yard field. And because kids don’t have to take PE after 10th grade, the result is apparent in our nation’s ever increasing waistlines. Our schools are turning out a bunch of fat kids, and that’s sad because they are setting themselves up for health problems later in life.”

At Irvington High School, at least, the attitude of being winners has taken hold of the Vikings’ football team. “The greatest thing that has happened is that winning kind of perpetrates itself so that now everybody believes they’re good and they work out to stay good – they don’t go into the weightroom to shoot the bull or make friends,” says Spain. “Our kids are already looking forward to next football season. What we did this year was great, but we did it with a lot of juniors, so the deck is stacked for us to pull it off again next year, and you have to like that.” **BFS**



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