

# Ahead of Schedule:

Color photos by Karen Conard and Karen Carter, olentangysports.com



# OLENTANGY LIBERTY HIGH SCHOOL

Success came quickly for this football team by training not just harder but smarter

Steve Hale doesn't see obstacles; he sees opportunities. When Olentangy Liberty High School opened its doors in Powell, Ohio, four years ago, Hale good-naturedly accepted the challenge of becoming head football coach of a team facing its first-ever season. Many of the athletes had never even played the game before – and they were competing in the second-largest division in their league – but Hale had faith it would be all right. Still, it was no surprise when the Patriots finished 1-9 that first year. What *was* a surprise – to everyone except Hale – was that the team proceeded to make the playoffs for the next three years and posted a combined record of 26-8.

When BFS learned of Liberty's success, we figured our readers would appreciate some insight into how Coach Hale was able to establish a top program from the ground up. In this exclusive interview, Coach Hale shares his fast-track formula for developing a winning program.

**BFS:** What's the one thing you did that helped most to jump-start your

program?

**HALE:** We instilled a lot of good work habits in the kids right from the beginning, especially in the weight-room. We also had a BFS clinic in the summer of 2003 to help reinforce what we wanted to teach.

**BFS:** During your first season, what type of football system did you go with?

**HALE:** Half of the kids on our roster had not played football for several years, so our primary goal that first year on the field was to focus on the fundamentals. We lined up in an I formation, and 90 percent of the time ran off tackle. Our defense was a basic 4-4.

**BFS:** You won your first game in 2003 and then lost the next nine. What was the attitude among your players at the end of the season?

**HALE:** Amazingly, it was very good – there were no heads hanging down. They knew that the following year we would have everybody returning, which is a unique situation; and we explained to our kids that this season was not the end for us but the begin-

ning. As such, there was actually a lot of excitement at the end of the year because they were looking forward to next season.

**BFS:** Do you have a basic, overall philosophy in your football program?

**HALE:** Our strategy now, and for next year, is simple: to keep doing what we're doing. Our priorities are to get our kids working hard in the summer – making them bigger, faster and stronger – and keeping them healthy. We've had a lot of luck with kids not getting injured; and when there is an injury – usually a sprained ankle – they heal quickly, which we believe is partly due to our work ethic in our strength and conditioning program. What's more, we've never had a serious knee or shoulder injury, and there have only been three or four times in the last four years where we didn't have all our weapons on the field. Being this healthy gives us a big advantage, because often our opponents will have four or five players out because of injury.

**BFS:** Do you have an inspirational motto for your team?



The Patriots made a remarkable turnaround under Coach Steve Hale, improving from 1-9 to 26-8.

# PATRIOTS

Let's Go Liberty LHS  
 \* BEAT \* [Liberty] \* [Lion] \*

## BFS SUCCESS STORY

**HALE:** We have our athletes come into a workout with the mindset “Today is another day for me to win a championship!” We want our kids to believe in our program and understand where their success on the field is coming from. For this reason, we encourage our athletes to break personal records every day.

**BFS:** Have you had to modify the BFS program as your athletes got stronger?

**HALE:** We’ve had some kids who have gotten so strong on the box squat that we’ve decided to have them focus on other auxiliary lifts. For example, we have a wide receiver who box squats over 500, so we thought it would be

better to have him perform the front squat instead.

**BFS:** Do you have any special motivational awards in the area of strength and conditioning for your team?

**HALE:** We have a 48-inch plyo box that we set up in the school cafeteria. When an athlete is able to jump on the box, they get to sign their name on it. There’s a lot of excitement about working to get up on that box, and we already have 20 athletes who’ve done it.

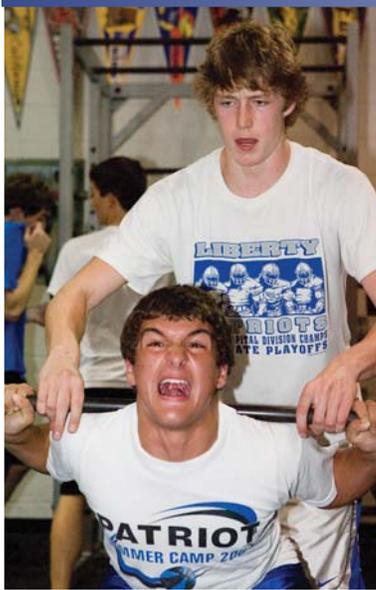
**BFS:** Do you encourage your athletes to lift in weightlifting or powerlifting competitions during the off-season?

**HALE:** No. We have never been to a lifting competition and will never go

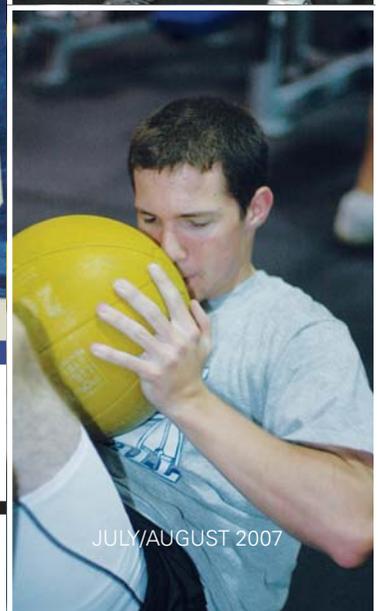
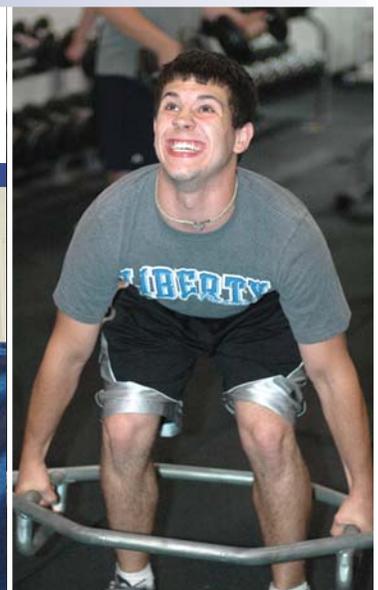


Photo by Kristi Scott, OHS, The Cannon

A 48-inch plyo box is set up in the school cafeteria, and when an athlete is able to jump on the box, they get to sign their name on it. It’s a great motivational tool, and so far the box has 20 signatures.



Coach Hale attributes much of his team’s success to working on all aspects of strength and conditioning.



as long as I'm here – we don't compete in that capacity. Our competition is on Friday nights on the football field, and we're doing things in the weightroom to make us better players. I'm not interested in winning weightlifting competitions; I'm interested in winning games on Friday nights.

**BFS:** Do other sports use the BFS program?

**HALE:** Our athletic director has actually mandated that all our athletic teams will use the BFS program. What's more, most of our kids have come to realize that if they do the program, they won't get hurt and they will be better prepared to perform whatever event they are doing. And from an

administrative standpoint, it's unbelievable what a relief it is to use a unified program.

**BFS:** Do you encourage incoming freshmen to use the Readiness program?

**HALE:** Yes, and in fact the athletic director at our middle school is also working on trying to find some coaches to implement the Readiness program. That way, when their kids get here, they'll have already learned the basic techniques. In the summer our kids work from 8 a.m. to 10 a.m., and we bring in some of the seventh and eighth graders first thing in the morning at 7:30 to work with them for about 30 minutes. For right now that's the best we can do because we

have so many athletes working out in the morning.

**BFS:** Do you have any general advice for other coaches who are taking over new programs?

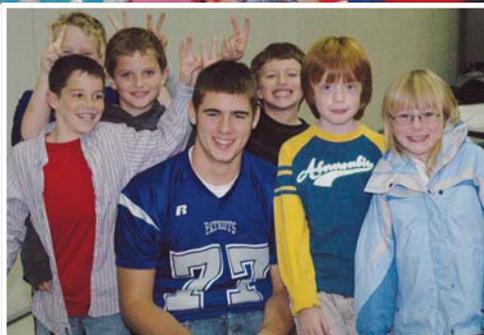
**HALE:** You've got to keep your focus and not lose faith in what you're doing. When you're 1-9, everybody in the world can tell you what you're doing wrong; but if you know what you're doing, you have to have confidence that it will work. And when you're clearly outmatched, as we were in my first year, you have to keep that in perspective and realize that you will get better. Just stay positive, and the payoff will be more wins on Friday nights. **BFS**



The football team and cheerleaders often give popular motivational talks to young people in their area.



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# TOTAL PROGRAM CLINIC

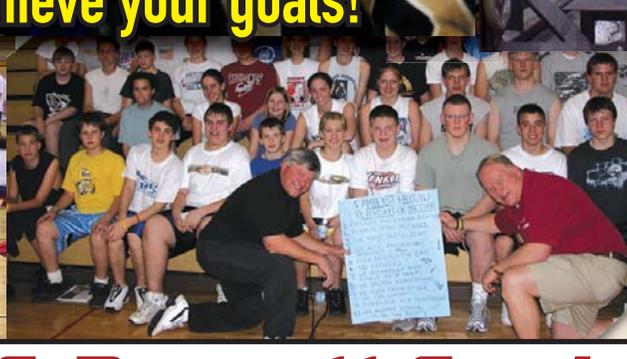
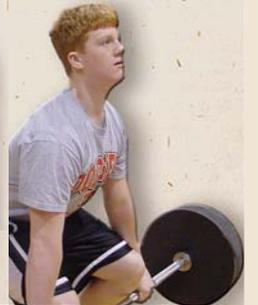
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