



Sometimes a coach has to take a step backward to take two steps forward

If there's a motto that could have summed up Spencer Henley's coaching philosophy when he took over the Colon High School football program in 2000, it might have been "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again – and then give up. No use making a fool of yourself!" This team had problems.

A Division 7 school in Colon, Michigan, Colon High School had a football history about as pathetic as you could get. How bad was it? For starters, the football team hadn't had a winning season since 1976. The school suffered records of 2-7 and 1-8 in 1999 and 2000, and the following year was even worse. They lost the first seven games, and then Henley had to forfeit the last two because so many players were injured they didn't have enough players to take the field. And to cap off their humiliation, their school mascot was a bunny! Colon, Michigan, is known as the "Magic Capital of the World," but there would be no pulling a rabbit out of a hat in *that* season.

"We were playing in a very difficult league,"

says Henley. "At our school football hadn't been a cool thing to do, so it was hard to recruit enough players." Another issue facing the Magi was the reality of having 14 seniors on that 0-7 team and no juniors, which meant that the following year there would be no seniors on the team. "After that 0-7 season I sat down with the athletic director and we decided that we couldn't put our juniors out there by themselves and expect them to play varsity football. We decided to just play with a junior varsity team, which took us out of our league for two years."

One Step Back, Two Steps Forward

During those JV seasons, Henley decided he wanted to get the kids into the BFS program, but he encountered some opposition from the players. "They just didn't want to do it – there wasn't any commitment." Instead of fighting their apathy, Henley decided to prepare for the future by focusing on the middle school level because he found that these athletes really wanted to do the program.



Running back Bryant Bontrager is a versatile athlete who helped Colon High School win. He averaged 10.7 yards per carry rushing with four touchdowns, and 26.6 yards per reception and five touchdowns. He also returned a kick and punt for a touchdown and broke up six passes on defense.

“I started the seventh and eighth graders on the BFS Readiness Program,” says Henley. “We worked hard on lifting technique, but we never actually used weights other than in a few dumbbell exercises – just to give them a taste. It was only during the second half of the eighth grade that I had these athletes starting with weights on core lifts such as the squat. And in the summer between eighth and ninth grade they really started to hit it.”

Henley’s plan and his patience paid off. Just prior to the 2004 season, of Henley’s 21 players, 17 could bench press 200 pounds, 16 could squat 300, and 19 could Hex bar over 400 – and one even did 700! Henley also had a few players who were motivated enough to participate in powerlifting competitions in the off-season.

One lift that Henley was especially concerned about was the deadlift, having injured his back in college. “I deal with back pain every day of my life, so I’m not a huge fan of deadlifting because it gets your back in a bad position because your hands are outside the frame of your body.

“That’s the reason I like the Hex bar so much for our athletes – it keeps their hands right at their sides so they are more likely to begin the movement by pushing with their legs rather than pulling with their back.” For the players who also compete in powerlifting, Henley only allows them to perform the regular deadlift two weeks before the competition to get used to the technique. As for how well the Hex bar deadlift carries over to the regular deadlift, Henley has found that if an athlete can Hex bar 400 pounds, he can do a regular deadlift of at least 315. “At the heavier weights there’s a bigger gap; for example, my athlete who can Hex bar deadlift 700 can do about 550 in the regular deadlift.”

Having witnessed the success of the football team, other students at Colon High School have seen the light and have gotten on the BFS program. “I have two weightlifting classes that are full, with 30 kids in each one,” says Henley.

Back in the Saddle

Because moving down to the JV level resulted in scheduling problems, when Henley’s school moved back to the varsity level in 2004, it had to compete as an independent school. The results,



QB Jared Thornton



RB Curtis Bohne

literally, were unprecedented: The team went 7-1 and earned a berth in the playoffs against Schoolcraft.

“Schoolcraft has been a perennial powerhouse in the league that we dropped out of, and the game meant a lot to us because for the last ten times we played them the average score was about 41-3. This time they beat us 38-24, that’s all. We had several turnovers that hurt us, and some strong winds that hurt our passing attack, but it was a game that was statistically even. We ended up being very competitive with them, which had never happened before, and we finished the season with no major injuries.”

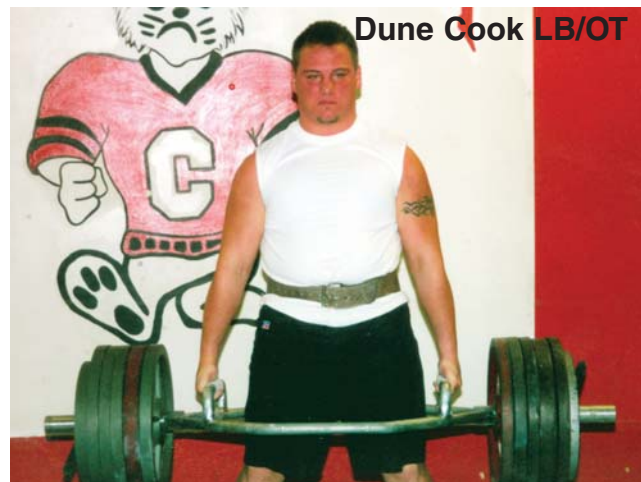
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majority of these students are athletes, but there are kids who are not and they’re doing a really good job with the program.” Colon High School girls are also getting with the program.

“I have about 10 girls who lift regularly, and I expect that number will keep increasing,” says Henley. “Weight training is becoming more accepted, and the female athletes are seeing a difference in their sports performance. A volleyball player might say, ‘Hey coach, I can really tell the difference when I spike the ball,’ or ‘I’m a lot quicker on the court.’ They’re beginning to understand how this training transfers over to their sport.”

Coming full circle, Coach Henley must be congratulated in transforming a program that seemed destined for failure into one that contended for the state championship. Now if he could just work some magic on that mascot! **BFS**



Dune Cook LB/OT

The BFS program was a key to the success of the Magi football program. To help athletes find the time to train, Coach Henley offers two weight training classes during regular class periods.