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hen Coach Ronnie Peacock took over as head coach for Rogers High School, he knew he was in for a challenge, as the school didn't have a recent history of winning. That prediction was confirmed when his Mountaineers finished 2-8 that first year and 1-9 the next. "I'd known I was getting into a tough situation when I took this position, but it was a lot tougher than I expected – a lot tougher."

When the Mountaineers improved to 6-4 the following year, the immediate future seemed brighter, but the team garnered only eight wins and a tie over the next two years. Peacock kept up the good fight, however, and his patience was rewarded the following year: The team went undefeated, 12-0, and went on to the Class 7A State Championships against the Fort Smith Southside High School Rebels from Fort Smith, Arkansas.

Having beaten the Rebels earlier in the season, a game in which Rogers was ahead 21-0 in the first quarter, Peacock couldn't help but feel confident. "Our kids were on a roll, and we had already beaten the Rebels. We knew if we played well, we should beat them again – but you never know," says Rogers. In the championship game, Rogers scored a touchdown with 40 seconds left in the game, missing the extra point, to go up by two. That hiccup would cost them, as on the subsequent kickoff the Rebels were able to hit a 37-yard field goal with four ticks left on the clock. Final score: Rebels 23, Mountaineers 22.

Now, although they weren't able to hammer in the



last nail of a perfect season, Rogers High School has finally shaken their reputation as a team of "also-rans." A 12-1 season is, by any standard of measurement, remarkable. And there are many individual accomplishments to recognize, such as the All-Arkansas honors given to quarterback Cody Kirby, offensive lineman Lee Ziemba and defensive lineman Derek Smith. A word about Kirby, who was named the 2006 *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* Offensive Player of the Year and who has orally committed to Missouri State.

The previous two seasons Kirby had been set back by ankle injuries, breaking his left ankle in the first game of his sophomore year and his right ankle four games into his junior year. "We throw the ball a lot, and injuries to key players can really hurt," says Peacock, who says in 2005 the team was 3-0-1 with Kirby and 1-5 without him. But Kirby, just like Coach Peacock, is not the type of person to give up easily.

Kirby worked himself healthy and racked up 4,267 yards



of total offense that included 34 passing touchdowns and 18 rushing touchdowns. He also had a 66 percent completion ratio, fumbled only once, and was named the team's offensive player of the week eight times.

Beyond the Numbers

Peacock, a former professional football player who has also coached at the college level, sees many differences between working with high school athletes and with those at higher levels. "The higher the stakes, the more importance is put on winning on the scoreboard," says Peacock. And on recruiting.

"In college you're going to be able to recruit your kids, and it's about getting the right kids that fit into your program and then just working them really hard. In college it's either "win or go," and that is one reason there are a lot of college coaches whose only concern is winning and who are not interested in making a real difference in these kids' lives. In high school if you don't win, you're still teaching kids and changing lives." And that's just the way Peacock approaches coaching.

"If it is all about winning and you put everything into winning and you lose, then you lose everything." says Peacock. "On the high school level there's a lot more that

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Ronnie Peacock, Head Football Coach/AD

you're trying to accomplish, and I would go so far as to say that my biggest wins have not been on the scoreboard. My biggest victories have come from touching kids' lives, and maybe saving kids from drugs or helping guide a kid who has grown up without a dad."

As for Peacock's view of professional football, he has mixed feelings. "First of all, my stint in pro football was relatively short, but it had a tremendous impact on my life.



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I think there is a lot of pressure put on pro athletes to liven things up to make things bigger than they are. They know they are being watched and the television cameras are on, and so there are the little dances in the end zone — it's almost like the pro athletes have to have that image, though not all of them do."

Marvin Harrison, the wide receiver from the Colts, is one NFL player Peacock admires: "Harrison is not real flashy, but he's out there catching and taking care of business. But then there's Terrell Owens and the message he sends, not only with his actions on and off the field but also in terms of respect for other players and his coaches. The message that is sent out by pro football is 'Terrell Owens can do whatever he wants to do and can get away with it, as long as Dallas is winning.' If Dallas is going to the Super Bowl, everybody loves Terrell Owens. I hate that image."

Doing What Counts

Peacock says that one of the programs he is most proud of at Rogers, a BFS school, is the annual father-son

Head Football Coach Ronnie Peacok

Head Football Coach Ronnie Peacok ended his first season at Rogers with a 2-8 record. This year his Mounties finished at 12-1 and went to the Class 7A State Championships.

retreat, which he started seven years ago. "In my 34 years of coaching, it's the best thing I've done because it has positively impacted more lives than anything else I've ever done in coach-

ing football." Peacock says this retreat encourages fathers and sons to get "emotionally naked" with each other, which he explains is "talking from the heart about things that they normally wouldn't talk about."

For the mothers, Peacock puts on what he calls "The Mountie Mom Clinic," which he describes as basically a Football 101 clinic for the mothers of his players. "We talk about some basic concepts of the game, we have an official come and talk about the rules, and we dress a football player in the pads to show the mothers how their sons are being protected. We want to show that we are trying to do what's best, and what's right, for their kids."

Asked to sum up his philosophy about coaching, Peacock paused for a minute and replied passionately, "We all want to win, but there's something that is much more important than winning. Learning how to work as a team member, how to count on each other – all of those things, in my opinion, are as important, if not more important, than winning on the scoreboard."

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