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The Science of *Soccer Power*

A strong work ethic in the weightroom helped the soccer team at Reeths-Puffer earn its second consecutive conference championship

Soccer just might be the final frontier of strength training. Shot-putters and discus throwers were among the first group of athletes to lift weights, soon followed by football players and athletes in other major sports such as basketball and wrestling. Even baseball players have become a common fixture in weightrooms, eventually gravitating away from the fancy pulley machines and towards the power racks and lifting platforms. Just about every sport out there has discovered “the secret of steel” and has been profiting from it for years. Except soccer.

It wasn't that soccer coaches didn't value conditioning, but historically their focus was on endurance and plyometric drills. In fact, until



Head Soccer Coach Ben Ritsema with BFS Clinician Evan Ayres

recently the only time you would find a soccer player in the weightroom was if he or she was looking for someone. Now, however, the sport has discovered that to improve speed and jumping ability and to become overall physically superior for the game, you can't beat weight training. And one school that is proving this point is Reeths-Puffer High School in Muskegon, Michigan.

Ben Ritsema is the head soccer coach for the Rockets of Reeths-Puffer. In the spring of 2003, just after a soccer season in which his team placed fifth in the conference, Coach Ritsema attended a Total Program Clinic conducted by Evan Ayres. Ritsema was so impressed by what he saw he decided to give the program a try. The results were everything he'd hoped for.

The following season the Rockets won their first-ever conference championship, their first in the 18-year history of the program. Whereas in 2003 they'd had 12 goals for and 12 against in conference play, in 2004 they had 14 goals for and 5 against. And whereas in 2003

they'd had three players make all-conference and no honorable mentions, in 2004 four players made all-conference and two were honorable mentions.

Because of the success of the Total Program Clinic, in the spring of 2005 the school decided to take the next step and hold a Be an 11 Clinic, once again

conducted by Evan Ayres. The soccer team had 100 percent attendance, and the players quickly set a goal to exceed the outstanding results of 2004.

In 2005 the Rockets won their second conference championship, even more decisively than in 2004. They scored 34 goals, made a school record of 18 wins, and had four all-conference members and three honorable mentions. What's more, the team hasn't had a serious injury since beginning the BFS program.

A Change of Attitude

When asked if there had been any problem getting the soccer team on board with BFS, athletic director Todd Farmer, who helped arrange the BFS Clinic, replied, “There was a little bit of resistance at first because change is difficult for

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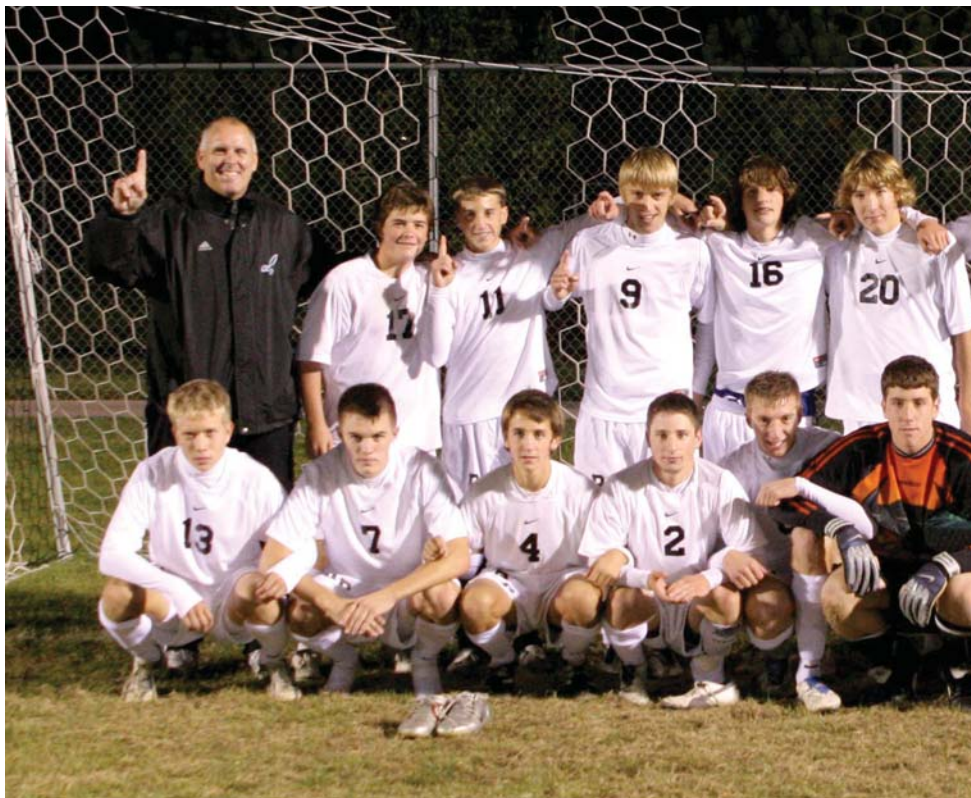
—ATHLETIC DIRECTOR TODD FARMER



Sean Wright helped the Rockets soar to success, leading the team in goals with 18. He also had 10 assists, and was selected All-State and All-Conference.



#3 Paul Kimbro, All-Conference
Honorable Mention



#10 Matt Schmitt had 17 goals and nine assists. He was 2nd Team All-State and was named All-Conference three times.

anybody – and with this type of situation a lot of the coaches would say that it's just one more thing that they have to do." It wasn't long before they came around.

"When I attended the BFS Clinic in 2003," says Ritsema, "I really thought it was being brought to Reeths-Puffer for the football program, and to be honest I really wasn't certain if I wanted to incorporate it into my soccer program. But some of my athletes started doing the lifts in a strength training class, and they really enjoyed it. So I decided to get my other soccer players into the weightroom, and the kids ended up loving it." Farmer agrees: "These soccer kids are some of the most dedicated student-athletes that we have, and they were religiously in the weightroom all summer long. What's also great is that our younger kids are seeing that commitment, seeing what it takes to become successful."

On the field, Ritsema noted one of the biggest improvements in his players: "With BFS we were able to play a more



The Reeths-Puffer soccer team won conference titles in 2004 and 2005.



#8 Nathan Schmitt, All-Conference

physical game than we ever could before; and when you play more physical, you have more control of the game.” Farmer explains it a bit differently: “Whenever our players collide, it’s usually the other players who are the ones falling down to the ground,” he says. “People in the stands might think that we’re playing dirty when this happens, but the fact is we’re just stronger and more physical than the other teams – they’re bouncing off us and falling. We’re not cheating; we’re just more physically fit.”

Another benefit of the conditioning program, says Ritsema, is the camaraderie that developed among the players. “BFS bonded the team, so that not only did it strengthen them physically, it strengthened the unity of the team. And team unity is obviously important in a team sport such as soccer. The bottom line is that my 2005 team was stronger, faster and way more in shape than other teams – I will have my teams do BFS until I retire from coaching!” **BFS**

BFS bonded the team, so that not only did it strengthen them physically, it strengthened the unity of the team

—HEAD SOCCER COACH BEN RITSEMA



Goalie Nate Gilmore had eight shutouts this year and was named All-Conference.

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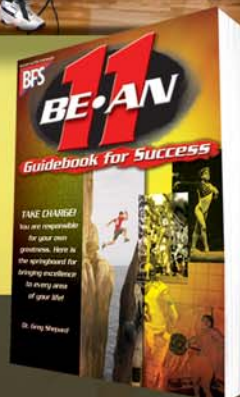
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