



PHOTO BY DANNY VOWELL, THE KENTUCKY NEW ERA



at Trigg County High

A recommitment to conditioning, along with a little fun, has helped turn around this school's football program

High school football is such a serious business that it makes you wonder if it should still be called a game.

Coaches take football seriously because the outcomes of their games ultimately determine their job security. Athletic directors take football seriously because it's a primary source of revenue for all sport programs, and winning records put more paying customers in the bleachers. Players take the game seriously because performing well enough may lead to college scholarships. Trigg County High School in Cadiz, Kentucky, is typical in this regard: Everyone connected to football takes the game seriously. But in the off-season at Trigg County, there's no reason not to have some fun.

"In the past a lot of kids just saw the off-season conditioning program as a lot of work," says the Wildcats' head strength coach, Coby Lewis, a former player at Trigg County who took over the strength program five years ago. "I, along with Head Coach Curtis Higgins, try to make it more exciting and fun by having the athletes participate in powerlifting competitions in the off-season."

In addition to working towards the state high school powerlifting championships in March, Lewis has his Wildcats constantly challenge each other in weightlifting. "If we're working out good one day, and then a couple of kids want to try to compete with other kids, at the end of the week we'll put on some weight and let them have

some fun and compete against each other."

One reason it was important for Lewis to give his athletes opportunities to enjoy their workouts more with such challenges is that, unlike many successful high school sports programs, the school doesn't have weight training classes throughout the day. If athletes

want to work out, they have to do so after school. "By having the athletes compete against each other and participate in the state powerlifting meet, more kids will stay after school to lift." The strategy works.

Whereas throughout most of the 1990s usually fewer than a dozen kids would lift after school, and even fewer in the summer, now the gym is the place to be year-round. "In the off-season we'll have not only our high school football team but also many athletes from other sports – it's packed."

The need for a change in the after-school conditioning program became evident at Trigg County High after the 1997 and 1998 seasons: Their combined record for the two years was 1-17. "When I took over, I really started



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Extra points were a common sight with Trigg County football, and this year was no exception as the team was ranked third in the state after the regular season.

PHOTO BY SCOTT BROWN, CADIZ RECORD



Head Coach Higgins talks strategy to quarterback Tommy Woodall.

focusing on the BFS program,” says Lewis. In 1999 we were 3-7, and since then we’ve never gone lower than 8-3.” This season was no exception, as they had only one loss in the regular season, finished District Runner-up behind the number-one team in the state, and made it through to the second round of the playoffs.

Putting a Good Hex on Strength Training

According to Lewis, the core lifts performed year-round at Trigg County are the power clean, squat, bench press, and the Hex bar deadlift. His favorite advanced auxiliary lift is the push press, and his standard auxiliaries include the leg press, leg curls and leg extensions. Lewis also includes board

presses and lifting chains for variety, but he believes there is too high a risk for most high school student to use bands. “You better make certain that what you’re doing at the high school level is safe for kids, and this is why we don’t use bands in our program.” For this same reason he also prefers the Hex bar deadlift over the straight-bar deadlift.

One reason Lewis prefers the Hex bar deadlift is that he hurt his back performing the straight-bar deadlift when he was in high school. “With the Hex bar there’s a lot less strain on the back because the weight is to your side instead of in front. A lot of time kids will get injured more with the weight in front, plus you have to drag the bar in front of the body, and a lot of times it will catch.” For powerlifting competitions, however, his athletes perform the straddle deadlift, a style that has one foot in front of the bar and the other behind it.

“The straddle technique is a lift they do in Kentucky,” says Lewis. “It will add about 30 pounds to your result, and like the Hex bar it puts less strain on the back.” Lewis adds that although the Hex bar is the primary deadlift they use in training, they will perform the straddle deadlift with relatively light weights prior to competition. “As in the squat, the key to performing the straddle deadlift safely is to keep your chest out and head up so that your hips come forward – if your hips come up and not forward you’re going to hurt yourself.”

In addition to providing motivation and safety, the Hex bar also helps to improve the squat and explosiveness, says Lewis. “It helps with exploding from the ground, which is needed every time you come off the line in football or jump in basketball.”



Taylor McGee is the strongest football player ever for Trigg County. Shown here pulling 625 in the straddle deadlift (he’s done 635), he is also an unstoppable force on the football field.

PHOTO BY SCOTT BROWN, CADIZ RECORD

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Many other sports have had tremendous success at Trigg County. Shown are Jay Jones, men's basketball; Laquisah Boyd, women's basketball; Zach Wright, cross country; and Cayla Hampton, volleyball.

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Every Wednesday night those involved with the Cats with Character program attend a dinner that includes motivational talks by guest speakers.

Cats with Character

In addition to building strong bodies with weight training, Trigg County wants their athletes' experience

in sports to help build character. "Cats with Character" is a program we have implemented with our football team over the past two years," says Lewis. "We now have about 100 kids involved in our after-school weightlifting program, and we know that some of those kids get involved in negative activities once they leave the school grounds. What we're trying to do is let them know that there is more to life."

One of the requirements of the Cats with Character program is that each participant must give 10 hours of

community service each year, but it's not all work. Every Wednesday night those involved get a free meal that will include a talk by a professional athlete or another influential person.

"Sometimes the talks are motivational, sometimes spiritual – but the main point of the meal is that we get to spend some time together. Yes, we work hard in the weight program. But probably the biggest reason Trigg County High School has enjoyed so much success in football these past few years is that we understand the importance of being a team on and off the field."

BFS

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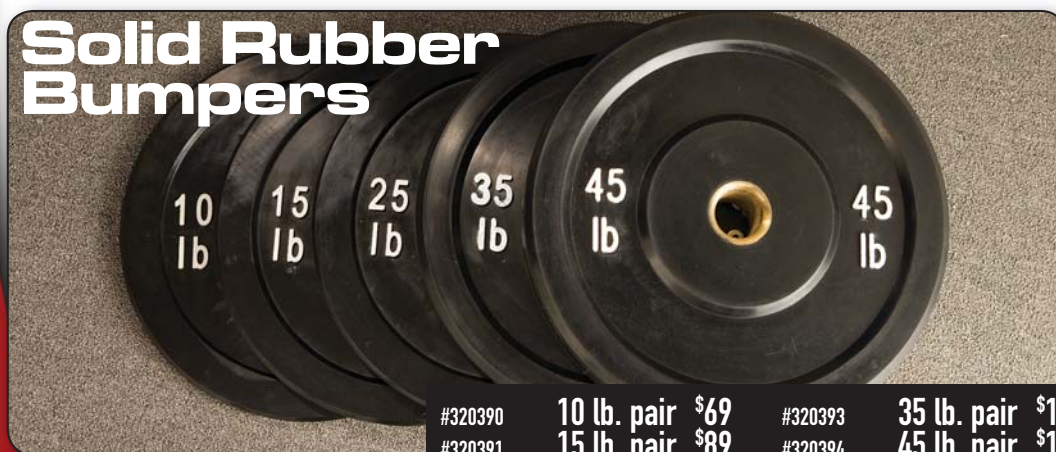
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