



Fun with Football

By Mike Korton

Head Football Coach
Champlin Park High School

14 yrs. coaching football, 13 yrs at Champlin Park, 11 as a assistant,
2 yrs as head coach (Record as head coach 20-3)
3 yrs as the head basketball coach at Champlin Park.
Family- Wife Tracy, Child on the way- Due date 5-8-05
College- Graduated from St. Cloud State
High School- Osseo Senior High
JMS/P.E. Teacher

As a football coaching staff at Champlin Park High School, we believe that having fun things for the players to do during the season is important in many ways. We think if the players have something to look forward to every day, it will keep them interested in football during a long season. These are not just fun for the players. They have become fun for the coaches as well. We believe that if the players are having fun, it will be easier for us to keep their interest and focus on football during the season in progress, as well as serve as an enticement for other students to join us in the coming seasons. Our coaches' feel that the more students you have out for your program, the better your program has the chance to become. Where would you rather have a kid hanging out--with the team--or at home, trying to find something to do? One of the great things about the sport of football is that we do not cut players. In fact, we try to find a way for all of our players to be successful in football, which we hope, in turn, helps them understand how to be successful in life.

Sunday/Monday- Our week starts out on Sunday with a coaches' meeting. In this meeting, we talk about the awards for the previous game that we will be giving out on Monday. In this meeting, the coaches have a good time talking about the players and the positive things they did, both during the game and week of practice. On Monday, we gather with the team and hand out these awards. The awards are given to the Offensive Player of the

week, Defensive Player of the week, and the Special Teams Player of the week. Along with these three awards, we give T-shirts to each of these players. We also present a Captain of the week award to a deserving player. As a "salute" to our demonstration team players, we recognize an Offensive and Defensive Scout Team Player of the week.

We then have our awards with which we have a little fun. We have a "Brick" award which we give out to anybody that fumbles or has a tough time holding onto the football. A set of boxing gloves is given to any player that drops a pass on either offense or defense. Our last award is our "el Matador" award which is a red towel given to someone that runs around or away from a block instead of fighting through it. In some ways, I feel the last three awards are somewhat negative, but the reaction from the team makes it all worth while. Watching the way the players yell out names and speculating on who is going to get these awards makes for a good time and a lot of laughs.

Tuesday/Wednesday- These two days are what we consider our big preparation days. We need to have good practices on these days in order to play well on Friday. We begin our practice with "Rebel" jacks and the players spell out "REBELS" while doing jumping jacks. A few years back, the Twins were playing the Yankees in the playoffs and while they were stretching, the players were talking about the game. Tim Hermann (head coach at Austin High School), our head coach at the time, was giving the



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players a hard time about how good the Yankees were. Coach Hermann is a Yankees fan! When the players were done stretching, they decided to do “Twins” jacks instead of “Rebel” jacks. Since that time, the players will spell out names of girlfriends of other players on the team or anything that they were joking about beforehand.

Thursday- The players look forward to Thursday’s, a day on which they just wear helmets and shoulder pads to practice. This practice is a walk through, where we look for things to be mentally correct. It is a short practice, which is followed by a team dinner-one that is catered in and served to the players by the booster club. The o-linemen may appreciate this a little more because it is “all you can eat”. Following the dinner, we move to the lecture hall and gather to watch a highlight film of last week’s game. The film focuses on the positive things that came out of the game. But in the past few years, this highlight film has expanded. Our coaches now insert clips from movies into the film. No one is safe from these clips, including the entire coaching staff. After a clip is played from one of these movies, the players usually respond with hooting and hollering. I think they look forward to the highlight film more than they do the dinner!

Friday- When I played at Osseo and coach Craig Hansen (head football coach at Maple Grove) was the offensive line coach, he always had breakfast with the offensive lineman on the day of the game. He would bring donuts and juice and we would talk about the game that we were going to play that night. We have carried this over to Champlin Park, where different coaches meet with their position players and do things such as having donuts and juice in the morning. This gives us time in a lighter setting to talk with our players and get to know them. It also lets us start to get focused on the game. We also have a post game party at the school which is put on by the booster club, and to which all Rebel supporters are invited. The parties are a little different each week and there will be food and beverages at each one. This provides a safe place for our team and our students to be after a Friday night game and it also keeps us together as a squad.

One of the things that we do during the year to add fun and excitement to football is “Midnight Madness”. We have our first practice at 12:01 am on Monday morning under the lights on the main field. It isn’t a long or difficult practice, but it is an exciting way to start the season. The parents and supporters show up in the stands and the cheerleaders are down on the field as well. The coaches aren’t that excited about it, but the players look forward to it every year. Another thing that I do personally is to invite my o-linemen over to my house for a lasagna dinner one night during two-a-days. The players have PlayStation tournaments and hang out together. This is my way of telling the offensive line they are special and what they do means a great deal to our team’s success. This has caught on to an extent that last year our wide receiver coach had his wide receivers over to his house for a taco dinner, our quarterback coach took his position players out for pizza, and the defensive secondary coach did the same. This is a nice way for the coaches to get to know their players outside of football early in the season. It is also a good way to laugh and have fun with them in setting other than the practice or the game.

Tom Idstrom (defensive coordinator at Brainerd) coached with us and convinced us to get involved in the “Super Bowl”. This is an inner squad scrimmage which is held at night on the game field the second Thursday of two-a-day practices. The coaches pick the teams and post them in the locker room, identifying each team by using the names of the two teams that were in the Super Bowl the previous year. We also split the coaching staff up between these two teams, excluding our defensive coordinator and myself. The parents and fans show up and this makes for an exciting time.

During spirit week at Champlin Park, one of the days was designated as “Dress up like the 80’s” day. In a coaches meeting the night before this event, we decided that we would all dress up in our old high school uniforms. We would show up to practice and go through the entire schedule wearing these uniforms. I was a little hesitant about this because we were 4-0 at the time and I did not want to break the routine. The coaches convinced me that this was a good idea. We all rode out on the field on a golf cart wearing our old high school uniforms. The players thought it was great. This led to one



of the best practices we had all year. The managers even took a picture of the coaches dressed like this. Naturally, the players got a hold of this picture and are having it put in the yearbook this year. It is pretty clear to me that this was a memorable time for them and they had a lot of fun with it.

I often hear coaches speaking at clinics and, within their presentations, they talk about how they want to make football fun for their players. I really would like to approach them and ask them about the different things they do but, since that is usually not the real focus of their presentation, I don't talk them about it. However, I realize that there are many more simple, easy ideas that can help ease the intensity of the difficult day-to-day work of football and help it go by just a little easier, both for the players and for the coaches. As I grow more experienced as a coach, I find myself

loosening up. I used to focus on the number of good repetitions. Now, with the help of my assistant coaches, I am looking at things differently.

I believe there needs to be something in the day that the players can look back on and laugh. This makes for a healthier environment mentally and helps keep both the players' and coaches' morale at a great level. When a team is having fun and has something to which they can look forward, it is a just another excellent way to help ensure a successful season.