



Changing Attitudes at Watertown/Mayer

By: John Stifter, Watertown/Mayer

Coaching Experience: McGregor High School-Head Football, Head Girls Basketball, Head Baseball 13 yrs., Watertown High School-Head Football 4 yrs, Ninth Grade Boys Basketball 3 yrs.

Education: Itasca Community College-1.5 yrs., Bemidji State University B.S. in Industrial Technology Education, Secondary Mathematics, Coaching Licensure.

Married: Korrine with 4 kids, Drew 20, Derek 16, Amy 14 and Kellie 11.



Front Row L-R Ed Rundell, John Stifter and John Rosholt. Back Row L-R Bob Kratch, Steve Boylan and Kurt Becker. Not Pictured- Phil Hanson.

Four years ago, I took a chance when I moved my family from northern Minnesota (McGregor), a community that we had been a part of for 13 years. I knew that if I didn't make a change at that time, I would probably be there for the rest of my career. My family supported me and we made the move. The experience has been a positive one for our entire family, yet was probably one of the toughest things I have had to do in my career. I went from being comfortable with what I was doing to entering a new district and starting out all over again. Any coach put into this kind of situation will know what I am talking about.

Many people ask me where Watertown Min-

nesota is located on a map. Consequently, Watertown is located about 30 miles west of the Twin Cities between highways 12 and 7. It has a community of about 2,700, and the high school has an enrollment of about 450 students.

When I came to Watertown, one thing I noticed about the football program was that there was definitely a negative attitude toward football with the student body. As a new head coach, I would talk to students in the hall and ask them why they were not out for football. The response was usually, "Why would I do that, we stink." I felt the biggest obstacle that the coaching staff had to overcome was to change the attitude of the stu-



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dent body and the athletes toward the football program. I would like to share some of the things we have done to help change the attitude towards our football program.

The first thing that I feel was instrumental to changing attitudes was the strength of my assistant coaches. I know that without their help, this attitude change that we are experiencing here, would not be happening. Our defensive coordinator, John Rosholt, is a great motivator and one of the most prepared coaches that I have ever worked with.

John has recently won the Butch Nash assistant coach of the year award. Kurt Becker helps out with the defense and Phil Hanson and Ed Rundell work on the Offensive side of the ball. Phil has been coaching since the time of leather helmets, so his experience includes the 1980's when football was dominant here, and a state championship was won in 1986. I would also like to thank Steve Boylan and Bob Kratch who volunteer their services. Search around your community and you may find some real gems that can help your program out. Bob, for instance played for Bill Parcells in the NFL for several years at New York and New England. He was an offensive lineman and his help has been invaluable with the "O" line. The fact that we have a coach helping out that has a couple of Super Bowl rings, helps out with motivating our kids.

The first season, I was optimistic and naive. The second concept that helped change the attitude of the team was how to practice. Our kids would literally walk from drill to drill and they did not know how to practice. The level of intensity and motivation needed to be developed from the ground up. We no longer allowed the athletes to walk from drill to drill. That meant encouraging the kids to hustle between every drill, making sure the kids understood why we felt this was important. It did take away from the X's and O's part of practice, but we felt we had to do it. This will never happen over night and we still have to work on this every day.

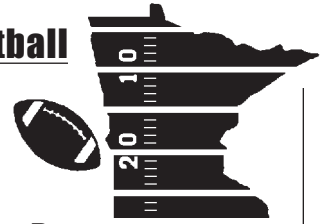
The third thing that we incorporated into the program was providing team meals on game night. Even though the meal before the night of the game is probably the most important in terms of nutrition, we wanted to make sure the

kids were all together before game time. I like the idea that the kids are together and able to focus on what lied ahead of them. We were also able to make sure that the kids didn't consume anything unhealthy the night of the game.

The next season I thought we were making strides in the overall attitude of the team, however, something was missing. Sometimes when you want to change attitudes, you have to take some chances. After starting the season out 0-4, I sensed there was something still missing that we had not addressed. The fourth change we made was to redirect the commitment to our program. We had teammates that were not as committed to the program as others. I feel that no matter what sport you are coaching; your athletes have to have a total commitment to your program. So, we had a team meeting and encouraged the guys to concentrate on our football while it was in season. We put these high demands on our athletes, and the kids responded by going 4-0 in the second half of the season. As coaches, we began to see the teams attitude changing.

At the start of the third season, there was definitely a dramatic change in the level of expectations. The Wright County conference is one of the toughest 3A football conferences in the state. We felt that, although a conference title would be nice, our focus had to be on a goal that was more realistic. We wanted to compete in every game and try to improve each game so that we would be in a strong position for a decent playoff run. We no longer had to concentrate on how to practice and now changed our focus to confidence. Our kids entered each game with a strong belief that not only could they compete, they also had a chance to win. This was evident in our pre-season scrimmage. For the first time, our kids played with pride and expected to do well. Football was no longer a dirty word and the kids were buying into the new attitude change. We ended that season 5-3 and finished fourth in the conference. We competed with teams that had beat us badly the previous two seasons. During the playoffs, we were fortunate enough to win the section and make it to the state quarterfinals. The kids were excited and felt good about what they had accomplished. .

Going into this season, we had lost 15 seniors from the previous season. The kid's attitudes



were still very healthy heading into the season. The fifth thing we incorporated into our program was to increase the strength of our schedule. This past season was a testimony of the importance of having a healthy attitude. In order to toughen our schedule, we brought in a 4A football team for our opener along with the tough conference schedule. Even though we did not fair very well in that opening game, we felt that we needed to play a tough schedule to let our kids know that we believed in their abilities. That game proved to be a good move as our kids played hard and learned many things that helped them improve as the season progressed. Yet, we ended last season 3-5 and were a 6th seed in our section. There is no doubt that because our kids had the confidence and understanding of how to be competitive, we were mentally and emotional ready for the play-offs. As a six seed, we played every sectional game on the road. We played hard throughout the sectional playoffs and won the section. Even though PEM (the eventual state champion) defeated us in the state quarterfinal, we had a lead with just two minutes left in the game.

In closing, my hope is that we can continue to work on the attitude of our football team. By no means do we have all of the answers. I think that every coach is different and some things that work for one staff, may not work the same for another staff. In summary the things that I feel have made a difference in our program is:

I. Creating a great atmosphere with a good staff-Look for volunteers in your community .

II. Changing the way our players practiced-Practice is upbeat and intense.

III. Incorporating a team meal on game nights-this keeps us together from the time school is out until we dress together.

IV. Redirect the commitment to our program-Athletes concentrate on football during football season.

V. Developing a tough schedule-Easy for us due to the conference in which we play

VI. Focus on the playoffs-Condition your kids to love the pressure that comes with the playoffs.

VII. Make sure your kids know exactly why they are playing the game-We tell them the number one reason they are playing the game is to have

"fun"!

VIII. Enjoy the kids-That's what it's all about.

At a clinic this winter, Pete Burcich from the Minnesota Vikings said something about football that made a lot of sense. He said "Football is the one team sport that really does take a complete team effort. In basketball, if you have a guy who can handle the ball and a shooter along with a good post up player, you can find success. In baseball if you have a couple of hitters and a couple of good pitchers you can win. But in football, you need eleven guys all on the same page doing their job. If you have a great running back and a poor line, the back cannot find a place to run." We have the greatest coaching job in the world. Good luck this season and have "fun".