

Team building that goes beyond the field

**By: Kevin Haley, Head Football Coach, Barnum High School
Brian Robertson, Defensive Coordinator**



*Left to right: Kevin Haley,
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Kevin Haley

Social Studies teacher at Barnum High School since 1996

Coaching at Barnum since 1994 – been the head coach since 1998

Graduated from UMD in 1996 with a Bachelor's of Applied Arts in Teaching Social Studies and gained a Masters of Arts in Education from Hamline University in 20

Married to my wife Becky and have three children, Nicholas, Jared and Jordan and live in Barnum

Brian Robertson

Math teacher at Barnum High School since 2007

Coaching at Barnum since 2007 – Defensive Coordinator since 2008

Graduated from North Dakota State University in 2007 with a Bachelor's of Science in Mathematics Education

Football games are won on the field. Everyone who has ever coached knows this is true. However, a successful program does a lot more than just play on Friday nights. Successful programs are a lot more than just X's and O's. In Barnum, we have had some success in the last few years. We attribute much of that success to the team building activities that take place every year. The activities are simple things, such as eating dinner together, watching film together and working together. The focus of these activities is that we always do them together.

During the season, each and every Thursday night our players get done with practice and run as fast as they can off the practice field. Waiting for them at the fire hall is a full spaghetti dinner put on by a group of dedicated parents who truly care for all of our players. This is a great time because it gives all the players—from the freshman to the seniors—time together off the football field.

Friday nights in Barnum are always exciting for the players. The reason is simple: It is GAME NIGHT. Players get to experience football under the lights and in front of the fans. But, just as important as Friday night is for team building, Saturday morning in Barnum is just as important. Our players are in school at 8:30 a.m. for film session. We get together to evaluate Friday night's game and introduce them to our next opponent. This is never used as a highlight session. Rather, it is a time where coaches and players critique our performance and look for things we need to improve. After film, our team then heads to

the weight room. The last activity on Saturday, which is also probably the most important and most fun is getting our varsity players heading down to our football field to coach our elementary flag football players. This has become a special time for varsity players because they get to work with the future players of the Barnum program. They teach our elementary kids basic football skills such as catching, getting into stances, running with a football, and how to block. This is a great team building activity because it creates a connection that will last forever between the current and future Barnum football players.

Fundraising is an issue all in itself. Each team, for a variety of reasons, has to continually fundraise to build their program. Barnum is no different. However, our fundraiser has become much more than just raising money to buy equipment. It has become a team building activity that is truly community based. We take the last Saturday in September and travel around the entire school district and collect non-perishable food items that are given to the county food shelf. Our goal each year is to literally raise a 'ton' of food. We want to give the food shelf 2000 pounds of food. Some years we have collected that amount and some years we have come close. Now don't get us wrong, we are trying to raise money for our football program. However, the kids have learned a valuable lesson while performing this community service. They learned what it means to give back to a community that supports them in all they do during the football season. The players no longer see this as an activity

where they have to give up one of their Saturdays to fundraise. They see it as a chance to become a stronger team and a better person.

August is always an exciting time because football is just getting started. Those first two weeks of football are grueling. It is hot, humid and the practices are long. Players are tired, both physically and mentally. On the last Friday of those demanding two weeks, coaches host the players to a "survivor's" picnic. We end practice a little early, head down to the lake, and the coaches make lunch on the grill for the 45 or so players we have out for football. A simple plate of hot dogs or hamburgers and dessert gives players time to reflect on their accomplishments together, as a brotherhood of warriors who made it through the tough two weeks of August football.

Team building activities in Barnum continue during the season. We spend a great deal of time talking about how football is the ultimate team sport. We instill the belief that the name on the front of the jersey is much more significant than the name on the back. However, we do take time each week to recognize the individual efforts of some of the players. We give four individual awards each week. We get together as a team and recognize the top offensive and defensive performances of the week. Coaches also recognize one scout player of the week. This award is usually given to a younger player or a JV player who has worked hard to make the varsity better during the week. The staff also gives out the "Sweet Beetdown of the Week" award. The award is a sugar beet. It originated from our defensive coordinator, who grew up on a farm in the Red River Valley part of Minnesota. This award is given each week to one player who dominated his position or who had an outstanding hit during Friday's game. The player then signs the sugar beet and gets to keep it for that week. When next week's award is given out the player from the previous week passes it on. Helmet stickers are another award players receive – the TEAM sticker being the most prized. Each player on the team receives a TEAM sticker if we win. This sticker teaches the team that all

of the players contributed to our win and each player has a significant role on the team.

X's and O's are important to the success of any team. However, we believe building team unity and trust are equally as important. The things we do at Barnum are simple. We eat spaghetti. We watch film on Saturdays. We coach future Barnum players. We give back to our community and we have a picnic. There is nothing fancy in what we do. But we do it year in and year out. Why do we do those activities? We do them because we feel these little things make a big difference. When our players leave Barnum, we want them to know and believe they were part of something special, something more than just a football team. We want them to know they were part of a family that will continue to grow long after they have turned in their uniform for the last time.