

Program Evaluation

By Derrick Gross, Head Coach, Northome-Kelliher

The invitation to contribute to this publication came as a surprise to me. It is humbling that my peers would consider anything I have to share about our football program worthy of publication, let alone of value.

After accepting the invitation the first thing I did was dig out some past issues and read the feature articles. I was humbled again. The names of the coaches who have contributed to this publication over the years, the success their programs have had, and the variety of topics they have so astutely expounded upon are hugely impressive. I truly appreciate this opportunity and hope my contribution worthy.

The next thing I did was to go through all my computer files looking for topics I would feel comfortable writing about. What I found was, as is often mentioned by authors of such articles, that the vast majority of what I had wasn't completely my own; it had been 'inspired' by the work of others. It also struck me how much really good information I have accumulated over the years and that far too much of it hasn't been looked at or used in far too long.

Then I spent some time perusing the literal library of coaching books, articles, and videos I have amassed. It wasn't hard at all to see which resources I have turned to most often. The dirty, wrinkled, and torn covers and the number of sticky note book marks and margin notes clearly told me what my go to resources were. What they were, or rather what they were not, surprised me yet again.

Finally, I sat down and spent some time pondering the success that our program has enjoyed in recent years. I thought about where the program was when we took over ten years ago. I thought about the ten year journey to reach our program's first ever section championship and state tournament appearance. And, I thought about the future of our program and what challenges we will face going forward.

At the end of this impromptu evaluation process three things about our program seemed to stand out: leadership, consistency, and expectations.

I learned leadership in the best place in the entire world to learn it, the United States Marine Corps. The Marines teach that leaders are not born they are made. Consistency goes hand in hand with leadership. The most effective leaders are consistent in their actions and decisions. People inherently want to

follow those they trust, those from whom they know what to expect, those who are consistent. Once consistent leadership is established high expectations become the shared goal of not only the leaders but everyone involved.

Ten years ago when I became head coach one of the first things I did was pen a philosophy for our program. Where the framework for this philosophy actually came from I do not recall. Most likely it was a conglomeration of ideas taken from a variety of sources. Each pre-season I've gone over this document, often making revisions as our program has grown and changed. Over the years this philosophy has become more and more our own. It is the constitution of our football program so to speak. When there is a tough decision to be made I often refer to it. Each pre-season this philosophy is shared with our players. It is shared with parents. On several occasions it has even been shared with the entire student body for homecoming. I truly believe that this philosophy is what keeps us consistent from year to year, keeps our expectations high, and keeps us as coaches focused on the most important aspect of what we do – lead.

PHILOSOPHY

The football program exists first and foremost for its players; without them there would be no program. However, the football family is a diverse group that includes members of the community who follow and support Mustang Football, the student bodies, staff members, and administrations of each school, as well as parents and the individual players themselves, each of whom has an important role in the program.

A gathering of the communities' citizens to view the weekly football game can be one of the largest audiences the school regularly has to showcase elements of its overall educational program. The football team, band, student body, staff, parents, and fans gather to participate in the educational process. A foundational goal of our football program is to coordinate the assets of various school and community organizations in a positive way that will bring about a mutually reinforcing and rewarding situation. Success on the field cannot occur without success within our communities.

Each player is a member of the Mustang Football family. This family must be a priority off the field as well as on. More

importantly, and of higher priority, each player is a member of their own family. Athletes need the support and encouragement of their families in order to perform at a high level. Success on the field cannot occur without positive involvement in, and from family.

The role of athletics in the educational setting is to broaden and reinforce the overall instructional goals of the school district. Athletics, especially football, allow us to bridge the gap between the academic atmosphere of the classroom and true-to-life situations of the real world. The academic expectations for our players are high. Success on the field cannot occur without success in the classroom.

Coaching is the process of guiding all involved through an instructional program that will develop individual and team talents to an extent that will allow for success both on and off the playing field. This instruction must begin with the fundamentals of the game. It is only through a mastery of the basic fundamental aspect of the game that players develop the skills necessary to perform at ever higher levels of achievement. The Mustang Football Program's technical foundation is built on the fundamental principles of strength training, conditioning, stance, start, blocking, tackling, offensive assignments and defensive keys. Relentlessly teaching the fundamentals of the game in order to foster talent is the best and quickest way to substantially upgrade a program and to maintain it once established. Success on the field cannot occur without successful execution of individual fundamental skills.

Coaching is also the process of guiding all involved through an instructional program that will develop individual and team character to an extent that will allow for success both on and off the playing field. There are many positives that are offered to our athletes: self-discipline, building of self-concept, teamwork ideals, development of work ethic and much more. However, many championships are won by teams and individuals without these qualities. Some get by on talent alone. Wonderful and hard working athletes are not guaranteed success. What then is the reason for being a part of this program? The future economic, social, and political lives facing high school students today are run by committee. The Mustang Football team is a committee in the pursuit of goals that can only be achieved through the dedication, efforts, and commitment of all its members. This program is a tool for young men to explore who they are through participation in a proven process of growth and development. Successful athletes will gain experience to foster new growth in present and future endeavors.

A winning record is not the only or even the most important, determination of success for our football program. We will be

a success if each season a group of young men combine their unique skills in such a manner that they play as well as they can as a unit and have respect for each other and the entire football family.

I believe our program is successful because it provides the values of hard work, effort, fair play, and respect. I believe our program is a success because it teaches that faith, family, education, and community come before football and it implores each member to improve every day as a person, as a student, and as a player. Our program is a success because, after leaving it, young men attribute to it qualities which make them successful.

Most important is the preservation of the positive attributes of our game and our program. We must teach all who will listen, the value system of this game which is a microcosm of the human experience. Those who understand what is required to be a champion in the game understand what is required to be a champion in life. They understand that every player needs every teammate on every play just to survive. This game provides a metaphor for all that is good about shared values and building community. The ultimate goal of Mustang Football is to make a positive impact on lives well beyond the game field on Friday nights.

I'm very appreciative of the opportunity to write this article. Ironically, writing it has turned out to be a valuable exercise for me in stepping back and looking at our program as a whole. It has reminded me of where we were; where we came from. It has heightened my appreciation for where we are. And, it has rekindled my own sense of urgency for where we are going – for the importance of Mustang Football beyond the score board, standings, and rankings. It is our philosophy which drives our program. I hope sharing it will both benefit and motivate you and your program. ■