



## Little Things Make a Big Hit in this Game

By: Richard Risbrud

Have you ever wondered why some high school football programs are successful year after year? I know it's not just a numbers (student enrollment) game because there are many schools in this state that have smaller enrollments; yet they compete for the conference championship year after year! Is it because they have a great coaching staff? Is the school located in a community where lots of home grown football talent is raised? In my 27 years of coaching football, I've come to the conclusion that there are many reasons why a football program is successful, but certainly an important reason is that these programs have coaches that pay attention to detail and see to it that little things make a big hit in their program. Let me suggest a few:

- ***Be a walking billboard for your football program.*** Coaches need to promote their football program wherever they go; at church, in stores, at other sporting events, and wherever people are gathered. If you stop and visit with the younger kids, shake their hands and talk football, they will more than likely come out for the team in the future because they want to be coached by you. Always make eye contact with your players in the hallway of the school, greet them or visit with them about things in their life. Cut out newspaper articles and pictures of these kids from your local newspaper and send it to them with a nice card. What a compliment to them and a credit to you!

- ***Organize a youth football game at home varsity games during half time on Friday nights.*** How many times have you gone to a home high school football game and seen elementary kids playing a football game on their own a short distance away?

These kids are telling us that they would rather be playing the game themselves; than watching the high school varsity game going on at the same time. Why not let them play at half-time of the varsity game on the home field? We see young children play during high school basketball games during half time all the time! If your community doesn't have an organized youth football program and teams to play each other at varsity game half times, have a few adults referee a flag football game of the kids that you do have. Use the space and have 3-4 games going on at the same time. The crowd will love it and you will get the parents of these young kids to attend your game.

- ***Show strong support for the other sports and coaches at your school.*** Is there competition for the best athletes in your school with coaches of other sports? You will run into constant conflict with coaches of other sports in our school if you try to convince players to play football and football only. Let's coach the multi-sport athlete! Your school is like a body. All the parts need to work together to maintain a healthy system. Support these kids playing other sports. Go to their games, speak highly of them and bend over backwards to stay at peace with each other. We are admonished to encourage each other, respect each other, serve each other, be devoted to each other, and bear each other's burdens. This is our "family" responsibility as coaches, and is to be expected in our relationships to each other.

- ***Talk about a character trait to your players each day at practice.*** As a coach you are in a powerful position to influence and mold the lives of



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your players by the things you say and do. Have you ever heard a parent tell you, “Will you tell him, Coach? He doesn’t listen to me anymore!” If you truly love your players, you will be more concerned about the type of person you want your players to be more than wins and losses. Preach to them constantly about integrity, trust, dedication, commitment, love, friendship, attitude, patience, respect, sportsmanship, self-esteem, persistence, loyalty, honesty, and goals. Have weekly meetings with your senior players. They must take the lead in all these areas! That leads me to my next point.

- **Don’t announce your team captains until after the final regular season game.** Designate that all of your senior players are team leaders at the beginning of the season. Have each of your seniors take turns leading calisthenics out in front of the team, meet with the referees prior to the game on the field and take turns giving “pep talks” to the team at various times. Stress to all your players that senior “captains” do not tease other players. They do not break training rules. They do not get in trouble during school. They are never late for practice. They work hard in the weight room. They don’t swear, trash talk or show disrespect to girls. They don’t brag but rather give credit to his teammates when interviewed. After the 8<sup>th</sup> game, have your players vote who they believe deserve to be captains. Your team will know who they are! Make it a senior honor they earn! These are the captains who will now lead your football team into the playoffs.

- **Give your assistant coaches more responsibility.** A head coach needs to spend much of his time coaching his assistants and then *allow* his assistants to coach the players; not only during practices, but also in games. Most assistant coaches are eager and will do almost anything the head coach asks. Let them do it! Teach your assistants how to be head coaches. The domineering head coach that doesn’t allow his players to be coached by his assistants, and tries to do everything himself is either setting himself up for failure, or he will be looking for new assistant coaches year after year.

- **Show more concern for your injured players.** We all have players get hurt during practices and

games. Injuries will always be part of the game of football no matter what we do. How many times have you had Johnny get injured at a game Friday night and when you saw him Monday asked him how he was doing? That’s two days too late. The head coach should call Johnny Friday night. If it’s a serious injury, he should visit him in the hospital as soon as he can. Show as much care and concern for him when he is injured than when he is healthy. It’s a sad day when you hear parents say, “After my son got hurt, the coach didn’t care about him anymore.”

- **Invite a retired coach to a practice or game and ask them to help you coach one last time.** Most of us know of retired high school and college coaches living in and around our community. Call them up and ask them if they would like to help you “coach” a few days at practice or at the next home game. They will probably get tears in their eyes! I did this a few years ago, and I learned so much from him during a week of practice that I hired him as an assistant coach the following year! None of us knows everything there is to know about the game of football. We can always learn new things. These retired coaches have a wealth of knowledge just waiting to be tapped when they are offered the opportunity.

- **Send Christmas cards to those who support your football program.** Do you have businesses that sponsor your radio broadcasts or buy an ad in yours sports program? Thank them after the season with a football team picture saying “thanks for supporting our team!” They will appreciate it very much and it will be a “no problem” sale next time you need their help.

Do any of these make sense? If you’re not doing any of these in your program, give them a try. You’ll be amazed at how they will enhance your credibility and overall football program.