



## Cromwell Football

I would like to thank the football coaches association for asking me to write in this publication. It truly is an honor. I am going to write about how I took over a successful football program and kept it going by keeping some things the same and changing others.

Three years ago I became head coach and inherited a great program in Cromwell from the hands of recent Hall of Fame inductee Keith Bergstedt (Bergie). I had been his defensive coordinator for 6 years. During that time we won 5 section titles with 1 state title and 1 runner-up. When I got the head job I knew I had a lot of work to do to continue the success. My first challenge was to keep the program at a high level by not changing alot, but also putting my own stamp on the program as well. I think that has been accomplished so far, with a state runner-up and semi-final appearance in the last two seasons.

Here are some things that have not changed since I became head coach: Cromwell Football prides itself on putting a good quality team on the field year in and year despite usually having a lack of numbers. We are one of the smaller 9-man schools in the state with a 10-12 enrollment of around 70-75 on average. We are always going to be lacking numbers, but we also take pride in knowing that we can beat up on schools twice our size. Our football team numbers have been anywhere from 21 to 38 boys in grades 9-12 since I have been here.

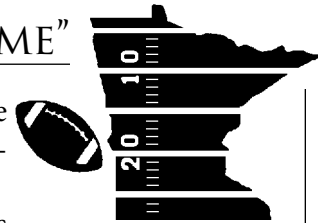
One of the things that Cromwell teams are known for is being very quick. Year in and year out, we are usually the smaller team on the field so we have to be quick. It is a mentality we try to teach our players. One of the big things that helps this is our quickness drills. Every day in pre-season practice we do the drills twice a day. Once game weeks start, we do them once a day. The coaches watch the drills intently and let the kids know if they are getting quicker or not. Bags, cones, speed ladders, ropes, choppy feet, seat rolls,

and figure 8s are just some of the drills that we do. We feel these quickness drills really help. We also stress to our lineman over and over to be the first guy off the ball and our backs to hit the hole as quick as possible. Our coaches tell the lineman to don't be overly worried about technique, but get in to your man first. If we have a lineman who is getting off the ball quick, we can then work on perfecting his technique. Big, strong oxen type of lineman don't have a chance on our quick hitting plays if our small lineman get into them first and our backs hit the hole quick.

Our practice routine has also not changed. A typical practice would start with specialty work, stretch/form run, then quickness drills, sled & chute work by the entire team, position breakdown, tackling stations, skele or two-minute, 9 on 9, and then conditioning. The only thing new to this routine since I have been head coach is the two minute drill.

Giving plenty of responsibility to my coaching staff is also something Bergie did and I continue to do. I feel this is very important, especially with a small staff. Dave Foster is our defensive coordinator and kicking coach and does a great job with that. Al French is our 7/8th grade coach, helps out with the JV team, and does most of our scouting. This is our whole staff! This is a problem most 9-man schools have. All three of us wear many hats during the season to keep practices running smoothly. I am glad I have two very capable coaches. I would love to have 1 or two more, but we adapt with what we have. One of the biggest problems we have is coaching the JV team on Monday. Usually two of our three coaches will coach the JV team after a short varsity practice and/or film session. It is important for the 9th and 10th graders to get their playing time, but many of those players are needed to prepare the varsity for Friday night as well. This has been an ongoing problem for our staff since I began coaching here.

## “KEEPERS OF THE GAME”



Here are some things that have changed at Cromwell in the last couple years:

The first step was for me to take over the offense. Bergie influenced me to take over the play calling duties. My offensive philosophy has taken some of the best things of Bergie's quick hitting wing-T offense and brought them to our new multiple formation split veer offense. I like running option for two main reasons. 1) The defense needs to play assignment football and spend more time in practice drilling this. I know being a former d-coordinator. 2) No one in our conference or section runs option, so it is something new for a defense. Our veer option is slightly different than a normal veer option. Our mesh and QB read happens fast because our backs are taught to hit the hole hard.

Our defense has also changed. We used to be a predominantly 4-3 team. Now, we like to switch up our fronts depending on the offense of the opposing team. We might switch from a 3-3 defense to a 4-3 to a 5-2, depending on the formations and the tendencies of the opposing team. We like to play zone, either cover 2 or cover 3, but will also mix in man. Coach Foster does a great job of getting all 9 guys swarming to the ball looking to cause turnovers. Our defense has been very underrated the last three years, giving up over 20 points only 4 times.

Our weight program I believe has also helped us be successful. We have a very nice weight room for a school our size, and it is in use regularly during and after the football season. During the season, we lift 2 times a week, usually on Mondays and Wednesdays after practice. We have the team do three lifts: bench press, squat, and power clean. They do bench and squat 2 reps of 10 and cleans 2 reps of 6. Just enough weight to maintain strength, not build. For our off-season lifting program, we want the players to lift 4 times a week using a 3 phase weight program that lasts 9 weeks and then starts over. If in another sport, we want them to get in the weight room as much as possible. The summer lift is where the major changes in our program have taken place. I put the players on weightlifting teams of 5-6 guys. They are competing against other teams for rewards such as shirts, hats,

sweatshirts, and probably the biggest perk of all is less conditioning during pre-season

practice. Any team that has over 75% attendance record will receive football apparel that they design. Which ever team has the best attendance will win a shirt or hat and get to sit out of some of the conditioning (example being 3 less 40's or 1 less Pittsburg) during pre-season practice. This is a big motivator. Having the players on weightlifting teams gets some kids excited to lift weights that might not be otherwise. Also, there is some positive pressure to get in the weightroom. Players not showing up are not just letting down themselves by not lifting, but the other guys on their weight team as well.

There are other small things I have done to change the program and make it fit my philosophy. Not enough time to mention them all. I tried hard to balance the old traditions and expectations at Cromwell with some of my new ideas and expectations. When you have a program as successful as Cromwell has been, changing everything with a new coach is not necessarily a good thing.

If anyone has any more specific questions on our offense, defense, quickness drills, or weight program, feel free to email me at [jgronner@cromwellwright.k12.mn.us](mailto:jgronner@cromwellwright.k12.mn.us).