

Photo: Bob Foote

Victory Lap

By developing team speed, flawless execution of the Wing-T Offense and forging a deep bond with his local youth football program, Eric Moore has built Center Grove (Ind.) High School into a perennial Indianapolis-area powerhouse.

By Mike Podoll, Editor

"If you come, I will build it."

Those were the reassuring words, albeit modified from the movie *Field of Dreams,* that the athletic director of Center Grove High School promised Eric Moore in 1999 if he accepted the head football coaching position at the school located in Greenwood, Ind., about 20 miles south of Indianapolis.

Moore, born and raised in Indiana, had just come off a successful stint as the head coach at Charlotte High School in Punta Gorda, Fla., and was moving back home permanently to be with his family. He wasn't sold on the job at Center Grove initially. Especially with the school sharing the same Indianapolis-area Metropolitan Conference with perennial athletic powers such as Ben Davis, Carmel, Pike and Warren Central (the 2013 Class 6A state champions).

"At the time I was offered the job, I wasn't too sure about the whole thing," says Moore. "But the athletic director at Center Grove seemed like a smart, energetic person who shared my vision for how the football program could be built.

"As he was recruiting me for the job, we stood together on a hill near campus. We looked to the left and saw a football facility that wasn't in very good shape. In fact, it was almost subpar. We then looked to the right and saw a $7 million dollar basketball arena. I mean, this place was the Taj Mahal of basketball – a contrast which sort of mirrored the prep sports mindset in Indiana back then in 1999."

> "Knowledge and many repetitions often lead to flawless execution…"

The athletic director assured Moore of the school's commitment to building the football program and the coach took him at his word and accepted the position. It was a decision that's paid massive dividends for everyone involved with Center Grove High School.

With a record of 135-53 at Center Grove, including finishing the 2013 season at 11-2 and earning a trip to the IHSAA Class 6A final four, Moore's time as head coach of the Trojans has been an unbridled success.

Moore has guided Center Grove to sectional and regional championships in 2000, 2002, 2003, 2008, 2009, 2012 and 2013. His 2008 squad won the school's first-ever state championship. He was recognized by the IHSAA for 20 years of service in 2007 and, as a track-and-field coach, was named by the National Federation of State High School Associations as 2012 Boy's Track & Field "Coach-of-the-Year."

Moore points to three major factors that have contributed to his sustained success.

1. A commitment to speed development, strength training and conditioning with the "Winter Power Club."
2. Establishing the Wing-T Offense throughout all levels of the program, from second-grade youth football through varsity.
3. Building a deep connection to the area's youth feeder system, by founding the Center Grove Bantam Youth Football League.


Photo: Bob Foote

Eric Moore has built a popular year-round strength, conditioning and speed-improvement program for his youth feeder system called, "Winter Power Club."

Winter Power Club

Moore is serious when it comes to year-round speed and strength development. As soon as the football season is over, the very next week, he begins an off-season program that involves student athletes from second grade through eighth grade, called "Winter Power Club." This program runs every Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday for an hour and a half until April. In these sessions, the coach lays the basic ground work for proper training-and-conditioning techniques.

"In Winter Power Club, we'll work with the kids on flexibility and teach them weight-lifting techniques with wooden bars and things like that," Moore says. "By teaching the proper exercises and lifts at a young age, then by the time they are freshman, they're not afraid or intimidated by any of them."

Moore says exercises introduced during Winter Power Club include power cleans, all the Olympic lifts, lifting with kettle bells, core strength and more. This serves as a lead up to his spring off-season speed-improvement series, which includes a focus on an athlete's strides and athletic footwork.

"I'm a track guy, a hurdle guy and a big believer in speed training," says Moore. "I mean, we get our players strong, but we really try to build up our team speed in the off-season.

"The way we look at it, some young athletes have a tough time developing their strength during their high school years, no matter how hard they train. Our goal then, is to get our players so fast, that it doesn't matter.

"My teams are fast – I mean, we run downhill the whole time during games – and it doesn't matter how strong you are if you can't catch us."

As a dual-role track-and-field coach, Moore says that many trainers fall into the trap of making drills so elaborate over time, that they end up losing their core purpose.

"Your drills need to be drillable. The bottom line is that players need to get the benefit from doing a drill," says Moore. "When it comes to speed drills specifically, athletes need to do the basic things very well – basic speed work, the dynamic-flex work – are all fundamentals they need to master if they are going to improve.

"DNA is DNA. You'll never turn a 5.3, 40-yard dash kid into a 4.3 athlete. But if you can help that young athlete improve from a 5.3 time, to a 5.0 or a 4.95 kid – then all of a sudden – you have yourself a different kind of player."

Wing-T Offense

The minute he was hired at Center Grove in 1999, Moore began to build an extensive youth-football league to serve as a feeder-system to the high school program. Known as a Wing-T Offense innovator, the coach installed a systematic approach for teaching Wing-T basics that incorporated consistent terminology, fundamentals and a number system to be used from second grade to high school.

To train his youth coaches in the essentials of the Wing-T Offense, Moore began to hold Wing-T clinics and started a seven-month program of 90-minute weekly classes for all coaches in the program.

"I donate my time – every week from February through late

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July – to run weekly Wing-T classes and we go every Monday night from 7 pm to 8:30 pm," says Moore. "In these classes, we pick a Wing-T topic and cover it thoroughly, going through teaching points and specific drills that relate to that week's subject.

"Usually after the class, I'll stay after another half hour or so just to answer questions."

Moore says that the primary goal of these classes is to help youth coaches learn how to teach the Wing-T. The end result of well-trained coaches, are players who are deeply ingrained in all fundamental aspects of the Wing-T by the time they reach the high-school varsity program.

"Every one of our youth coaches must learn how to run the Wing-T Offense to a degree that's appropriate for the grade level they're coaching," says Moore. "Coaches in our feeder system must run the Wing-T, and if they're running anything else, we sit down and reiterate why we do things the way we do.

"In fact, I recently saw one of our third-grade youth coaches running the spread. Now, we incorporate some spread concepts within our varsity offense, but there's no reason for a third grade team to be running spread.

"Everything we do at the youth level is done with purpose and meaning."

From "Whoop-De-Do" To "What We Do"

Moore chuckles when people call the Wing-T Offense "simplistic" or sarcastically refer to it as a "high-school offense." While the coach admits it's not a glamour offense, he points to the winning results he's had with it as proof enough.

"The Wing-T is definitely not a sexy offense like the spread, that's for sure," says Moore. "But you know what? I sit and laugh every Saturday morning while watching our freshman and JV games where an opposing school runs a spread offense and lines up in shot-gun formation 46 times – and fumbles seven of them – which leads to three or four extra possessions for us.

"Our players know offensive concepts for the Wing-T like the back of their hand by the time they're in ninth or tenth grade. Knowledge and many repetitions often lead to flawless execution."

Where flawless execution really pays dividends, according to Moore, is that it helps overcome an athleticism-gap that his teams often face in an ultra-competitive conference.

"Our conference has some huge schools in it, each of whom possesses phenomenal athletes," says Moore. "Meanwhile, we're a suburban school, located 20 minutes south of Indianapolis, and while we work very hard to develop our athletes to their peak-potential physically – especially with regards to speed development – we just aren't a very athletically gifted squad year-in and year-out.

"We'll have the occasional DI scholarship player here and there. But by and large, we face an athleticism-gap against most conference foes."

Moore says that not too many people are laughing at the Trojans offense these days, either.

"It's funny. We went from a 'whoop-de-do offense,' to a 'that's-what-we-do offense,'" says Moore. "Our players are so confident in our Wing-T Offense, and they know it so well, they feel like it gives us an advantage every single time we step onto the field.

"We try to out-execute every single opponent we play."

Having a "Go-To Play"

Moore says that on offense, all teams need a key base play or series that they can hang their hat on. For Center Grove, that go-to play is the belly.

"If things are going bad, or if we need a key yard, we turn to our belly series. Even our players want us to call it," says Moore. "If it's third-and-goal from the 2-yard line, our players know that we're going to call belly – and you can just see their posture change to one of confidence.

"I don't really care if an opponent knows the belly is coming, either. They'll need to out-execute us to stop it. And my players have probably run this play, in-game, 1,000 times since second grade. They know their assignments and they execute it flawlessly more times than not."

Moore says that having a go-to play also takes the "second-guess-the-coach" factor out of a parent's hands.

"If we tried one of 200 plays in our playbook and it fails miserably, when the parent's ask their son about the failed play on the car ride home from the game, the player will say, 'Well, I don't know dad, we've only ever run that play twice before in practice,'" says Moore. "It shows a lack of preparation and organization at a team level.

"But with our belly play, that player's car-ride-home answer



becomes, 'Well, I don't know dad, we run that play 27 times every practice. We must have screwed it up.'"

Evolution of a Program

Moore says that above all else, it's the Center Grove Bantam Youth Football program that drives his team's success. The youth league features six football fields, built upon property that the feeder program actually owns, and has over 1,000 youth players who participate in it from year-to-year. According to the coach, an established feeder program cultivates a natural connection to the varsity team.

"We have an end-zone section in our home stadium that is a 'bantam-league only' section, where all of the feeder-program players sit," says Moore. "The arrangement forges a bond among all of the players within the program and also provides the bantam players with a goal of one day playing for the Trojans."

A thriving feeder system was a major part of the vision Moore had for the school when he was offered the job in 1999. While being a plan that's come together relatively quickly, the coach admits that several key factors kick-started everything.

"In 2003, we upgraded our football stadium and not only added some bleachers, but we cleared several financial hurdles to install FieldTurf," says Moore. "As a result, we became the first high-school football program in our state to install artificial turf, which caused great buzz in the community."

Moore says that the Trojan program also benefitted from Peyton Manning's arrival to the Indianapolis Colts, which happened the same year he took the Center Grove job. According to the coach, the success of the NFL team lit the fuse for a new-found passion for football around Indianapolis and the surrounding area.

"Everyone started going to Colts games and began watching football on a regular basis," says Moore. "The Colts won a Super Bowl in 2006 and it kicked off a whole new generation of energized football fans around Indianapolis."

In 2007, Moore says that his football program benefitted from another facility upgrade when the school completed a multi-million dollar locker room renovation. The coach leveraged the new facility further by storing all of the Bantam League youth football equipment in the visitor's locker room.

"In the off-season, our youth-league players are required to check in at the high-school stadium, where they walk across that gorgeous turf and into our beautiful, state-of-the-art locker room to pick up their equipment," says Moore. "This causes our young players to aspire to someday play varsity football for Center Grove High School.

"On Friday nights at our home games, fans are tailgating, the stadium music is loud, the stands are packed and the field is gorgeous. Home games are just a fun, raucous community event in Greenwood.

"My career at Center Grove has been extremely rewarding. It just goes to show what can happen when everyone works toward a common vision."

