

# Leaping into Glory: *Heber Springs High*



The BFS program helped the Panthers capture their first playoff victory in 27 years

A 4-6 season may not seem like the kind of success that a football coach ordinarily would want to talk about, but Coach Steve Janski's first season with the Heber Springs Panthers was very satisfying. Actually, it's downright remarkable when you consider that for the previous five years the team had had a combined record of 3-47! So what exactly was the problem with this division 4A school from Heber Springs, Arkansas?

"There were a number of mental factors involved, such as motivation and enthusiasm, but also there was the major fact that they had no year-round strength and conditioning program," says Janski. "They lifted a couple months during the spring, but that was basically it." Janski set out to change all that.

Janski arrived at Heber Springs in February 2005 and initially based his program on many ideas from college

programs he'd heard about. But Janski dropped that system after he talked to some college recruiters who suggested he look into Bigger Faster Stronger. "I started investigating the BFS program, and I liked the fact that no matter what sport you're performing, you do the same core lifts. The way I see it, with BFS you're not coaching a sport, you're coaching an athlete!"

In addition to getting a new workout, this past year the Panthers



A strong defense helped the Panthers go from 3-47 to 9-3.



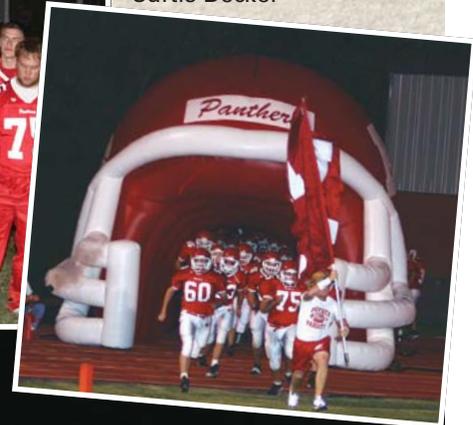
#52 Alex Wyatt, #22 Fraiser Blankeneship



#33 Tanner Tubbs

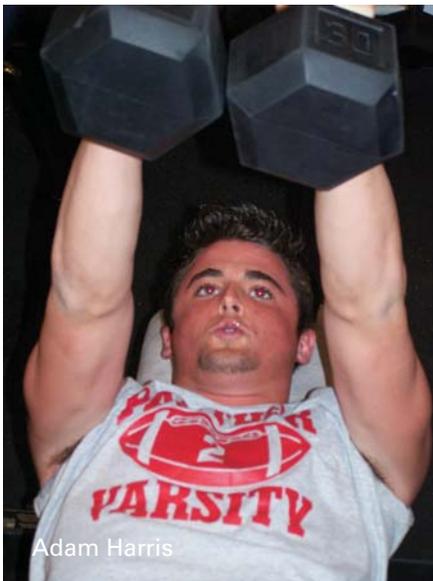


#34 Corey Copeland, #80 Curtis Decker





Josh Candau, left; Alex Witkowski



Adam Harris



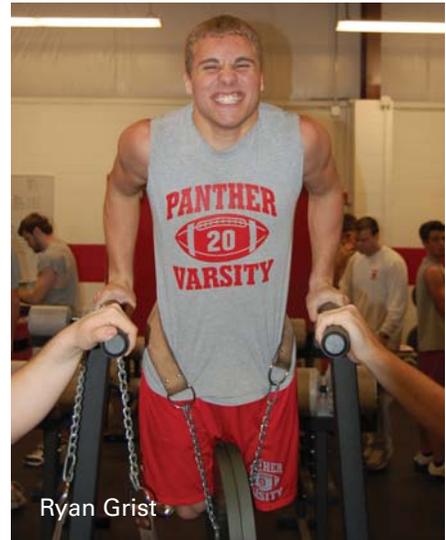
Corey Copeland



Frazier Blankeneship



Kris Immesote, left; Spotting, Alex Wyatt; Ryan Grist



Ryan Grist

also got a new field house. The old one was more than 30 years old. They tore it down and built a new one with a weightroom filled with BFS equipment. As for a new attitude, Janski says that he started a philosophy with his athletes of “One family, one heartbeat.” “This message is posted in our field house and just about everywhere you look,” says Janski. “We wanted to create a family atmosphere, and so we engaged in activities such as taking our kids on retreats or taking them to play paint-

ball.” Did these changes work? Are you sitting down?

### Leaping Forward

For starters, in Janski’s second year the Panthers surprised everyone by winning their first three games before taking on Lonoke High School. If Janski’s players could win this one, it would mean that the Panthers would be 4-0 for the first time in three decades. And that they did. With a game that saw the Panthers dominate the line of

scrimmage, they rushed for more than 350 yards and a 20-14 victory.

The next milestone occurred with their 10th game of the season. Heber Springs, which once had been on the verge of canceling their program, defeated Newport High School 24-14 and put themselves in the playoffs for the first time in 10 years. Although Janski says that the first half of the Newport game was the “worst half of football they played all year,” his team rebounded with superior conditioning



Left to right: Chi-Chi Tamburo, school board member; Steve Janski; Rick Rana, Superintendent; Ronnie Fair, school board president. Board members not pictured: Joe Tourear, Jackie McPherson, Ed Lacy

*Every kid wants to be a part of something special, and then feel that they are needed – and they may not know it at the time, but they really want discipline.*

Steve Janski, Athletic Director/  
Head Football Coach

that enabled them to shut down their opponents in the second half. A victory is a victory, after all.

The playoff game was an away game against Greenland, which was a concern, as Greenland had not lost a home game in more than two years. But Heber Springs pulled off another miracle, 21-12. This win was another statistical achievement, as it gave the Panthers their first playoff victory in 27 years!

In the next game they played perennial powerhouse Nashville, a team that has won several state championships in the past decade, including in 2005. Janski says the Panthers “hung in there,” losing 41-28, but they couldn’t have been more pleased with how they had been able to break their old tradition of losing and set upon a new path of winning.

The enthusiasm for Panther football is growing: The number of athletes going out for football has tripled since

Janski took over the program and instituted the BFS program. But it’s not only football that is reaping the benefits. Janski is the athletic director, and he decided to unify all the sports with BFS. “Our basketball coaches, our track coaches, softball coaches and baseball coaches – they’ve all bought into it. And with all these kids, it’s amazing the progress they are making so quickly.”

For other coaches in the same predicament of taking over a – how can we say it? –terrible football program, Janski has some advice. “It’s important to make it fun for the kids. There are so many options out there for kids today that are not constructive or positive. You know, I was told when I first got here that you couldn’t get the kids involved in a summer program because we live in a resort-type of community with a nice lake, but I really didn’t buy into that. Every kid wants to be a part of something special, and then feel that they are needed – and they may

not know it at the time, but they really want discipline.

“It’s also essential when turning around a losing football program to install a strength and conditioning program that enables them to see the results, day in and day out. Whether it’s a five-pound increase in how much they’re lifting or just one more rep, kids must experience success every time they set foot in that weightroom. And that success encourages them even more to keep coming back.”

Another factor that Janski believes is part of a successful program is that coaches must always work on selling themselves and selling their program. “The old days are over – today’s coaches have to recruit and motivate these kids because we know that the game of football can change their lives. Playing football can teach you things that the world outside of athletics can’t teach you.” **BFS**

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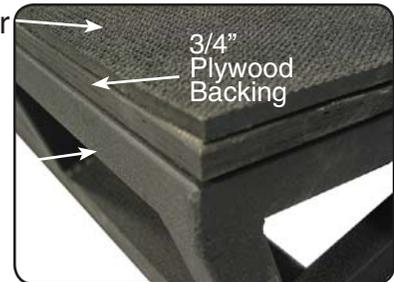
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