

FLORIDA

COY IS BACK!

COACH OF THE YEAR IS
HEADING BACK TO ORLANDO
AND ITS BIGGER THAN EVER
BEFORE!

INSIDE:
COACHES
SPOTLIGHT



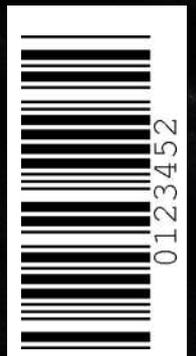
COY FOOTBALL CLINICS

BELL IS BACK

THE LEGENDARY LEON HS
COACH RETURNS TO THE
SIDELINE

AROUND THE STATE

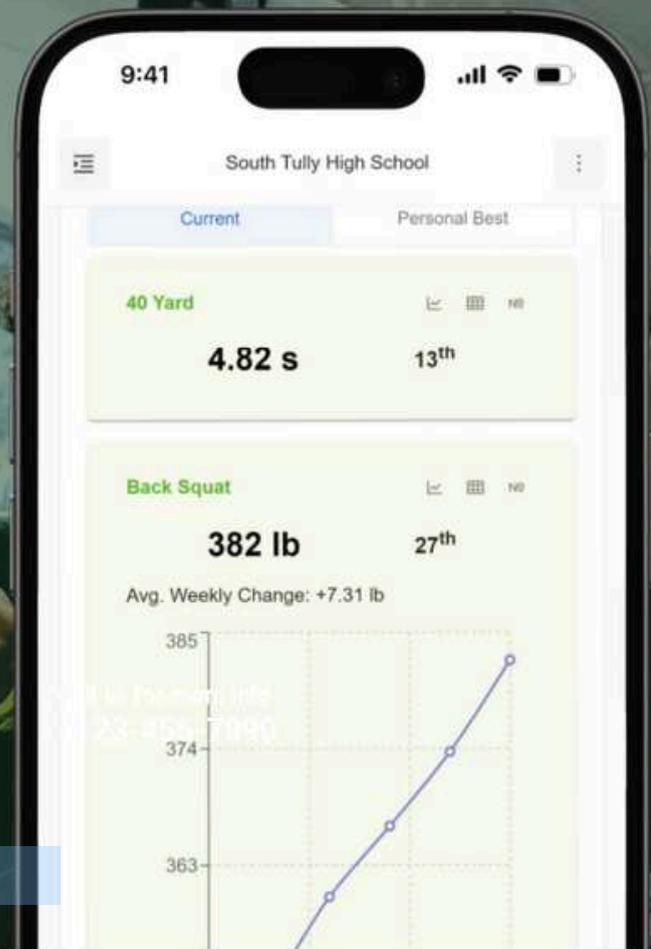
NEWS FROM ALL ACROSS THE
FREE STATE OF FLORIDA



TULLY

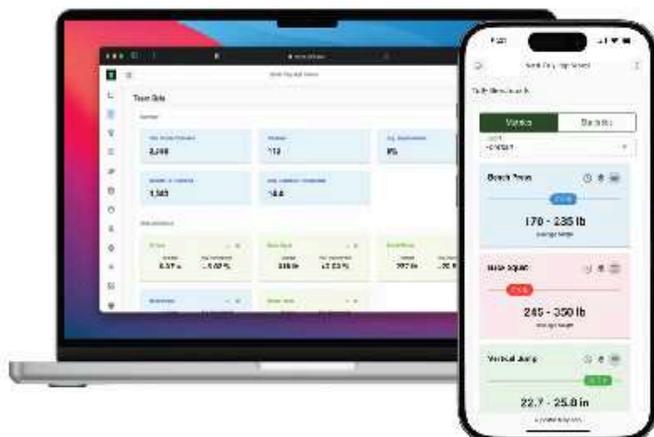
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The Interview You Need To See



**FLORIDA COACHES
COALITION**



FLORIDA COACHES MAGAZINE

It is hard to believe that we are already nearly 25 percent of the way through the school year. Time truly flies when you are in the middle of practices, games, film sessions, and the countless responsibilities that come with being a coach. As the first quarter of the year wraps up, we want to take a moment to thank each of you for the energy and commitment you continue to pour into your athletes and programs. Your work is not only shaping young athletes on the field, but also molding leaders and citizens off of it.

With this second issue of Florida Coaches Magazine, we are excited to share stories, updates, and resources that highlight the incredible impact coaches across the state are making every single day. From small towns to big cities, Florida's high school coaching community continues to be the heart of athletics and the foundation for opportunities that extend well beyond sports.

Over the next two months, you will notice a major ramp up in the work being done to advocate for higher compensation and better support for coaches across Florida. Behind the scenes, there has been a tremendous amount of organizing, planning, and relationship-building with lawmakers, school districts, and community partners. We are working tirelessly to make sure the voice of Florida's coaches is not just heard, but acted upon. You will begin to see the results of these efforts in the coming weeks, and we could not be more excited to share what has been in motion.

This issue is also a celebration of the progress already being made. Each page is designed to showcase the passion and perseverance of coaches just like you. Whether it's highlighting a coach who has achieved a milestone victory, spotlighting innovative strategies for athlete development, or providing updates on initiatives that directly affect your livelihood, our goal is to ensure that this magazine remains a platform built for coaches, by coaches.

As we move forward, we ask that you continue to stay engaged, connected, and vocal. The changes that are coming will not be possible without your collective support. Together, we are building a stronger foundation for the profession and creating a future where coaching in Florida is valued at the level it deserves.

Thank you for investing your time, your energy, and your heart into this work. We hope you enjoy this issue and are as encouraged as we are about the direction we are heading. The school year may already be moving quickly, but the best is yet to come.

Dr. Andrew Ramjit
Executive Director
Florida Coaches Coalition

A football player in a white jersey and helmet is running with the ball. The player is wearing a white helmet with a black facemask and a white jersey with a "Maple Health" logo. The player is wearing black gloves and black shorts. The background is a blurred green field with a blue sky.

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No helmet, headgear, or chinstrap can prevent or eliminate the risk of concussions or other serious head injuries while playing sports or otherwise. Researchers have not reached an agreement on how the results of impact attenuation tests relate to concussions or other injuries. No conclusions about a reduction of risk or severity of concussive injury or other injury risk should be drawn from impact attenuation tests. All headgear and chinstraps must be used along with properly fit and maintained helmets.

CONGRATULATIONS COACH ROBBY PRUITT



(Via On3 - Andy Villamarzo)

For the first time in the history of high school football, a head coach has won 200 games in two different states.

Williston (Fla.) head coach Robby Pruitt led the Red Devils to a 49-21 victory over Ocala Trinity Catholic on Friday night. With the victory, Pruitt became the first football coach ever to win 200 games in two separate states as he also logged over 200 victories in Georgia at Coffee and Warner Robins.

Pruitt is one of 49 football coaches to have ever won 400 or more games in prep gridiron history.





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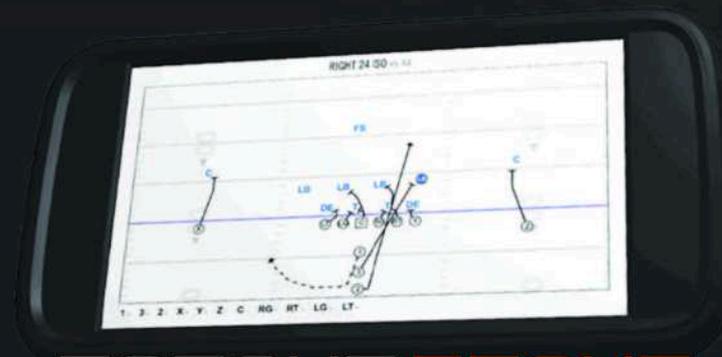
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Tap the pitch or play you want to send to your players. Your calls are instantly received by the player devices.

STEP 3: EXECUTE

Player devices receive the call in milliseconds, and vibrate to notify the player of a new call.

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SPORTS ILLUSTRATED: TEXAS' UIL APPROVES WEARABLE PLAY-CALLING DEVICES FOR 2025

According to a report by TexasFootball.com, the University Scholastic League (UIL) has approved wearable play-calling technology for the upcoming 2025 high school football season. The Texas association stressed in an email sent out to athletic directors and coaches that though this wearable technology has been approved, it is not for helmet communication from coach-to-player but a wristband-like device.

"Coach-to-player communication will be allowed through one-way wearable technologies in UIL football games for the 2025 season, with some important restrictions," UIL emailed athletic directors, football coaches per the report. "Again, this is not coach-to-player helmet communication but utilizing wristband-like technology to communicate with your athletes." Per the report, the new wristband-like communication is unique in a sense because of the following ways of how it will be utilized:

- Wearable wristband-like technology can be used only for coaches to communicate with players for in-game play calling
- Communication from coaches-to-players can only come from the coaching booth or press box
- Communication from coaches-to-players is only via text messaging with no audio allowed
- The new technology is a one-way play-calling communication wristband system from coach-to-player

Sign stealing by coaches was a concern at the UIL 2024 high school football state championships to the point that people were removed from games for it. "There were people removed at the state championship games for stealing signs," Texas High School Coaches Association Executive Director Joe Martin said to the Tyler Morning Telegraph. "Our coaches are really adamant about being able to have access to this, and some will use it and some will not."

One Texas high school football head coach via a report said that his team may use the new technology, but are unsure since use of it would've been needed during the current spring football period.

"There is a possibility that we might use it, but I don't know how much," Coppel head coach Antonio Wiley said to the Tyler Morning Telegraph. "The things that we do, mostly with formations, I think it would be harder for us to revert to that in this short of a time frame without having used it in spring ball. I think it's an advantage for guys who are worried about their offensive signals and formations and plays being stolen during the course of the game."

GoRout of Minnesota, a company that produces the wearable wristband-like communication, released a statement a couple weeks ago regarding the UIL's decision to approve the technology for the 2025 season.

"The Liberty League trial set a precedent when it comes to the innovative ways coaches communicate with players," GoRout Chief Partnerships Officer Drew Robinson said in a press release via the company's website. "We're thrilled that Texas coaches recognize the value of wearables and understand that this is where the game is headed. Texas is leading the way when it comes to innovation in football, and we expect this to set a precedent for teams and leagues at all levels."

NHSSCA FLORIDA FAMILY DAY



2/2



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1/2



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**FLORIDA COACHES
COALITION**

Coaches

SPOTLIGHT

A CONVERSATION WITH RICKY BELL:
HEAD COACH OF LEON HS FOOTBALL
FHSAA BOARD MEMBER

BY: TYRONE MCGRIFF



**RICKY
BELL**

LEON HIGH SCHOOL



Coaches

SPOTLIGHT

COACH BELL, AS THE HEAD COACH OF LEON FOOTBALL, YOU'RE SOMEONE A LOT OF PEOPLE IN OUR COMMUNITY WANT TO HEAR FROM. FOR THE FOLLOWERS OF THE FLORIDA COACHES COALITION, CAN YOU GIVE US A 3,000-FOOT VIEW OF YOUR STORY? SHARE A BIT ABOUT YOUR UPBRINGING AND THE ROLE SPORTS PLAYED IN YOUR LIFE GROWING UP IN TALLAHASSEE?

I was born and raised in Tallahassee, growing up off Orange Avenue. Sports were always a big part of my life. My parents encouraged and supported me in whatever I wanted to do. I played city league football at Myers Park, some basketball, and a little baseball—though I'll admit I didn't like getting hit with the ball, so baseball wasn't really my sport. Football, on the other hand, stuck with me.

I grew up a middle-class kid on the south side of Tallahassee, playing with friends who became lifelong companions. Some of those friendships have lasted over 50 years. Sports gave me that community.





Coaches

SPOTLIGHT

THINKING BACK TO THOSE EARLY YEARS, WERE THERE ANY MENTORS OR ROLE MODELS WHO SHAPED YOUR LOVE FOR THE GAME?

Absolutely. First, my friends—we all played together, pushed each other, and shared a love for the game. But my early coaches had a huge impact. In city league football, Mr. Driscoll and Mr. Phillips from Myers Park were big influences. They were security guards at FCI and even took our team to play games inside the prison for the inmates. That was an unforgettable experience.

In high school, my head coach was Jack Gaskins, a Hall of Famer. Coaches Hector Hernandez and Jerry Davis also guided me. I played basketball too, and Coach John Sodi was another role model. By my junior year of high school, I knew I wanted to be a coach. That vision guided me from then on.

SO, WHEN YOU TRANSITIONED INTO COACHING, WHAT INSPIRED THAT MOVE?

By my junior year in high school, I knew I wanted to coach. I still wanted to play, so I walked on at FSU during the spring. I wasn't good enough for a scholarship, and without that, I had to work to pay for school. After that spring, I decided it was time to start coaching.

Two years after graduating high school, I asked to coach the freshman team at my alma mater. A couple of my high school buddies and I coached that team for two years before moving on. That's how it all started.



Coaches

SPOTLIGHT

YOU'VE HAD A QUITE A JOURNEY IN YOUR CAREER. HOW DID YOU ULTIMATELY LAND AT LEON?

This is actually my second stint at Leon. I started at Wakulla under JD Jones, a Hall of Fame coach, for two years. Then I went to Lincoln High under Charlie Armstrong. After that, I became the defensive coordinator at Quincy Shanks.

At 28, I was promoted to head coach at Shanks. That year, we struggled early but turned it around—after going for a two-point conversion to win our first game, we didn't lose again that season. The next year, Gene Cox called me to be his defensive coordinator at Leon, and I took the opportunity.

I spent nine years at Leon—seven under Gene Cox and two as offensive coordinator under Jimmy Sauls. In 1992, we were state runners-up. After that, I became head coach at Rickards High School, where we turned the program around by my third season.

From there, I moved into administration—first as a school administrator, then as the county athletic director for 19 years. I retired in 2020 but came back to Leon in 2025 because I wanted to make a difference for these kids. I'm not here to build a résumé. I'm here to leave this program better than I found it.



Coaches

SPOTLIGHT

IN ADDITION TO COACHING, YOU SERVE ON THE FHSAA BOARD OF DIRECTORS. CAN YOU EXPLAIN YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES THERE AND HOW THAT INTERSECTS WITH BEING A HEAD COACH?

A couple of years ago, Governor DeSantis restructured the board. I applied, interviewed, and was selected to serve. Our responsibilities include making policies, hearing appeals from schools statewide, and managing the budget.

We meet every other month in Gainesville. On Sundays, we hear appeals. Mondays, we break into committees—I'm on the Operations Committee, which handles game operations, scheduling, classifications, and more.

When making decisions, I always consider what's best for kids. Ideally, I want to rule in favor of letting them play, but it has to be fair for all kids, not just one. Each case is different, and you have to treat it that way.

FROM YOUR PERSPECTIVE, WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST CHANGES YOU'VE SEEN IN HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETICS?

The biggest change is how easily kids can transfer schools. School choice was intended for academic opportunities, especially for students leaving failing schools. Now, many use it for athletics, and it's hurting fair play, sportsmanship, and team loyalty.

I'm all for giving kids opportunities, but the constant movement can damage programs and the bonds teams work so hard to build.



Coaches

SPOTLIGHT

LOOKING AHEAD, WHAT'S YOUR VISION FOR LEON HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL, AND HOW DO YOU SEE YOUR CONTINUED IMPACT WITH THE FHSAA?

For the FHSAA, I want to be a voice of reason—ensuring player safety and keeping the playing field as level as possible.

For Leon, my goal is simple: leave it better than I found it. I want to restore discipline, structure, and traditions that will last long after I'm gone. You can build a program over years, but it can be torn down in a season. My job is to stabilize it and prepare the next leader to carry it forward.

COACH, I KNOW THE COMMUNITY APPRECIATES YOUR LEADERSHIP AND DEDICATION, BOTH AT LEON AND STATEWIDE. THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO SHARE YOUR JOURNEY.

Thank you. I appreciate the opportunity to talk about my story and my vision.





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How to Talk to Your Booster Club or School Board About Guardian Caps

We get it – talking about money can be a tad bit awkward. But, when the cause is as important as ours here at Guardian Sports, the mission is truly priceless. And that's why we're here to help.

At Guardian Sports, we're committed to real, measurable impact. Every product we create is designed to **elevate protection, performance and precision**. If you're preparing to spark up a conversation with your school's booster club, athletic donors or board members, these talking points will help you make a strong, informed case.

What is a [Guardian Cap](#)?

The Guardian Cap is a soft-shell, impact reducing helmet cover designed for football, lacrosse and hockey helmets.

Founded in 2010 by Erin and Lee Hanson, Guardian Sports emerged from over 20 years of experience in material science. The traditional hard-shell helmet hadn't changed much since the 1960s — the Hansons saw the need for a modern, science-backed upgrade. And that upgrade became the Guardian Cap.

What are the benefits of Guardian Caps?

- **Reduces impact** and redirects rotational forces upon collision.
- **One-size-fits-all**, catering to youth, high school, college and professional players.
- **Easy to attach** with snaps and Velcro; doesn't alter the helmet.
- All versions **weigh less than a pound**.
- **Dampens soundwaves** and vibrations.
- **Reduces radiant heat** from sunlight up to 20 degrees.
- **Customizable** with numbers, logos or decals.
- **Preserves helmets and decals** from wear and tear.

Which Guardian Cap is best for us?

- **Guardian Cap XT** – Original Cap; tested, validated and mandated; used by youth – college.
- **Guardian Cap NXT** – Original Cap; tested, validated and mandated; used by college and professional players who weigh 250+lbs.

- **Guardian Cap XT 2.0** – Same science, same technology, sleeker design; used by youth – college.
- **Guardian Cap NXT 2.0** – Same science, same technology, sleeker design; used by college and professional players who weigh 250+lbs.

What tests have Guardian Caps passed?

Guardian Caps don't just talk the talk – they're backed by independent studies, clinical research and on-field data. The NFL's Medical Director, Dr. Allen Sills, has to publicly support the use of Guardian Caps as "progress, not just policy."

- [Rutgers – Clinical Youth Study](#)
 - Conducted by Robert Heary, MD, Neurosurgeon
 - The study concluded that by using Guardian Caps and implementing safer tackling techniques at the middle school level will lessen the frequency of head impacts over the course of an entire season.
- [Virginia Tech](#)
 - "Helmet shell add-ons have been shown to decrease linear and rotational acceleration, thereby helping reduce the risk of injury."
- [BioCore – H.A.R.M. Testing](#)
 - H.A.R.M. = Head Acceleration Response Metric
 - On average, the Guardian Cap NXT reduced H.A.R.M. by an average of 9%
- [Stanford – H.A.R.M. Testing](#)
 - Overall, after incorporating Guardian Caps, H.A.R.M. values were reduced in laboratory impact tests by an average of:
 - 25% at 3.5 m/s
 - 18% at 5.5 m/s
 - 10% at 7.4 m/s
- [NFL On-Field Data](#)
 - According to the NFL, concussion numbers were reduced by 52% after introducing Guardian Caps.

Are Guardian Caps used by the NFL?

Yes! Absolutely. Guardian Caps have been part of the NFL's evolution in player safety since winning the **NFL HeadHealth TECH Challenge** in 2017. In 2020, Guardian Caps hit the fields for multiple NFL practices and data testing. NFL owners announced in early 2022 that Guardian Caps would be mandated for all offensive linemen, defensive linemen, tight ends and linebackers during training camp practices.

"It's really become a norm here. The players know the Caps. They've seen the data, it works. The Guardian Caps have become another piece of equipment that they take to practice. You think about all the head impacts that we're reducing from players wearing them and it's second nature now," said **Brendan Burger, Equipment Director of the Los Angeles Rams.**

A year later, the NFL expanded that mandate to include all contact practices and add running backs and fullbacks to the list of mandated positions. Wide receivers and defensive backs were added in 2024.

The NFL permitted the usage of Guardian Caps during games for the 2024 season. By the end of the season, 20 NFL players wore Guardian Caps in games and concussion numbers had decreased by 17% from the year before – the lowest numbers since head injury tracking began in 2015.

"We've got two years of data now showing significant concussion reductions in those players that wear Guardian Caps in the NFL," said **Dr. Allen Sills, MD, FACS, Chief Medical Officer of the NFL**

How much do Guardian Caps cost?

Pricing depends on quantity, but affordability is a priority at Guardian Sports. Whether you're outfitting a youth league or a varsity squad, our sales team will work with you to meet your needs.

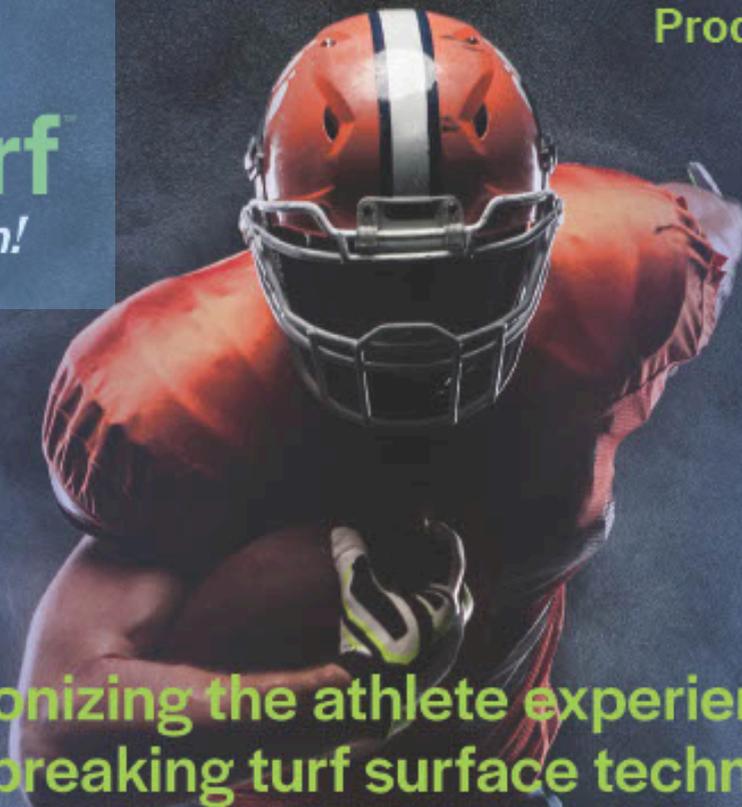
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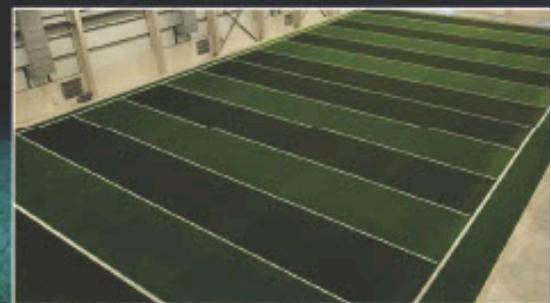
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FROM **around** the state

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BROWARD**

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**COACH THE LEADER
WITHIN**

By: Justin Wentworth

BROWARD COUNTY ADVANCES ATHLETIC INFRASTRUCTURE WITH WAVE OF NEW SYNTHETIC TURF FOOTBALL FIELDS

By: James O'Brien

Broward County is stepping up its game in youth and community sports, with multiple initiatives underway to install state-of-the-art synthetic turf football fields across schools and parks. These upgrades, aimed at enhancing safety, durability, and accessibility, are part of broader efforts by the Broward County Public Schools (BCPS) district and the county's Parks and Recreation Department. While not a single comprehensive county-wide mandate, the projects collectively aim to modernize athletic facilities at key locations, benefiting thousands of student-athletes and residents.

The most visible progress has come from BCPS, which kicked off a multi-million-dollar investment in 2024 to replace natural grass fields with artificial turf at several high schools. The initiative, totaling \$3.6 million, prioritizes student-athlete safety by reducing injury risks associated with uneven or worn grass surfaces. Installations were targeted for completion in the fall of 2024, but recent celebrations highlight ongoing momentum into 2025.

A highlight of this school-based push was the ribbon-cutting ceremony at Dillard High School 6-12 in Fort Lauderdale on August 19, 2025. The newly unveiled field, dubbed the "Isaac Bruce Field" in honor of the NFL Hall of Famer and Dillard alumnus, features cutting-edge synthetic turf designed for high-impact sports like football and soccer. The project received a \$250,000 grant boost, underscoring community and private sector support for the upgrade. Similar fields have been installed or are nearing completion at South Broward High School in Hollywood, Deerfield Beach High School, and Monarch High School in Coconut Creek, covering a diverse range of communities from north to south Broward.

"These turf fields represent a commitment to our students' well-being and the future of sports in Broward," said BCPS Superintendent Peter B. Licata in a district statement. The synthetic surfaces are expected to last 8-12 years with minimal maintenance, compared to annual reseeding costs for natural grass, potentially saving the district hundreds of thousands in long-term upkeep.

On the parks side, Broward County Parks and Recreation is pursuing targeted conversions to synthetic turf, focusing on high-use athletic areas. A notable project is the Artificial Turf Field Conversion of the North Fields at Bamford Sports Complex in Davie, with bids awarded in late 2024 and construction likely wrapping up in early 2025. This upgrade will transform multi-purpose fields used for football, lacrosse, and other sports into low-maintenance, all-weather venues.

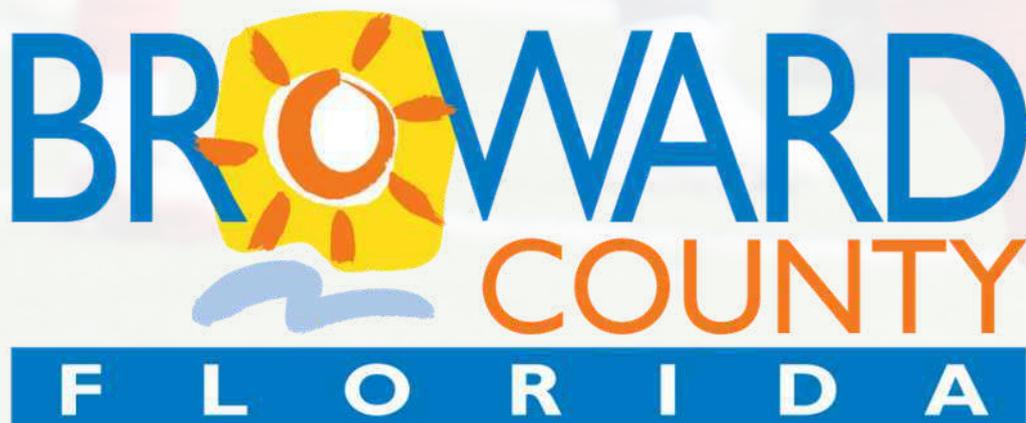
Further afield, the City of Coconut Creek—within Broward County—has allocated funds for turf installations as part of its parks improvement plan. The north field at Sabal Pines Park is slated for a \$600,000 synthetic turf overhaul in 2026, followed by the west soccer field at Gerber Park in 2027. These city-led efforts align with county goals to expand safe play spaces, though they are budgeted separately at around \$500,000 to \$700,000 per field, depending on size and features.

Overall, Broward lacks a unified "cover the county" blueprint for football fields, but the combined school and parks initiatives are poised to add or upgrade at least 5-7 fields by the end of 2026. BCPS's plan targets 10-15 high schools over the next few years, pending funding, while parks focus on 20 priority sites identified in the 2022 Parks and Recreation Master Plan. That plan estimates \$185 million in total facility improvements county-wide, with athletic fields comprising a significant portion.

Costs for synthetic turf installations vary but generally range from \$700,000 to \$1.5 million per full-size football field, including excavation, base preparation, turf laying, and drainage systems. Maintenance drops to \$6,000-\$10,000 annually post-installation, a fraction of natural field expenses. Funding sources include county budgets, state grants, and partnerships like the one at Dillard High.

Local officials hail the developments as a win for public health and recreation. "We're building fields that can withstand Florida's weather while keeping our kids active and safe," noted Broward County Parks Director Michael B. Kelpsch. As the 2025 football season ramps up, these new surfaces are already seeing action, promising brighter prospects for Broward's sports enthusiasts.

For more details on upcoming projects, residents can visit the BCPS website or broward.org/parks.





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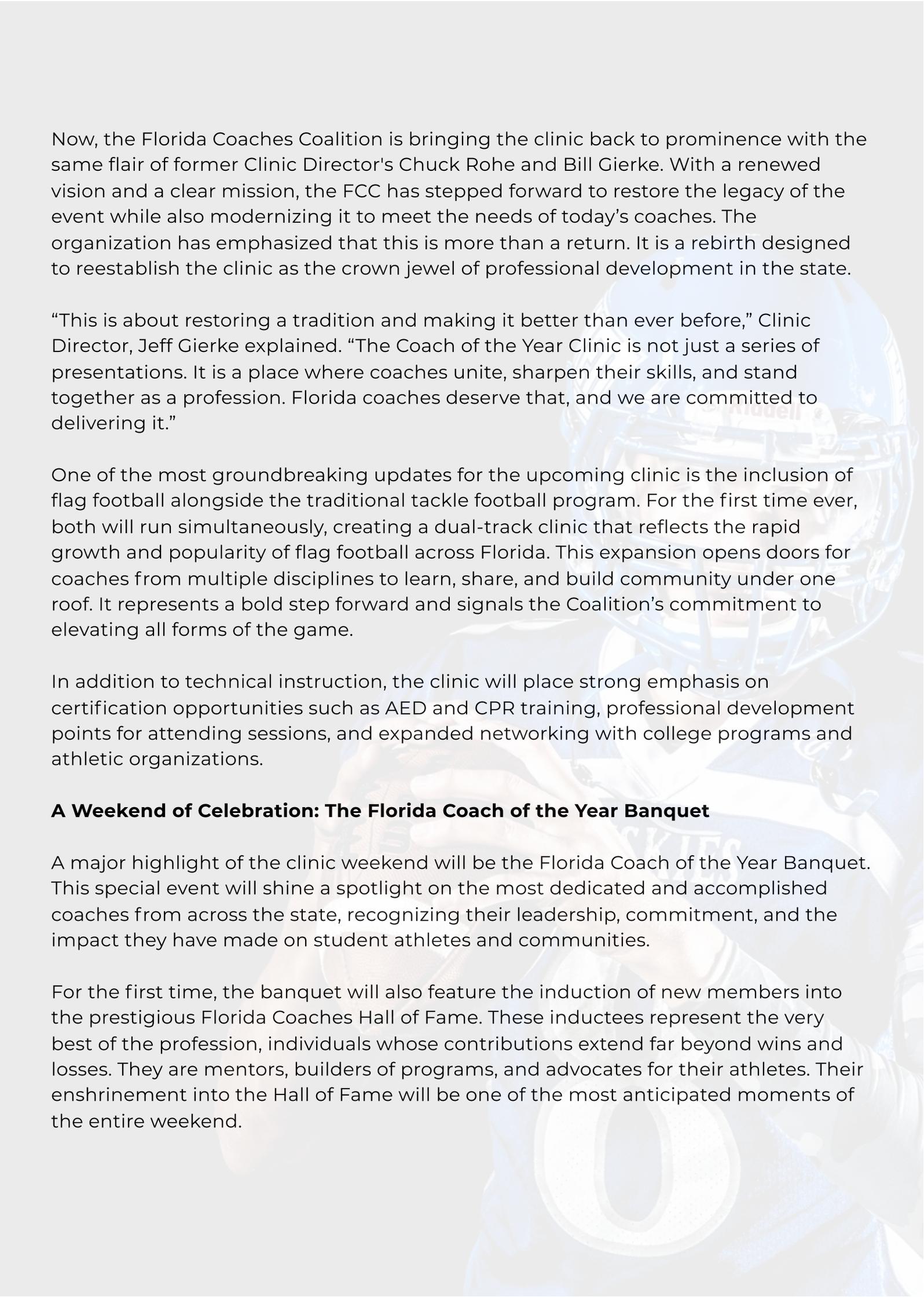
COY CLINIC IS BACK IN ORLANDO AND BIGGER THAN EVER! **By: Dr. Andrew Ramjit**

The Coach of the Year Clinic is officially returning to Orlando, a city that has long been tied to the rich tradition of high school football and professional development for coaches across the state. For many in Florida, the clinic represents more than just a weekend of learning. It has been a centerpiece of coaching culture, a place where generations of coaches built relationships, exchanged ideas, and came away inspired to bring new strategies and energy back to their teams.

The history of the clinic in Florida, and especially in Orlando, runs deep. For decades, the event was a must-attend gathering that combined nationally recognized speakers, major college coaching staffs, and a true spirit of fellowship. Coaches recall the days when hotel ballrooms were filled to capacity and when the clinic was as much about networking and personal growth as it was about Xs and Os. It was a staple in the professional lives of Florida coaches and helped shape the coaching landscape across the state.

But in the years following the Covid pandemic, the event struggled to find its footing. Attendance was never the same, the momentum stalled, and the once vibrant energy that made the clinic special began to fade. The pandemic had forced coaches into isolation, and while many events returned, the clinic could not immediately regain its position as the premier professional development experience for Florida's coaching community.





Now, the Florida Coaches Coalition is bringing the clinic back to prominence with the same flair of former Clinic Director's Chuck Rohe and Bill Gierke. With a renewed vision and a clear mission, the FCC has stepped forward to restore the legacy of the event while also modernizing it to meet the needs of today's coaches. The organization has emphasized that this is more than a return. It is a rebirth designed to reestablish the clinic as the crown jewel of professional development in the state.

"This is about restoring a tradition and making it better than ever before," Clinic Director, Jeff Gierke explained. "The Coach of the Year Clinic is not just a series of presentations. It is a place where coaches unite, sharpen their skills, and stand together as a profession. Florida coaches deserve that, and we are committed to delivering it."

One of the most groundbreaking updates for the upcoming clinic is the inclusion of flag football alongside the traditional tackle football program. For the first time ever, both will run simultaneously, creating a dual-track clinic that reflects the rapid growth and popularity of flag football across Florida. This expansion opens doors for coaches from multiple disciplines to learn, share, and build community under one roof. It represents a bold step forward and signals the Coalition's commitment to elevating all forms of the game.

In addition to technical instruction, the clinic will place strong emphasis on certification opportunities such as AED and CPR training, professional development points for attending sessions, and expanded networking with college programs and athletic organizations.

A Weekend of Celebration: The Florida Coach of the Year Banquet

A major highlight of the clinic weekend will be the Florida Coach of the Year Banquet. This special event will shine a spotlight on the most dedicated and accomplished coaches from across the state, recognizing their leadership, commitment, and the impact they have made on student athletes and communities.

For the first time, the banquet will also feature the induction of new members into the prestigious Florida Coaches Hall of Fame. These inductees represent the very best of the profession, individuals whose contributions extend far beyond wins and losses. They are mentors, builders of programs, and advocates for their athletes. Their enshrinement into the Hall of Fame will be one of the most anticipated moments of the entire weekend.



“This banquet is about honoring excellence and inspiring the next generation of coaches,” said Dr. Andrew Ramjit (Executive Director of FCC). “Our Hall of Fame inductees and award recipients represent the highest standards of the profession, and we could not be more proud to celebrate them.”

The banquet not only provides an evening of recognition but also sets a new standard for how Florida acknowledges and values its coaching leaders. By pairing the educational side of the clinic with a formal celebration of achievement, the event ensures that coaches are both empowered with knowledge and celebrated for their service.

More than a Clinic

Equally important, the clinic will serve as a rallying point for advocacy. The Florida Coaches Coalition has been vocal about the need for fair compensation, greater recognition, and stronger protections for coaches. By bringing the clinic back with renewed energy, the Coalition is not just reviving a tradition but also creating a powerful platform to push forward meaningful change for the profession.

The return of the Coach of the Year Clinic to Orlando is more than an event on the calendar. It is a symbol of resilience, a nod to history, and a bold step into the future. Florida’s coaches will once again have a place to gather, to learn, to advocate, and to celebrate the work they pour into their athletes and schools every single day.

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COACH THE LEADER WITHIN: LESSONS FROM “EXTREME OWNERSHIP” AND “LEADERS EAT LAST”

By: Justin Wentworth

Why Leadership Books Matter in High School Sports

High school sports coaches bear immense responsibility: shaping young athletes, building cohesive teams, and cultivating life skills that extend beyond the field. Two powerhouse leadership books—**Extreme Ownership** by Jocko Willink and Leif Babin, and **Leaders Eat Last** by Simon Sinek—offer complementary guidance perfect for the high-stakes world of coaching. One delivers battlefield-tested discipline and accountability, the other fosters trust, empathy, and safety. Together, they form a leadership playbook designed to elevate both team performance and the well-being of every athlete.

Extreme Ownership – Accountability from the Front Line

Extreme Ownership is built around the unshakeable principle that leaders must take complete responsibility for everything their team does—or fails to do.

Key Principles for Coaches:

Own It All: Whether it's a blown play, a lost game, or team morale issues, resist blaming players, referees, or the schedule. Own the outcome—then guide your team forward.

No Bad Players, Only Bad Leaders: Great teams aren't born; they're led. It's your role to bring out strengths in every athlete, even when talent seems lacking. Believe in the Mission: If you're not fully behind your game plan or season goals, your team won't be either. True belief inspires trust and commitment.

Check the Ego: In coaching environments, egos can stall progress. Stay humble, make better decisions, and model self-control.

Cover and Move (Teamwork): Special teams must support each other, trading off responsibilities to move forward—just like players pass, block, and defend in sync.

Simple Plans Win: Complex game plans can confuse; in high-pressure moments, clarity matters most.

Prioritize and Execute: Not everything can be fixed at once. Focus on one priority at a time—defense, morale, fundamentals—and execute with discipline.

Decentralized Command: Empower captains and assistant coaches to lead in their areas—on the line, in drills, on the bench.

Plan: Build clear, flexible plans: playbooks, practice drills, contingency plans for rainouts or injuries.

Lead Up and Down the Chain: Communicate effectively with school administrators and athletes alike—advocate for your team while modeling accountability.

Discipline Equals Freedom: Rigorous routines off the field—early arrival, well-structured practices, recovery protocols—create the freedom for composure in games.

Leaders Eat Last – Building Trust and Team Well-Being

Simon Sinek's **Leaders Eat Last** examines how trust and biological responses shape effective leadership—particularly through the lens of empathy, safety, and serving others.

Key Takeaways for Coaches:

Circle of Safety: Foster an environment where athletes feel emotionally and physically safe—encouraging risk-taking, effort, and perseverance without fear of harsh judgment.

Servant Leadership: Step into the role of caretaker—prioritize your players' growth, health, and confidence. Leadership isn't about authority; it's about rising above to support your team.

Oxytocin Builds Trust: Small acts of kindness—checking in after a tough game, recognizing effort, praising improvement—release oxytocin, reinforcing trust throughout the team.

Manage Cortisol—Reduce Stress: Stress kills cohesion and performance. A calm, encouraging atmosphere—like acknowledging progress after mistakes—can lower athletes' fear responses.

Trusting Teams Last: Teams that trust each other perform under pressure and bounce back stronger. Cultivate this by modeling accountability and empathy.

The Playbook—Blending Tough Accountability with Empathy

Here's how to weave both leadership philosophies into a high school sports context:

1. Pre-Season Team Culture Lab

Action: Host a team retreat where coaches share “extreme ownership” philosophy—holding oneself accountable—and invite players to define how trust, safety, and support should look all season.

Why it Works: Coaches set early expectations—with clarity and empathy.

2. Leadership Captains: Accountable Caretakers

Appoint captains who not only help enforce discipline (plans, rules, focus) but also check in with teammates emotionally—balancing “extreme ownership” and “servant leadership.”

3. Post-Game: Accountability Circle + Empathy Debrief

Structure your post-game reviews: have captains and coaches own mistakes (“I could’ve adjusted that call earlier”) and then affirm positive effort and resilience (“That last quarter showed grit—and we’ll build on that.”)

4. Practice Drills: Simple, Clear, Collaborative

Design drills with simple structure and clear responsibilities—but ensure players feel supported when trying new moves or correcting mistakes.

5. Weekly “What I Need” Check-Ins

Offer voluntary one-on-one moments—players can voice concerns, receive support, or ask for guidance. Your active listening builds the Circle of Safety.

6. Rituals That Bond

Consider team dinners where coaches serve or acknowledge players, reinforcing “leaders eat last” in a literal and symbolic way.

7. Celebrate with Discipline and Humility

When teams win, they celebrate hard work and shared effort—not just outcomes. When they lose, reflect on what could be improved, without blame.

Why It Works for Florida High School Coaches

Culturally Responsive: Florida's diverse teams benefit from empathy-based leadership. Knowing your players' stories—about parental support, academic stress, or physical injuries—builds trust.

Lightening Pressure: Accountability without empathy risks burnout or withdrawal. Balancing both supports mental and emotional resilience.

Results-Oriented and People-Centered: Florida coaches aim to win—but not at the cost of athlete well-being. Combining both books ensures chest-pounding wins and healthy athletes.

Lead With Ownership... But Eat Last

As a Florida high school coach, you're more than a tactician, you're a mentor, role model, disciplinarian, and supporter. By embracing **Extreme Ownership** and **Leaders Eat Last**, you champion both high expectations and nurturing care. You teach responsibility, resilience, trust—and above all, you shape athletes who lead with both grit and grace.



Coaches

SPOTLIGHT

BY: CHRIS NULL



**LAVERA
BATES**

OAK RIDGE HIGH SCHOOL



Coaches

SPOTLIGHT

COACHING JOURNEY - HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN COACHING, AND WHAT FIRST INSPIRED YOU TO GET INTO COACHING?

I've been coaching for 17 years. I started in August 2008, my senior year of college (University of Kentucky). There was a local high school (Lafayette HS) that was looking for a cross country coach. I was done with eligibility so when they reached out to my head coach, he presented the opportunity to me. I was eager to help other athletes in the sport that I truly love.

COACHING STOPS - WHERE HAVE YOU COACHED DURING YOUR CAREER, AND HOW HAVE THOSE EXPERIENCES SHAPED YOUR COACHING STYLE?

August 2008 - Assistant Cross Country Coach, Lafayette HS.
(Lexington, KY)

This was my year coaching and I realized I had a passion for helping athletes develop and maximize their potential. Graduated in December and moved back home to Orlando where I coached track and field at Evans high school.

January 2009 - Assistant Track Coach, Evans HS
(Orlando, FL)

I worked under Greg Thompson who gave me the freedom to coach the entire team. I learned a lot from this experience because prior to that I only knew how to coach middle distance/distance runners. In this role I learned to develop the power and speed in athletes.



Coaches

SPOTLIGHT

July 2011-July 2012 - Director of Operations
University of Kentucky (Lexington, KY)

- This experience truly changed my perspective of college athletics. I saw college athletics through the lens of an athlete and in this role I was an admin/assistant coach for the team. I learned the business side of college athletics.

August 2012-January 2016, Director of Operations/Assistant Coach
University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA)

- In this role I truly developed as an administrator and collegiate coach. I gained more duties each year. My AD and Head Coach both allowed creative freedom as it related to coaching, equipment, travel, recruiting and meet management.

January 2016-September 2017, Director of Operations
University of Texas at Austin (UT)

- I moved on from coaching to working as the administrator of the team. Solely focused on the day-to-day operations. In this role everything was enhanced. The best way I can describe Texas is that it is a well oiled machine.

October 2017-June 2019 - Director of Operations
University of Georgia (Athens, GA)

- Continued as a full time administrator. In this role I experienced everyone working together from the AD all the way to the team manager. Everyone was all in and we operated as a unit with full transparency.



**FLORIDA COACHES
COALITION**

Coaches

SPOTLIGHT

WHO HAS BEEN THE MOST INFLUENTIAL PERSON IN YOUR COACHING CAREER, AND WHAT LESSONS DID YOU TAKE FROM THEM?

My father, Coach Morris has been the most influential person in my coaching career. My sisters and I were his first athletes. I would watch him study the sport, ask questions, break down and adjust training, motivate athletes in the good and bad times, push athletes to maximize their potential, and never quit.

The biggest lesson: **OUTWORK YOUR COMPETITION**

COACHING PHILOSOPHY - HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR COACHING PHILOSOPHY, AND HOW HAS IT EVOLVED OVER THE YEARS?

My coaching philosophy is rooted in mentorship and the development of the whole athlete. I believe coaches build leaders in the community by supporting success both academically and athletically. With integrity as the foundation, I encourage my athletes to be accountable for themselves and each other. My ultimate goal is to build champions and help every athlete reach their full potential in every aspect of life.





Coaches

SPOTLIGHT

ACHIEVEMENTS & MILESTONES – WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR PROUDEST MOMENTS OR ACHIEVEMENTS AS A COACH?

Contributing to the following championships:

- UTSA - Conference USA Champions
- UT - Big XII Champions
- Georgia - NCAA Champions
- Oak Ridge - Appearances at the State Track Championships 2023, 2024, 2025. In 2025, had a state runner-up in cross country. Naming the track at Oak Ridge after legendary coaches John Hemmer and Bill Stamper.

PLAYER IMPACT – BEYOND WINS AND LOSSES, HOW DO YOU HOPE TO IMPACT YOUR ATHLETES BOTH ON AND OFF THE FIELD?

I hope to impact my athletes by teaching them the value of leadership, accountability, and perseverance. My goal is for them to leave the program not only as better athletes but also as confident individuals prepared for life's challenges. I want them to understand the importance of discipline in their academics, respect in their relationships, and integrity in their decisions.





Coaches

SPOTLIGHT

STATE OF COACHING IN FLORIDA – WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON THE CURRENT STATE OF COACHING IN FLORIDA, PARTICULARLY REGARDING PAY AND SUPPORT FOR COACHES?

You have to love it because the pay is not a reflection of the time we put in. We do not get paid enough but having the support of your principal, AD, and fellow coaches is a game changer. Something I wish we could change is the leadership at FHSAA. The leaders are not a reflection of the coaches nor do they make decisions in the best interest of the athletes or the growth of the sport.

CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES – WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES COACHES FACE TODAY, AND WHAT OPPORTUNITIES DO YOU SEE FOR IMPROVEMENT IN THE PROFESSION?

The challenge is not being represented by leaders who understand or know the sport.

Opportunities for growth:

- Communication
- Coaches Pay
- Facilities & Equipment:
- Collaboration
- Education & Advocacy

I am in my 5th year of coaching and we still do not have a high jump pit, pole vault pit, discus cage, or enough hurdles for all 8 lanes.



Coaches

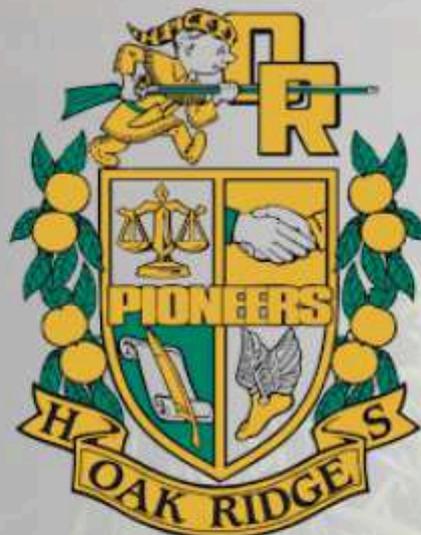
SPOTLIGHT

ADVICE FOR FUTURE COACHES - WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO YOUNGER COACHES JUST STARTING THEIR CAREERS?

Be Coachable. Be Selfless. Maintain Healthy Relationships. Prioritize Self- Care

LEGACY & VISION - WHEN YOU LOOK BACK ON YOUR CAREER YEARS FROM NOW, WHAT DO YOU HOPE YOUR LEGACY AS A COACH WILL BE?

My legacy as a coach will be defined by integrity, accountability, and the unwavering love I have for my athletes. I strive to lead with honesty and consistency, holding myself and my team to the highest standards both on and off the field. Above all, I want to be remembered as a coach who treated her athletes like family; guiding them, supporting them, and celebrating their growth as individuals and leaders in the community.





**FLORIDA COACHES
COALITION**

Coaches

SPOTLIGHT

BY: TESSA TAYLOR



**SUSAN
ALVAREZ**



FROSTBROOK HIGH SCHOOL



Coaches

SPOTLIGHT

COACHING JOURNEY - HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN COACHING, AND WHAT FIRST INSPIRED YOU TO GET INTO COACHING?

I have been coaching for 5 years at the high school level for girls basketball. I started out as a volunteer coach and was just going to be working with a small group, intermediate team, but things did not play out like that, and I ended up stepping into a much bigger role as other coaches had health issues and family things that came up.

For flag football, this sport was introduced to our high school only three years ago and this will be my third-year coaching.

COACHING STOPS - WHERE HAVE YOU COACHED DURING YOUR CAREER, AND HOW HAVE THOSE EXPERIENCES SHAPED YOUR COACHING STYLE?

I have volunteered with youth football and cheer for over 16 years, and I would say that experience helped prepare me for high school as it was only a mild transition working with the same age group just greater expectations. At the varsity level I have been at Frostproof High.

BIGGEST INFLUENCE - WHO HAS BEEN THE MOST INFLUENTIAL PERSON IN YOUR COACHING CAREER, AND WHAT LESSONS DID YOU TAKE FROM THEM?

I can't just name one coach... Coach Pierstorff told me that "girls don't play football and I should try out for basketball." So, he is a large part of my love for the sport. I can acknowledge him because I still have a good head on my shoulders, zero concussions and the next best thing to football is basketball. So, I owe Coach Pierstorff credit in helping me develop my love for the sport.

For my go to questions of dealing with personal reflection and abilities to coach, I seek advise from one of my past coaches and a coach that I had the privilege of coaching with, Coach Arms.



**FLORIDA COACHES
COALITION**

Coaches

SPOTLIGHT

COACHING PHILOSOPHY - HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR COACHING PHILOSOPHY, AND HOW HAS IT EVOLVED OVER THE YEARS?

I don't think I can say it has evolved, I am still a "new coach." I tend to allow flexibility, but demand honesty. I believe in teamwork, but I also want each individual athlete to hold themselves responsible so that they can reflect and develop character.

ACHIEVEMENTS & MILESTONES - WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR PROUDEST MOMENTS OR ACHIEVEMENTS AS A COACH?

Establishing a trusting relationship with your athlete, so on their worst days they know they can come to you with anything.

PLAYER IMPACT - BEYOND WINS AND LOSSES, HOW DO YOU HOPE TO IMPACT YOUR ATHLETES BOTH ON AND OFF THE FIELD?

My hope is that their perception of win or loss develops into lessons learned. I want them to change their perspectives and focus on what can be done differently next time and adapt. Basketball is a team effort, and I hope by the time they leave the court they are not as selfish as they were when they stepped on it the first time. Something that is encouraged is, "Play for someone else." The greatest win, the greatest victory isn't what you do, but what you help others accomplish.



**FLORIDA COACHES
COALITION**

Coaches

SPOTLIGHT



FROSTPROOF BULLDOGS

STATE OF COACHING IN FLORIDA – WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON THE CURRENT STATE OF COACHING IN FLORIDA, PARTICULARLY REGARDING PAY AND SUPPORT FOR COACHES?

I think at the high school level, the training is outdated and just anyone can come in and coach. The biggest complaint I have now is that I have a degree (Master's in Athletic Coaching from FSU), it still isn't good enough. I must still take trainings that are irrelevant and a waste of time.



Coaches

SPOTLIGHT

CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES - WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES COACHES FACE TODAY, AND WHAT OPPORTUNITIES DO YOU SEE FOR IMPROVEMENT IN THE PROFESSION?

Fundraising is a big issue. Because who has time to do that when you have all the random paperwork that they are requiring you to complete along with trainings.

ADVICE FOR FUTURE COACHES - WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO YOUNGER COACHES JUST STARTING THEIR CAREERS?

Don't settle for answers that involve, "that's just how it is done." Evolve and don't let anyone tell you that you can't change your program even if it means starting from scratch. Beauty comes from cultivating new things.

LEGACY & VISION - WHEN YOU LOOK BACK ON YOUR CAREER YEARS FROM NOW, WHAT DO YOU HOPE YOUR LEGACY AS A COACH WILL BE?

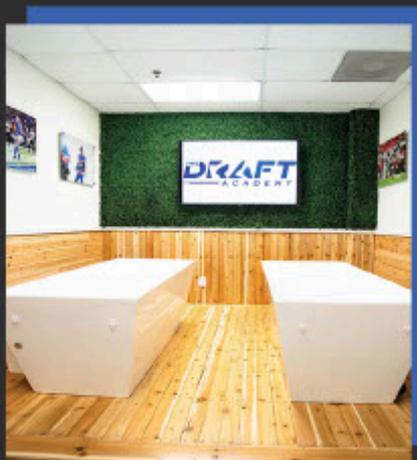
She cared enough not to give up on us even on the days when it was hard.



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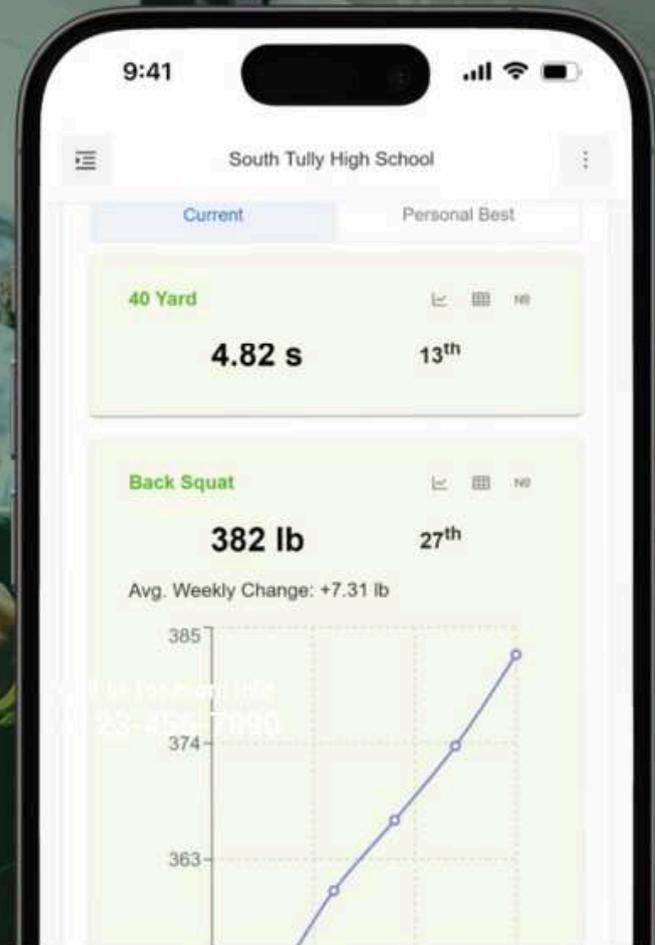
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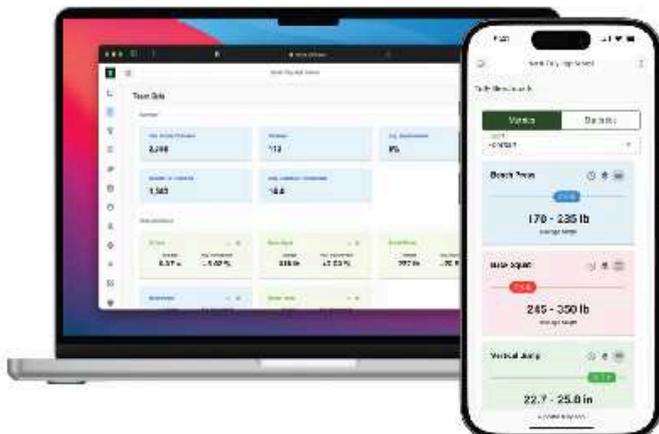
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