

What they need in a coach

As you may know, Fauquier High School continues its search for a new head football coach.

After 11 years as the Falcons' head man, Tom Ferrell in November resigned to spend more time with his family. His resignation followed Fauquier's second straight 4-6 season and seventh losing campaign in the last 10 years.

A selection committee, including members of Fauquier's administration, booster club and a few parents, will begin interviewing applicants this

week. FHS Principal Roger Sites said he hopes to hire the new coach by the first week of February.

So what does Fauquier need in a head coach?

The Falcon football program should seek more than just a new face and more than a minor facelift. It needs an extreme makeover.

The Falcons need a lot of things — an increase in participation, talent, size, speed, weight, success. But we won't see any changes or improvements unless the new football coach turns the Falcons into more than a football team.

Look back at the success achieved by both county high school athletic departments in 2003-04. Liberty and Fauquier teams won a combined 12 district titles, three regional crowns and a state championship.

A closer look clearly shows which programs experience success.

Did you get that? *The programs.* Not just teams.

There's a difference.

A program is a sport where the head coach has laid out a blueprint or foundation for each squad — varsity, junior varsity and freshman — and every athlete under his charge to go by. A program springs from a deeper sense of commitment and greater attention to detail.

There are expectations that must be met. You don't just report at the start of the season or a few weeks prior to that and start working. You start working long before the first practice. Many times, athletes and coaches participate in some sort of preparation year round.

A team is a unit that might work hard during the season and fight with all it has but can't achieve true success because it lacks that foundation to get over the top.

Go ahead, take a look. You'll see the difference. You will notice every squad that really achieved something was more than a team.

The teams that went somewhere had something extra — an edge gained by the philosophy of going beyond the typical.

Take Liberty's football program, for instance.

After the season ends in mid- to late-November, the LHS coaches begin leading their players — freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors — through an intense off-season weight-lifting program.

The Eagles lift three times a week during the winter and four times a week in the spring. They then cut back to three days a week in the summer.

In addition to improving the strength, speed and endurance of the football players, the off-season program also helps breed a sense of unity.

Look at the wrestling programs at both Fauquier and Liberty.

Fauquier's grapplers hit the mats a few times a week soon after the winter season ends. Then in the summer, wrestlers from both teams travel to camps where they improve their technique and face strong competition. The wrestlers further prepare themselves by attending a series of preseason tournaments.

Consider the Fauquier boys basketball program, whose varsity squad consistently finishes among the top

three in the district. The Falcons play in spring, summer and fall leagues, attend open gym sessions year-round and team camp in the summer.

Liberty's girls basketball squad generally fields rosters of athletes who play on travel teams in the off-season.

Many of the county's high school volleyball players compete on year-round travel teams and attend team camp in the summer.

You can find many more examples that I haven't mentioned.

But the point is: To succeed, you have to go the extra mile or two, three or four.

Fauquier's new football coach will need to live by that philosophy.

The Falcon team also needs an attitude, an identity.

Until this year, when first-year defensive coordinator Ron Watkins dubbed his unit "The Junk-yard Dogs" and danced to the tune of "Bust ya up," an attitude, charisma or just plain nastiness basically had been non-existent.

If a program has a sense of confidence or self-belief, it will perform better. Success breeds unity — and numbers.

Fauquier has boasted an enrollment in the neighborhood of 1,500 students

over the last three or four years. But not even 10 percent of the student population turns out for football — varsity, jayvee and freshman combined.

Doesn't that seem a bit strange?

What's the main thing that high school kids want?

To belong. To be wanted.

Pump a kid up, give him a reason to feel good about himself and he'll follow you into war.

That's what Fauquier's new football coach needs to do.

Instill that pride and commitment and a change will come. Those problems involving poor student turnout, undersized rosters and a lack of depth will begin to subside.

Whether the new coach comes from within the ranks of FHS assistants or from outside the county, one thing remains clear: The man will have his work cut out for him. Reversing a losing mentality will prove difficult, but it's not impossible.

He'll just have to go beyond that first mile.

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