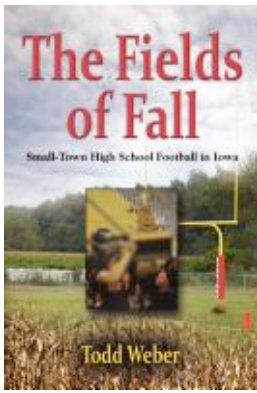


The Fields of Fall

Small-Town High School Football in Iowa



Todd Weber



The Fields of Fall follows several high school football dynasties in Iowa for a year. The book is an enlightening and entertaining ride through the 2010 season; dissecting the teams' philosophies and telling the stories of the people and the communities that make the game so special. Fields of Fall captures the emotional power of the game, detailing the teams' journeys through a season of highs and lows - and describes the fun that everyone was having.

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Chapter 1

Emmetsburg—Duane's World

Duane Twait hasn't coached the Emmetsburg E-Hawks in nearly a decade and there have been two head coaches since he left. Still, if you listen to the folks that are currently running the football program, you would think that Coach Twait is still walking the halls of Emmetsburg High School every day. No matter who I talked to about the E-Hawks, the words "Coach Twait," inevitably came out of their mouths within the first 65 seconds of the conversation. When I first contacted Head Coach Mike Dunlap via email about my project, he responded back with something like, "Sure, I'll talk to you. But you should really also call Duane Twait because..."

Coach Twait was hired as head coach in 1974 and he had his team in the 3A title game by the next season. The E-Hawks played in the title game every year from 1975 to 1979 and won two state championships in that span. In his 29 years coaching at Emmetsburg, Coach Twait's teams qualified for the playoffs 28 times, won 289 games, won seven state titles and were runner-up seven times. His 339 career wins ranked him fourth among the all-time coaching leaders in Iowa as of the start of the 2011 season. He was named the 1999 National High School Football Coach of the Year and was inducted into the National High School Athletic Association Hall of Fame in 2006.

With a resume like that, it's no wonder that he is still so revered by those who played under and coached with him. But as impressive as all his football statistics are, most people wanted to talk about the kind of person he is as opposed to how many football games his teams won.

"You'll never find a guy that's more humble," said Bruce Nelson. Nelson played for the E-Hawks in the late '90s, went on to play for the Iowa Hawkeyes where he made All-American, and played for the Carolina Panthers for two years before injuries ended his playing career. "You won't find an ego in that guy whatsoever. He's just a real special human being. He treated those little sixth graders—which is the first year we had him in football camp—exactly the way he treated a varsity player who had been starting for two years. He just has a lot of respect for everybody. He'd coach up kids that might have a real tough time starting—he'd coach them like they were going to be the next guy in. When a coach treats everybody like that, it's pretty special."

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Coach Twait obviously had a terrific football mind, but like any great leader of people, Twait had intangible qualities that helped separate him from other football coaches.

“There was an intensity about him that just made you want to do your best around him,” said long-time E-Hawk assistant coach Dave Fog. “I remember during some faculty basketball games, Duane would say, ‘Alright, let’s rev it up a little bit,’ or something. And everyone would get really intense and start playing harder. It’s almost a magical quality about him. As assistants, we learned so much from him about getting organized, motivating, and the little things. You would see him working hours and hours watching film and getting things ready to go, so you would start to do that and pretty soon he had a staff that was just like him. Just because we wanted to be like him.”

As a player, Nelson and his teammates also noticed the hard work of their coach and they would also try to emulate him and match his effort and follow his example.

“You saw the effort and energy he was putting in,” said Nelson, who is now a volunteer coach for the E-Hawks. “He was there. He was putting the time in. By the time I got around him he had already won a zillion games. So if a guy like that can put the time in, you’d better put the time in if you want to play. He was extremely intense on the practice field. And you knew if you did things the right way and did the things he asked you to do that you were going to become a starter and you were going to win games.”

The trophy case at EHS takes up more space than most school’s parking lots and makes the lunch room look like a mini museum. Much of that space is taken up by hardware brought home by the school’s storied wrestling program, which has bagged 12 state titles over the years. But the football team is responsible for their share of those trophies, and Coach Twait always made sure his players knew that the shiny metal was not the most important aspect of playing football. Nelson recalls Coach Twait’s speech to them after their state title in 1997.

“We were all hyped up in the locker room and high-fiving and hugging and all that kind of stuff. It was a dream of a lot of us to do those things,” he recalled. “I can remember thinking that he was going to give us this Jimmy Johnson speech—a ‘How ‘bout them Cowboys!’ kind of thing and pat us on the back. But he had us all take a knee and he talked about the responsibility of what it meant to be a champion and how when we got back to Emmetsburg everybody would be looking at us, and all those little kids were going to point us out when we’re walking down the street. And he said, ‘I’ve been telling you

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to act like a champion all year and now you have to be one.' At a time when he could have patted himself on the back and said, 'Look what I did,' he tried to ground all of us immediately. 'Don't let this be the end of your success; don't be going downtown and getting into trouble; don't be drinking. Get out for basketball; get out for wrestling, and make sure you stay in the classroom.' Who remembers all that a half hour after winning the state championship? He remembered to say all those things. I thought that was pretty special."

Joe Carter is the current athletic director at Emmetsburg and one of Coach Dunlap's assistant coaches. Like Dunlap, he also served as an assistant under Twait. He probably speaks for the entire staff and even the community as a whole when he described how Twait's influence can be felt in the every day lives of those he touched.

"I don't want to let Coach Twait down," he said simply. "I didn't when I was 22 when I first started here and I don't today. For those of us who were lucky to work with him, this is his deal that he started way back in the '70s, and we want to have E-Hawk football grow and we certainly don't want to let him down. He's a leader for us and a leader for the community and always has been."

Coach Twait's last game as the head man of the E-Hawks was the 2002 2A championship game in which they beat Williamsburg for their seventh state title under his leadership. Coach Twait retired from Emmetsburg after that season but did not leave football. His son Kevin, the head coach at Iowa Central Community College in Fort Dodge, convinced him to join his staff as offensive line coach, and he holds that job to this day.

"As a kid, Kevin was really involved heavily in athletics and he would do anything to help me," said Coach Twait. "And when there was an opportunity for me to possibly go back and lend him a hand, I wanted to do it."

The job of following the coaching legend fell to Tom Steen, who was Twait's defensive coordinator for 17 years. Steen and the E-Hawks followed up the 2002 championship game with an undefeated season and another title in 2003. Steen coached the E-Hawks for two more seasons, making the playoffs each year and compiling a three-season mark of 30-4. Steen went onto join the Twaits on the ICC staff where he still serves as linebackers coach. Interestingly, another Iowa high school coaching legend—Koy Goodchild, who guided West Bend-Mallard to four state titles—also serves on the Tritons staff. Mike Jepson, former Manson coach, is on the staff as well and with such an assemblage of football minds, the working environment in Ft. Dodge is very rewarding.

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“We really have a great group of coaches. They know what they’re doing and these are coaches that enjoy football,” said Coach Twait. “They’re not in it for any kind of ego thing. Our goal is to take the athletes we get and develop them the very best we can so they have the opportunity to move onto the next level.”

In 2006, Coach Dunlap was hired as head coach. He had been on the Emmetsburg staff for ten years with Coach Twait, and then was defensive coordinator during Coach Steen’s tenure. When he took over, Coach Dunlap didn’t see any need to stray from the course that his mentors had followed successfully over the decades.

“I spent ten years following Duane around like a puppy and basically I didn’t change anything,” he said. “It’s all about hard work and treating people the way they should be treated. And being fair. Overall, it’s just consistency in the program. We haven’t changed one thing since Duane left. A few things here and there, but Duane could walk into any of our practices today and take over just like he hadn’t left.”

The Dunlap era got off to a rocky start by Emmetsburg standards when they went 5-5 in 2006 and were drilled in the first round of the playoffs by eventual 2A champion Central Lyon/George-Little Rock, 42-7. The E-Hawks went 5-4 the following year and missed the playoffs for the first time in 25 years. While some in the fan base may have panicked, no one within the walls of the school did, and Coach Dunlap’s steady leadership and conviction in sticking to the fundamental philosophies of Emmetsburg football paid off in 2008. The E-Hawks went undefeated and claimed the school’s ninth state championship with a 3-0 win over rival West Lyon in the 1A title game. If there was a monkey on Coach Dunlap’s back, that season certainly removed it and disposed of it forever and proved that Emmetsburg football was not going away.

“Mike’s the perfect guy for it,” said Coach Carter of carrying on the E-Hawk tradition. “Coach Twait was a tremendous worker and had a tremendous work ethic and along with that he was extremely prepared all the time. I think Mike takes it a step farther. I think he’s done that in all parts of E-Hawk football—he’s taken everything a step farther. And that’s because he wants to maintain the traditions we’ve had here and build on them. I think it’s a lot harder to defend and to keep something at a high level than it is to get there. And that’s what he’s done. He’s added onto E-Hawk football—from leadership classes for our older kids to developing our youth program. He’s the definition of work ethic and preparedness.”

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There are some small towns that haven't changed much over the years—and it isn't necessarily a good thing for that particular town. Emmetsburg isn't in that category. Emmetsburg is the kind of town that hasn't changed in appearance or attitudes from decade to decade too much because everybody has always liked it the way it is. There are some newer industries, businesses and homes, of course. There is even a casino on the east edge of town. But Emmetsburg has a look and feel of a town left over from a slower and simpler time. There are plenty of long avenues where the branches of trees from either side of the street meet over the top of the road, and the homes and yards are clean, neat and well-kept. Tucked into northwest Iowa in relative seclusion, the town doesn't see many license plates from outside Palo Alto County unless the cars and their passengers are on their way to Lake Okoboji.

"Some people just don't like living in a place where they are three hours away from a mall," Coach Dunlap joked. Emmetsburg probably isn't quite that far away from a mall, but you get the idea. And most of the folks that call Emmetsburg home can do just fine without a food court or three department stores under one roof. Bruce Nelson has certainly experienced "big city" life, having gone onto play football in Iowa City and then Charlotte, NC, but with deep roots in Emmetsburg, there was really no other place he was going to end up after his playing days were over. Today he farms with his family.

"Growing up here, I used to really look forward to getting up in the morning and lifting weights, and I loved playing basketball. I remembered if I slept in and I missed that open gym, I'd be upset and disappointed and it ruined my whole day. I was so looking forward to it at night when I laid my head down on my pillow. And now when I get up in the morning, it's kind of the same thing. I'm excited to get up and go to work because I still get that same feeling I did when I played sports. So that's why I'm back here in Emmetsburg. Life is just simpler."

The population in Emmetsburg has actually gone down since the beginning of the Coach Twait era. Peaking in 1980 at over 4,600 people, the population has dropped over 20 percent since then and stands at about 3,600 now. When Coach Twait won his first title in 1977, Emmetsburg was a 3A school; when Coach Dunlap won his, they were a 1A school. Population dips like this in rural Iowa communities over the last few decades certainly aren't unusual, but what usually accompanies such drops are reductions in the quantity and quality of the kids playing football. Fortunately that hasn't necessarily been the case in Emmetsburg. Playing E-Hawk football is still the "thing to do" for the young men in the high school. For the 2010 season there were about 75

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kids in grades 9 through 12 out for football. Not a bad number, but still not as good as Coach Dunlap would like.

“We’re not a lot different than any other little town—just trying to keep industries and keep jobs—which means kids,” he said. “We still have guys wandering around the hallways that should be out for football that aren’t. We do get the majority of them out. But along with the declining enrollment, our numbers have gone down. I still walk the halls and try and encourage guys to get out who aren’t because obviously it’s a numbers game.”

If there are fewer people in the town of Emmetsburg than in the “old days,” you can’t really tell by going to a football game. On Friday nights, rabid E-Hawk fans still fill the stands at Duane Twait Field and pack the hill that separates the playing field from the school. At gathering places downtown, conversation about the E-Hawks is still at the top of most people’s lists.

“You can go downtown to the grocery store and everybody wants to know what’s going on with E-Hawk football, whether it’s September or December,” said Carter. “They’re very involved. They follow us; they encourage us; they support us in every way. There just isn’t a better community than Emmetsburg to coach high school football in. We expect to be competitive every year and our kids expect that. With that comes the best part of being in Emmetsburg; the kids will work hard; the parents expect their kids to work hard; and it kind of comes full circle. There are high expectations here for sure and that comes from the community as well as the kids. But with that comes the expectations that there is going to be a lot of effort and a lot of work put into it.”

For young men playing high school football anywhere, hard work, dedication and sacrifice—and how much of each that they are willing to put forth—becomes the key to becoming better football players and usually directly affects the win/loss column over the years. The high expectations and work ethic originally established and demonstrated by Coach Twait and now upheld by Coach Dunlap and his staff is the standard that anyone aspiring to wear the Emmetsburg colors on Friday nights must hit.

“Our expectations of kids are high, so they learn to work at a younger age,” said Coach Dunlap. “Even in sixth, seventh and eighth grade, expectations are high for them to work hard and that just carries on through. And it’s football, wrestling—pretty much in all sports.”

When expectations are that high, the work the staff and the kids are doing is all relative. In places like Emmetsburg, they don’t necessarily think that they are working harder than any of the other teams across the state. In places

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with lower standards and expectations, the kids may be doing 100 percent of what they are asked to do as well, but that doesn't add up to what kids in Emmetsburg are doing—either in quantity or quality. Fans of the teams that get beat up by the likes of Emmetsburg every year tend to think that schools like that are merely blessed with better athletes year in and year out. That just isn't necessarily the case.

"I don't think we have anything different in the water here or in the genetics of the parents of these kids," said Nelson. "We coach fundamentals and the kids work really hard in the weight room and they kind of get that dream going early on and they have expectations for themselves and the teams."

"We demanded a high level of quality in practice. That's where it all starts," Coach Twait added. "We were really sticklers in practice of playing and practicing hard. You have to impress upon them the importance of quality reps and quality practice. We always told them that everyone wants to win on Friday nights, but the team that wins is the one that has the ability to prepare to win."

With their multiple titles, nearly annual participation in the playoffs and a former coach that reached iconic status long before he retired, Emmetsburg football enjoys one of the richest traditions of any sport in the state of Iowa. Anyone with even just a working knowledge of Iowa high school sports has heard of Emmetsburg and can associate the town with football greatness. The community takes great pride in their school and the success of their sports programs, especially football, and the kids get indoctrinated at an early age.

"I didn't grow up idolizing the Iowa Hawkeyes and dream about playing there; I didn't dream about playing in the NFL," says Nelson. "I dreamt about playing varsity football in Emmetsburg. I wanted to play for Coach Twait and wanted to win a championship. That's the really neat thing. You grow up watching these football players on Friday nights and you want to be like them. They graduate, then you look at the next class and you want to become them. Before you know it, you become one of those guys and you're out there playing on Friday night and having all the fun in the world. It's real special to be a part of."

For Nelson, however, "watching the players" didn't necessarily mean watching much of the game itself. As kids, Nelson and his friends had something a little more "hands-on" to accomplish on Friday nights.

"I actually hardly watched any games," he laughed. "Our deal was every Friday night we had our own game. It was on top of the hill and oftentimes the

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older kids would try to get a group of kids from the other side, the opposing team, to see if they wanted to play us. The varsity game was secondary; our game was the primary one, and we wanted to see what we were made of by playing the kids from the other team. That was our highlight. The few times the varsity would lose, my dad was so upset that we had lost the game. But I hadn't realized it because we had won our game, so it was okay."

When these kids who are well-versed in the E-Hawk tradition get their shot at organized football, the coaches are certainly at an advantage. Unlike in many other places, Emmetsburg coaches don't have to spend too much time convincing the kids how great winning at a high level really is, and how rewarding the effort to get to the top can be. For Emmetsburg youth, the E-Hawk dream begins in first grade. Coach Dunlap runs a flag football program for first- through sixth-graders in the fall. E-Hawk players are on hand to help out and that gives the kids an excellent opportunity to interact with their heroes on a personal level. In addition to teaching the typical football fundamentals at the flag sessions, speakers are scheduled to deliver messages on the importance of character, teamwork, etc. If the younger kids don't necessarily understand some of those concepts at the time, they certainly will as they progress through the program. Many former E-Hawk players like Bruce Nelson have chosen to make Emmetsburg their home, and for their children, those messages probably make sense a little sooner.

"We're lucky that we're coaching kids whose dads played for Coach Twait in the '70s and even '80s and that's an awesome situation," said Coach Carter. "They know what it takes and what the expectations are. They've had the opportunity to run down the hill and play on Duane Twait Field and all those great things that come along with it and we're seeing a generation of kids that were watching and now want to do the same things. That's an exciting thing and something that helps us. That tradition is always in their heads and they grow up watching E-Hawk football and hearing about it and they want the same thing."

Chapter 23

State Quarterfinal—Madrid vs. Bedford, November 5

For the past 15 years or so, rival coaches have looked at their schedules at the beginning of the year and circled the game with Madrid. Depending on what their teams are like in a particular season, they either look to this game with restrained anticipation or sheer dread. During the 2010 season, “dread” was most likely the common sentiment. Some coaches that entered into Madrid week this year might have entertained visions of an upset, but most just wanted to get through it and hopefully come out of the game with some positives.

Earlham coach Scott Driskell is one of only two coaches to lead a team into Madrid and come out with a win in the past five years. As a district rival, he knows what it’s like to have the Tigers looming on the schedule every year. Some years he feels he can legitimately compete; other seasons he’s just trying to get his guys to the next week physically and mentally unscathed.

“I love playing there just because of the atmosphere and pageantry, just the entire tradition with it,” he says. “So we talk to our kids about that. ‘You’re not supposed to win, nobody expects you to. So if you go get throttled, guess what, that’s what was supposed to happen.’ And literally every other team that goes in there walks away thinking the same thing. So why not just enjoy it, let it all hang out and see what happens.”

The week after the West Marshall week 1 thriller, the Tigers would obliterate PCM-Monroe, another good 2A team that went 6-1 in their district. Madrid’s District 7 opponents proved no match for them during the regular season, either, and then the Tigers romped over both AHST and Van Meter in the first two rounds of the playoffs. The average score for the ten games following the opening night win was Madrid 60, opponents 13.

Coach Hinkel went out of his way to schedule good 2A teams for his non-district games to test his team, but he obviously couldn’t do anything about the teams in his district. It was hard to tell whether it was a down year for the other District 7 teams or if Madrid was just that much better than everybody else. It was probably a combination of both, and that resulted in some of the unsightly beatings they delivered to their rivals. Hinkel’s challenge during this stretch of games was to keep his team focused and looking beyond the relative strength or weakness of the opponent and the impressive final scores for ways to improve.

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“As you look at your schedule—let’s be honest, there are games that you know you’re going to win,” he says. “So you have to evaluate them, ‘Okay what can we get out of this?’ And the way I’ve always sold my kids is that it’s another week to get better. And the only way we can do it is, ‘What can be a goal?’ You have to find little victories. Some of these games you already know you’re going to win, no matter how bad you play. But you don’t want to play bad because that sends a message down the road. And I think our kids have bought into that really well. It’s all about getting better week to week.”

This isn’t a team that’s purposely running up the score every week. They run their plays and if the other team can’t stop them—well, 60 or 70 points pile up more times than not. And since the scores get lopsided relatively early in games, Madrid ends up resting their starters and playing their second- and third-stringers much more often than most teams. And this isn’t just a “clearing the bench” exercise for Coach Hinkel. It provides playing time for the younger kids and substitutes in game conditions against the opponent’s first team and keeps starters fresh for the inevitable playoff run. If it appears that Hinkel is just “plugging new guys in” every year, part of that is because the “new” kids have already played plenty of minutes as backups and have gained valuable experience that serves them well by the time they are starters in the seasons to come.

When Madrid took on the Bedford Bulldogs on this Friday night, it was their fourth game in 15 days. None of those games were competitive and Hinkel was able to rest some of his starters. Still, it’s football; and the extra game squeezed into the three-week span means 48 more minutes of the opponent smashing into, twisting and tackling, and attempting to wreak general physical mayhem to your boys. Not to mention the additional practices that a team needs to schedule during the playoffs.

Coach Hinkel had as big and strong a team as anybody that was still in the playoffs, and fortunately they were as injury-free as they had been all season. But he was still trying to pace them in practice just a bit, scrapping drill work and toning down the physicality somewhat.

“We’ve backed off practices to let them recover. But we’ve had to still practice when we typically don’t,” says Hinkel. “As far as the staff, I think we know how to approach this time of year. Now, I don’t know if it’s any easier for the kids other than the fact that they’ve been through it a couple years. We have a pretty good idea on what we’re trying to get out of them in this short week.”

Physical stresses aside, there is plenty going on inside the teenage male brain that coaches need to be cognizant of and take into account during game

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preparation. With everything magnified during playoff time, Coach Hinkel is just as concerned about the emotional and psychological well-being of his players as the physical side.

“The thing that’s been a little different with this team—it’s pretty even keel. It’s not a team that gets overly up, but as a result doesn’t get overly down. We’ve had games this year, where early on we’ve had mishaps and actually fell behind. And they haven’t panicked. I feel good about that. I feel good that they’re kids that are really buying into what we’re doing, they believe in what they’re doing, and I think they believe in each other.”

When I talked to Coach Hinkel the week prior to the Bedford game, I mentioned that I had been having trouble finding any coaches that thought the addition of a new round of playoff games in 2008 was a good idea. He laughed and said, “Well, why do you think that is?” I’m usually not prepared to *answer* any questions during an interview, but I gave it my best shot. Most of the coaches I had been talking to usually make the playoffs under the old system anyway, and the extra round just equated to playing another game that opened their teams up to injury and/or a possible upset loss, and just generally complicated their preparation.

When I suggested that perhaps the extra revenue gained by the Association and schools from the additional round may have provided some motivation for the new system, Coach Hinkel took the high road. He laughed again and said, “Well, you know you can’t talk about that.”

With the 1A, 2A and 3A quarterfinal games all scheduled for the following Monday, I didn’t have to make a choice between “my teams” to watch on this Friday night. And I was feeling good about not having to drive to Bedford. (I’m sure it’s a nice town—just a little more out of the way for me than Madrid!) All things being equal—both teams won their district and had already hosted two playoff games—the final tie breaker on who hosted the quarterfinal came down to reverse alphabetical order this year. Thus, “M” beat “B” for the right to host.

As I was watching warm-ups, the prevailing wind was blowing straight from the concession stand and the tempting smoke from the grill wafted around me. I had failed to eat properly at the second round playoff game in Decorah and I wasn’t going to let that happen again. On the drive up from my job in West Des Moines, I had downed two Pop Tarts and leftover pizza I had bought from home, but the smell from the grill was too tempting. The first time I visited Madrid, more than one person had suggested that I needed to try the

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hot dogs, so I went and ordered one and downed it while watching the rest of warm-ups.

There was no fear in the faces of the Bedford boys as they got ready, but, understandably, perhaps a little tension. The Tigers were more vocal than the last time I was here, as the seniors were reminding each other in no uncertain terms that this was the “last night in The Jungle, baby!”

I dropped in again for Don Lincoln’s speech to the players before the game at their usual meeting place just outside their locker room. As was the case in week 1, I wasn’t close enough to make everything out, but what I did hear made me think that this was one of those talks that Lincoln described as “maybe the coaches shouldn’t say.”

After Lincoln was finished, a senior whose number I could not make out in the early autumn darkness took over speaking. He echoed the sentiment of all the seniors when he shouted, “I haven’t lost three years in a row in the semifinals for nothing! We’re going all the way this year!” Coach Hinkel added some simple instructions that reminded the guys to “lock into your job,” “forget about where you are,” and “forget about the things you can’t control.”

Statistically, Bedford came into this game looking very similar to Madrid. They were a run-first team that had churned out well over 4,000 yards on the ground during the season, while their limited passing game was still effective when they did go to the air. Their defense was excellent and they had not allowed more than 14 points in a game all season. Madrid and Bedford had played two common opponents and both had thrashed them in the same manner. So this looked like it might be the first stern test for Madrid since that warm August night against West Marshall.

Bedford has a population of about 1,500, and by the look of the overflow crowd on the visitor’s side, a large percentage of them had made the 131-mile drive to Madrid. They were quickly rewarded when their boys got a good return on the opening kickoff, then methodically gashed the Tiger defense for big chunks of yardage and scored the game’s first touchdown just a few minutes into the game.

The celebration switched to the home side when Madrid scored just as quickly on their opening possession, then took an 8-7 lead with a two-point conversion.

Don Lincoln mentioned to me before the game that the team had been passing more in recent weeks and had some success through the air. While I

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love the running game—especially **this** running game—I was anxious to see a few passes, figuring the Tigers might eventually need a big gainer or two out of the passing game if they were to move onto the Dome and win the big prize.

I got what I wanted on the Tigers second drive of the game. On their first drive, Madrid pounded the ball to Timon Bell up the middle often and with great success. (He'd finish the game with 31 of the Tigers 55 carries, 284 yards, and two touchdowns.) So when quarterback C.J. Manthe faked beautifully to him and took two steps back to pass, tight end Brock Hinkel was all by himself on a corner route. Hinkel waited for the pass just a bit, gathered it in, and rambled for about 60 yards for a touchdown and a 14-7 lead.

After another Madrid touchdown, Bedford got one back on a well-executed and poorly defended screen pass. After seeing the huge pass plays the Tigers gave up against West Marshall, my thought was that pass defense may be the closest thing to a weakness that they had.

Bedford was moving the ball well on the ground and looked like they could truly threaten to win this game if they could just stop Madrid, at least occasionally. But Madrid got another touchdown and then essentially put the game away late in the first half. Bedford had the ball and threw a pass down the far sideline that was intercepted and by senior Nick Efkamp. A nice return coupled by a personal foul penalty on Bedford moved the ball deep into Bulldogs territory. Manthe and Hinkel hooked up again with eight seconds left in the half for a 13-yard touchdown on another corner route and Madrid was up 38-14.

There was nobody congratulating each other in the Madrid locker room at half time, very little "rah, rah," and absolutely no early celebration. The scene, instead, was a virtual football laboratory. Coach Hinkel took the first turn at the white board and addressed the offensive unit about blocking assignments. It was less a lecture and more an interactive exchange between teacher and pupils. Hinkel quizzed them about what they were seeing on the field, the players responded, and he mapped out minor adjustments with Xs and Os on the board.

Defensive coordinator Steve Perkins was next. Despite giving up just 14 points, the Tiger defense did seem on their heels a bit in the first half. Perkins didn't make many adjustments, but he advised the defensive unit to avoid giving up the big play and "live for another down."

Todd Weber

"They're a good football team," he told them. "Not as good as you—but they're going to get some yards." After hearing him talk for just five minutes, my first reaction was, "I wonder what school will be lucky enough to land this guy as head coach some day?"

The last thing Coach Hinkel said to his guys at half time was that they needed to get a touchdown right away in the third quarter to put Bedford "in a bad spot."

Of course they got quickly scored that touchdown to go up 44-14 and the game was all but over.

As the game clock ticked away and only zeros were left, a scene of sheer, unadulterated joy swept through The Jungle. After handshakes with the resolute Bedford Bulldogs and a brief presentation to them, parents, students and fans crowded onto the field and surrounded their conquering heroes. Coaches were hugging players; moms were hugging players; moms were hugging moms. Brock Hinkel held court with about a half dozen young fans who had gathered around him in adoration. Joyful, uncontrollable tears streamed down Lisa Hinkel's face as she embraced her son and his friends amidst the veritable emotional stew. In the middle of the scene was Coach Hinkel, who was surrounded by his players and well wishers. None of them minded when Lisa made her way through for a hug and a kiss from her husband.

While this was a genuine celebration of what they had accomplished, it was tempered with the fact that this team still had plenty of work to do. No one was thinking, "Gee, we sure are happy to get to the Dome." Rather, this group of Tigers' mandate was echoed by that senior in the middle of the team's pre-game huddle—losing was not an option.

For the past three years, the Tigers' quest for a second state championship had been derailed by heartbreaking semifinal losses. If there is a team to break that string and bring home the championship trophy, this might be the one. With talent, size, experience, moxie and a group of seasoned seniors with a singular focus bent on bringing a championship back to Madrid, anything less than a title this year would be a disappointment.

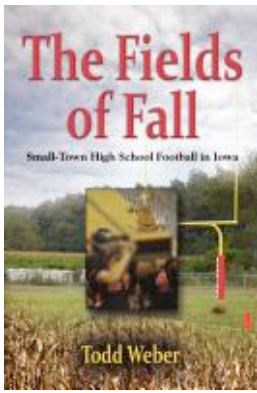
Pressure? Absolutely. But Coach Hinkel and his kids are used to that.

"Maybe I'm different than most, but I'd rather have pressure than no pressure," said the coach. "I think pressure is a stimulus. Somebody said, 'If your job had no meaning and no stress then how is it rewarding?' To me,

The Fields of Fall

stress is a motivator. Now, we have to learn how to manage it, but it's still important. When we've gotten to the Dome or gotten close, I've had kids who were great players who have not played very well and I've had lesser players step up. So we don't know under the lights how everyone is going to perform."

For the Madrid Tigers, the lights were about to get as bright as they get in the state of Iowa.



The Fields of Fall follows several high school football dynasties in Iowa for a year. The book is an enlightening and entertaining ride through the 2010 season; dissecting the teams' philosophies and telling the stories of the people and the communities that make the game so special. Fields of Fall captures the emotional power of the game, detailing the teams' journeys through a season of highs and lows - and describes the fun that everyone was having.

The Fields of Fall

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