

PROFILE

In Eagles' nest the word is defense

It was tough to figure Centennial's defense last year.

The Eagles weren't very big. Nobody weighed more than 190 pounds; looked like they'd be easy to move up and down the field.

Then the game would start and, sure enough, everybody was moving the Eagles right back. The yardage stats piled up in impressive fashion and the Eagles seemed to spend most of their time taking backward steps.

The final Wilco League statistics for the season saw Centennial a lackluster fifth in total defense, giving up an average of 214 yards per game.

Yet every time a game ended, not a whole lot of those yards had translated themselves into points.

The Eagles, who finished 4-5, surrendered just 74 points for the entire season, an average of 8.2 per game and fewer than anyone except Gresham.

In fact, ever since the Eagles came up with their "Zoo" defense four years ago that played a big role in the school's winning of the old Columbia Division, Centennial has been a tough nut to crack.

"We're not worried about how many yards we give up," says Jim Webb, who coaches the Centennial defense with Jim Mott and has been the Eagles' defensive coordinator for the past two seasons. "We just don't want anyone to score on us. We emphasize that the closer you are to the goal line, the harder it is to score. Reynolds had 350 yards on us last year but they only scored six points."

But with the personnel changes that high school football teams undergo every year, how do you keep a defense consistently tough year after year? Webb says it's no big secret.

"It comes from being in the building and knowing the kids you have coming out," he says. "We try to adapt our offense and defense to the kids we have. We fit our scheme of things to the kids we have coming back so that they're in the position of having a reasonable chance of success. It's nothing that everybody else doesn't do."

Adapting to the available talent sometimes means abandoning one system in favor of another every year, Webb explains. "In the two years that I've been here, we've had two different philosophies. We did one thing and then we did something else last year. But whatever we do, it's something that the kids can adjust to."

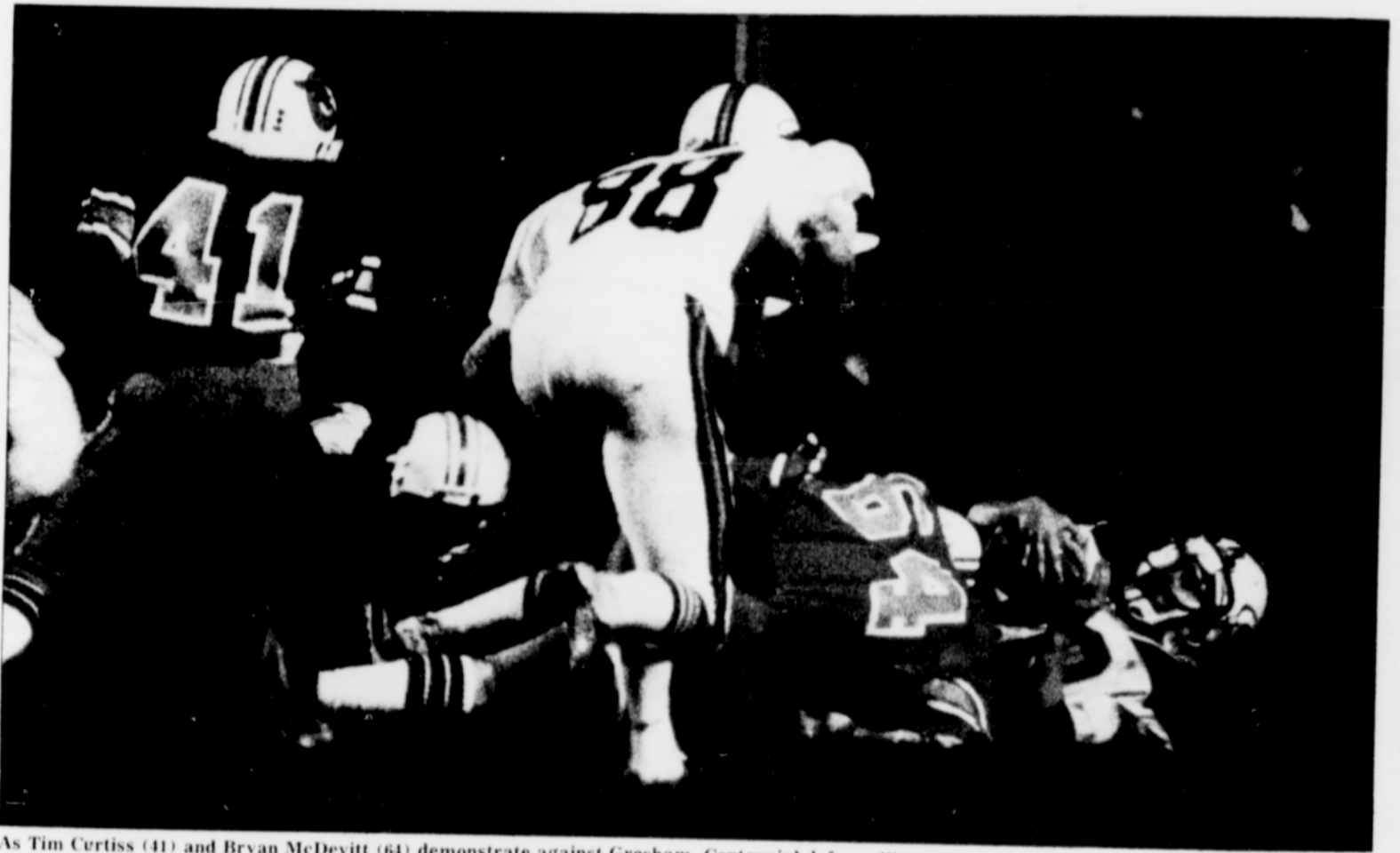
Once Webb has his personnel together, it's a matter of putting the system together. "Defense is technically easier than offense," Webb says. "The things you do are more simple. In offense you have to teach the kids a variety of plays against a lot of defenses. Defense is more of a reaction type of thing. It's a matter of knowing where you belong, what you're supposed to do and doing it. If the kids do that, they have a chance at being successful."

Still, just having a system down is no guarantee you're going to be able to hold anybody once the game starts. That's where scouting comes in, both in person and on film. Wilco League rules require everyone to send two game films to prospective opponents.

Webb and the rest of the Centennial staff study the films and review scouting reports to determine what an opponent's tendencies are on offense. They adjust their defensive strategy accordingly.

"Our philosophy is to pick out three or four things a team really wants to do, what its offense goes on," Webb says. "Then we try to take those things away and make you do something else. But you can go into a game thinking you're well-prepared and have nothing go right."

That happened to Centennial in last year's 10-7 loss to Barlow. The Bruins took the opening kickoff and scored in six



As Tim Certiss (41) and Bryan McDevitt (64) demonstrate against Gresham, Centennial defense likes its sack time.

plays, then got the ball back and kicked a field goal. After that, however, Barlow couldn't get another point. So what happened?

"After that second drive, we made some adjustments," Webb says. "We went to a flex defense, which had some advantages for us against a team like Barlow. Their offense was geared to reading our defense as the play develops. We tried to make it more difficult for them to do that."

That was all in keeping with the philosophy of defensive

football. "You don't want the offense to dictate to you," Webb says. "If they make lineup adjustments, you don't want it to make you change your lineup drastically. You like to make the offense adjust to your defense. Generally, you can tell right off how things are going. If the offense is tearing off big chunks of yardage, you have to make changes to stop that. But the kids must have confidence in you from a coaching

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