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Another Kind of Classroom

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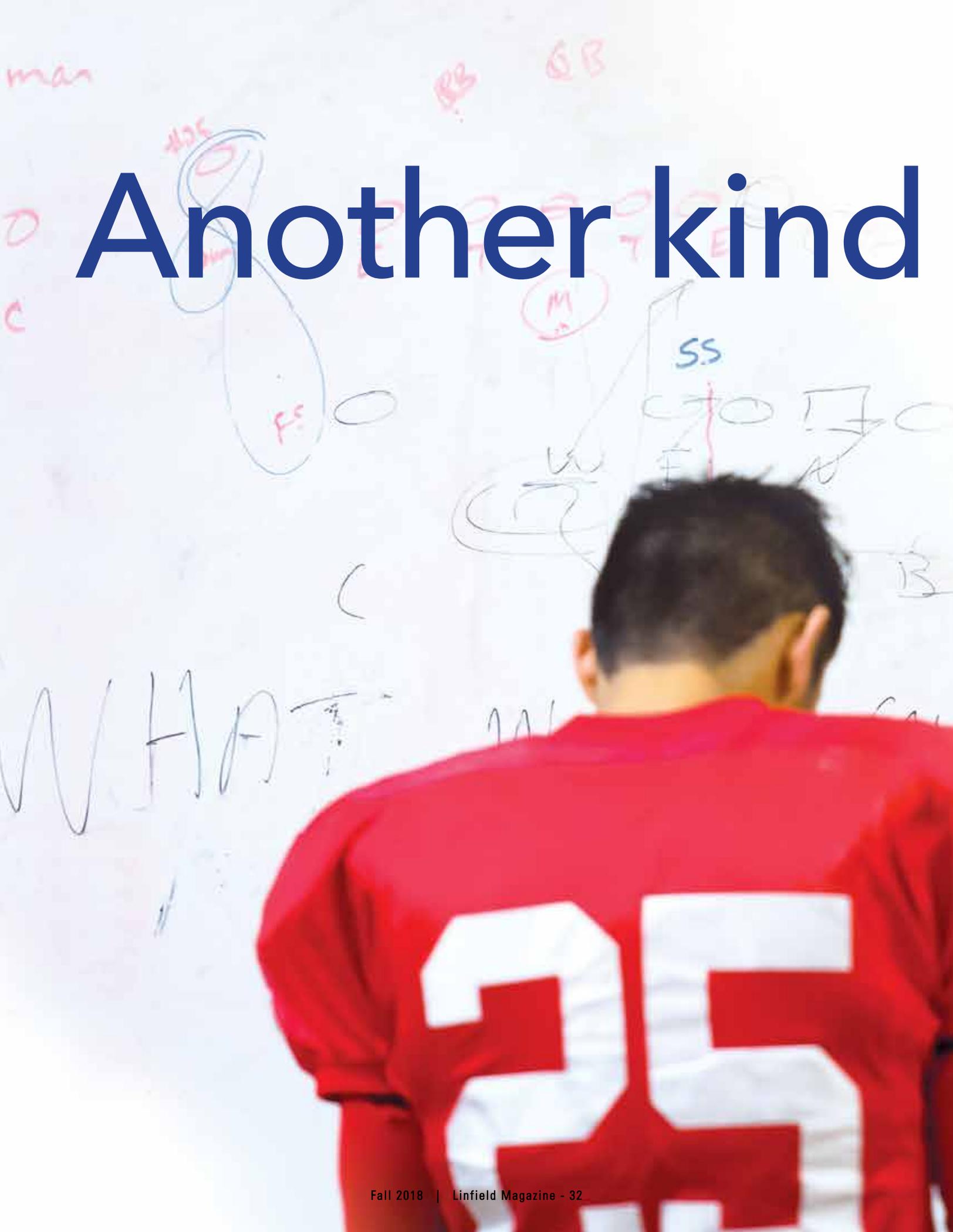
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Another kind



of classroom

The home locker room at Broadway Field is silent. Nobody is taping ankles. Nobody is listening to music. Everybody is reading.

Inside a badly out-of-date dressing room in Seaside, Ore., the football team sits on wooden benches and pores over a four-paragraph letter written by coach Jeff Roberts '97. In the letter, Roberts – also the school's principal – urges players to “embrace the now” and reminds them of “unfinished business with Banks,” a league opponent Seaside hasn't beaten since the team's seniors were in first grade.

Roberts emerges from a tiny office as the players finish reading – cramped because the physical education teacher's space converts to the coach's office on game days. He paces between benches of football players, delivering a firm message, “Tonight we expect to win. ‘Nothing to lose’ is a bunch of crap. That's for teams that don't expect to go out and win.”



Jeff Roberts '97, left, and Jon Eagle '83 are two of at least 21 Linfield alumni who are current head football coaches at the high school level. Both are passing on lessons they learned as Linfield football players.



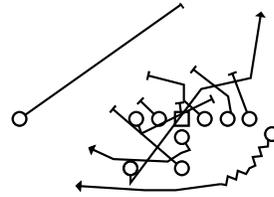
Jeff Roberts '97 led the Seaside High School football team for four seasons before being named principal in 2016 and stepping away from coaching for a season. He now balances principal and head coach responsibilities.

In a scene that could be straight out of “Friday Night Lights” or “Hoosiers,” Roberts picks up intensity during a two-minute address that culminates with a roar from the teenagers that becomes a chant.

Let’s go! Let’s go! Let’s go!

Hours earlier, Roberts leads a senior player into the principal’s office for a closed-door conversation. The player’s father won’t come to the Banks game – on senior night, in which other 12th-grade players will be escorted onto the field by parents for their last home game.

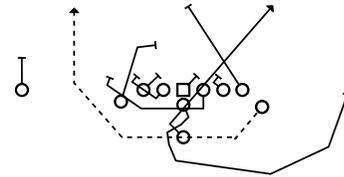
For long minutes after the player leaves, Roberts sits silently. A man who knows personal details about each of the school’s 377 students and prides himself on being upbeat and involved in the hallways, finds himself temporarily at a loss for words.



In all sports, coaches are judged on wins and losses. But far more important is their ability to help young people learn lessons they won’t receive anywhere else, or learn in any other way.

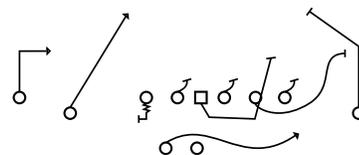
High school coaches deal with student-athletes suffering from extreme stress, frustration and pain – physical and emotional – and are sometimes the only ones around to offer a word of kindness or encouragement.

For high school football coaches, the classroom is a patch of turf 100 yards long and 53 1/3 yards wide. Class is in session on autumn Friday nights, sometimes in front of thousands who will remember plays and debate individual coaching decisions for decades. That, though, belies the reality that most of the job happens when few are watching and nobody is cheering.



Ad Rutschman '54 decided long ago that being able to handle adversity is an essential character trait. The College Football Hall of Fame inductee and former Linfield head football coach, baseball coach and athletic director has for years had a habit of asking successful people about the importance of honesty, work ethic, commitment to excellence, teamwork, relationships and resilience.

“I get basically the same answer every time – it’s everything,” says Rutschman, who believes athletics is the ideal venue to develop those skills. “I can teach honesty better on the football field than I can in the classroom.”



At Camas High School in Southwest Washington, students in sixth-period weight training class taught by Jon Eagle '83 are wearing cargo shorts and jungle-themed shirts. It’s homecoming week, and today is Safari Day.



Camas High School's Doc Harris Stadium is the place to be on fall Friday nights. In order to attain the best seats, locals line up more than two hours prior to kickoff, and once the stadium's gates open, students sprint to their section, which fills up rapidly.



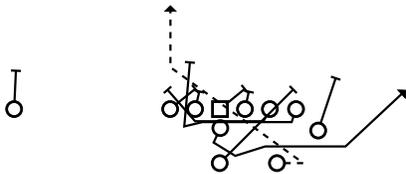
M.O.C. is printed on the Seaside High School uniforms and displayed on the locker room wall. Jeff Roberts '97 says it stands for "men of class, men of character, men of commitment."

“What’s tomorrow’s theme?” Eagle asks into a wireless microphone that dangles from a black lanyard onto his Camas Football jacket.

“It’s Dress-Like-a-Teacher Day,” a voice calls from the back of the room as students jog around the state-of-the-art workout facility. “I’m dressing like Eagle!”

Eagle is known for motivating his students to work hard, and encouraging them to be as fit and healthy as each can become. When he arrived at the Camas, Wash., school in 2008, his first weight-training classes were all male. These days, an increasing percentage of his students are female.

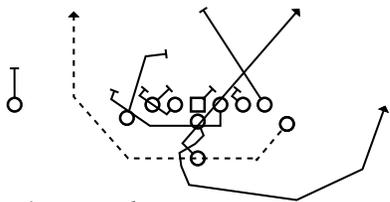
“He’s just so encouraging,” says Madison Peffers, now a scholarship track-and field athlete at Washington State University. “No matter where you start, he’ll get you where you want to be.”



Eagle inherited a middling Camas program in 2008 – it had never won a state playoff game – and soon turned the Papermakers into a juggernaut. The 2010 team won the school’s first state playoff game, the 2013 team reached the state championship, the 2016 team won the Washington 4A state title and the program won 58 consecutive regular season games between Sept. 23, 2011 and Oct. 27, 2017.

Eagle obsessively reviews his team’s performance and watches his opponents on HUDL, an online video platform. Papermakers players watch an hour of film each day, and occasionally Eagle’s students gather in his classroom for an impromptu session. Some watch more on their own. Isaiah Abdul, senior wide receiver, views an additional hour of film at home after completing homework. “It’s fun to learn,” he says.

“What we can control is developing our kids,” says Eagle. “We might not look as talented as our opponent, but we’re going to try to have our kids super prepared.”



Roberts is amused.

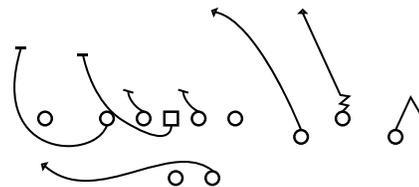
“We always lose pre-game,” he says, watching his Seaside team stretch quietly as their opponents yell and cheer loudly in the opposite end zone. His kids are a



Jon Eagle '83, head football coach at Camas High School, runs a disciplined program. During his pregame speech, Eagle asks, “how do we sub?” Players recite in unison, “hustle on, hustle off, call the man’s name!”

close-knit bunch, but quiet. With kickoff fast approaching, Roberts huddles the team together.

“Laser-like focus tonight,” he says, looking players in the eye. “Every play, best effort. Let’s assert who we are.”



The Camas Papermakers are confident. They have a 13-0 halftime lead over their rivals from Vancouver’s Union High School, and their 59th straight regular-season win seems within reach.

The team jogs off the field, into the tunnel under Doc Harris Stadium’s 4,000 fans. They assemble on locker-room benches facing the front of the room, quiet and focused. Class is in session.

In addition to being head coach, Eagle also directs the team’s offense. For eight minutes he draws plays on a classroom-style whiteboard, quizzing student-athletes on what is happening on the field. His sparse teaching tools are a dry-erase pen and his memory.

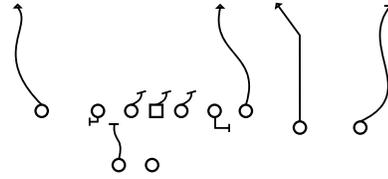
“Are they playing the run or are they playing you?” Eagle asks Kyle Allen, senior quarterback.

“He’s been more RPO (run, pass option) first,” Allen says.

“Good! That’s the answer we need. Very good,” says Eagle, enthusiastically.



Jon Eagle '83, head football coach at Camas High School, believes in making the game fun and that players want to be “coached up.” His team’s practices are constantly moving and consist of 30 five-minute segments at the school’s on-site turf practice field.

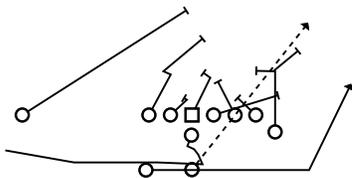
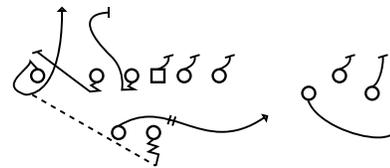


At the end of the third quarter, the Camas Papermakers hold a 13-0 lead and another league championship is 12 minutes away. Then comes the unexpected: a fourth-down, 19-yard touchdown by Union. Then another touchdown six minutes later, which ends up being the difference in a 14-13 upset for Union.

Camas’ 58-game winning streak is over, but the Camas band continues to perform its traditional post-game songs, young children still play catch and students take selfies on the field.

In the midst of it all, Eagle gathers his team in the stadium’s west end zone. Fans crowd around to listen.

“Your coaches love you very much,” he says calmly. “You’re our guys. You’re Camas guys. Don’t ever forget that.”



At the half in Seaside, Roberts unlaces his white Nike shoes and begins to change socks in a coaches-only meeting, while defensive coordinator Bill Westerholm dissects the team’s performance. Westerholm is Roberts’ “idea guy” and pitches – for the umpteenth time – an offensive play called the “naked boot.” Roberts grins at the suggestion and is calm, even though his team is behind 14-13.

Roberts concludes his strategy session with the coaches and walks out to address the team. If they are going to beat No. 5-ranked Banks, they’ll need more of his motivational talks. Standing in a small sea of red uniforms, Roberts reminds the team of a 49-14 loss earlier in the season.

“We have been a completely different team since that day,” he says. “Think back to what that was like, and let’s get after it.”

Roberts believes lessons derived from playing football extend beyond game mechanics.

“Teaching kids how to believe in themselves is as important as Xs and Os,” he says.

It’s the other side of an emotional, come-from-behind contest on the Oregon coast. Roberts and the Seagulls come storming back to upset Banks 19-14 on a rain-soaked night.

It’s impossible to hide the excitement on Roberts’ face. The coach works his way down the sideline hugging his coaching staff. The teams trade “good game” handshakes during the traditional post-game show of sportsmanship, and the Seagulls head to the north end zone to celebrate. Eventually, Roberts scans the team kneeling in front of him – and the 300 classmates, parents and fans standing behind them – and lets out a long “wow” that sets off cheers from the crowd.

Roberts praises his student-athletes’ resilience and commends the town for its support. It’s going to be a night of celebration, but Roberts can’t resist turning this into a teachable moment.

“This is big,” says Roberts of the victory and the state playoff berth that comes with it. Going forward, he says, “Do not be selfish. Make good decisions.”

The boys huddle together and sing their traditional post-game song.

As the crowd wanders into the night afterward, Roberts stands alone for a little while, soaking in the moment. Then he stoops, reverting to his job as school principal, to pick up a bouquet of flowers left behind in the celebration.

– Travis McGuire

