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CHRISTIAN BROTHERS FOOTBALL



Christian Brothers' new coach, Vance Mueller, is already working with his players not involved in other sports, doing off-season conditioning and flexibility drills.

Sacramento Bee/
Jay Mather

WAVIO

Former Raiders player Mueller brings new life to the program

By Jason Jones
BEE STAFF WRITER

Football at Christian Brothers High School hasn't been what Vance Mueller believes it should be — fun.

The Falcons' program is steeped in tradition, but history matters little to teenagers who have only seen CBS struggle in their time at the school. The number of players coming out for football has dwindled, and student interest has declined.

But if Mueller's history is a predictor of future success, CBS could be in for a football revival.

The Falcons' new football coach is a native of Jackson, was a three-sport star at Jackson High (now Argonaut High) before a standout career at Occidental College, a Division III program in Los Angeles.

three-sport star in Jackson said he thinks Mueller might have just what it takes to succeed as an off-campus coach.

"Not to put too much on it," said Occidental coach Dale Widolff. "But he's got the Midas touch. Everything the guy does, he's successful at."

Mueller's next challenge will be a true test of that touch. CBS went 6-24 during the last three seasons under Bobby Fresques. Mueller witnessed the last two seasons firsthand as the team's strength and conditioning and running-backs coach.



Vance Mueller, putting in extra time in hopes of reviving the Falcons' football program, works with Howie Strunk on a push-up drill. Mueller also has a fitness business in El Dorado Hills.

At a glance

- Vance Mueller played football and competed in track at Occidental College. Football MVP three consecutive seasons.
- Southern California Interscholastic Athletic Conference MVP as a junior and senior.
- Eight-time track All-American (sprinter, long jumper).
- Fourth-round selection of Los Angeles Raiders in 1986. A knee injury required a knee replacement, and Mueller retired in 1993.
- Has run Mueller Fitness in El Dorado Hills for more than 10 years.
- Earned an exercise science degree from Occidental.
- Married with three children.

campus. Rather than boarding a bus on gameday, the Falcons could dress and walk out of their own locker room ready for action.

Mueller plans to run a wide-open offense, a simplified version of the spread offense that has brought excitement and victories to colleges like Utah and Boise State.

Widolff has already invited Mueller and his staff to spend some time with his coaching staff before the season. The two talk regularly about the game.

"He's a quick study when it comes to football," Widolff said. "He picks things up very quickly. He asked questions a lot. By the time he was a junior and senior, he was making his own observations — not being a jerk — and saying, 'Coach, why don't we try this.'"

Though it might seem like an obvious coaching ploy, Mueller won't dwell on his six seasons in the NFL to motivate his players.

"I think there's a credibility that goes with it for sure," Mueller said. "But in the end, it comes down to what kind of person you are."

Mueller's down-to-earth personality showed during a recent workout.

Raulinaitis, who will be one of the team's top returning players. "We'll be a lot more disciplined, and I think we'll win a lot more games."

It isn't surprising to Widolff that the players have gravitated to Mueller.

"I think he's a people person," Widolff said. "I think he'll be able to get guys to play hard. I think he'll be able to get guys to buy into the program."

Mueller speaks respectfully of the tradition of CBS football, noting Sierra College coach Jeff Tisdell and Boise State coach Dan Hawkins coached at the school.

Becoming one of the rare small-school players to make it big, Mueller was a fourth-round draft pick of the Los Angeles Raiders, where he spent six seasons as a running back and a special-teams player.

Having fulfilled his dream of playing professional football, Mueller moved on to his next goal in life, opening a fitness business. Mueller Fitness in El Dorado Hills is in its 10th year of operation.

He's also been involved in the El Dorado Hills Junior Football program and still works for the Raiders, chip-in on the radio occasionally with color commentary and assisting in the luxury-suite sales department.

There, Mueller's effervescent personality allows him to entertain and host guests at Raiders home games. Someone who has known Mueller, 30, since he was a

The Falcons' lone win this past season was over McClatchy, which hasn't won a game in more than two seasons.

Making the climb uphill more difficult is playing in the Sierra Valley Conference, where three-time Sac-Joaquin Section champion Oak Ridge calls home. There's also Cordova, which is always dangerous, and Galt, which is on the upswing.

"Of course, we all want to win," Mueller said. "But the immediate goal is to bring some pride back to the program. My goal is to make football fun again."

Mueller's hiring has already brought some interest from players who otherwise might have skipped football next season. Athletes practicing for

He has plans to start some new traditions at the school, including possible future on-campus games.

The Falcons played home games last season at American River College and have played at Sacramento City College in previous seasons.

"My goal is to play at least one game here (at Christian Brothers)," said Mueller while looking at the outdated goalposts that also would need to be replaced. "Preferably homecoming."

There aren't lights on the field, so the game would have to be played on a Saturday afternoon or under portable lights on a Friday night.

Bleachers also would need to be rented or installed. But Mueller believes playing at home will energize the

While observing the progress of his players as they pumped iron and worked out, Mueller would drop to the floor to encourage an athlete doing push-ups or jump in and lead his players through drills. At the same time, he kept a close eye on the video recorder to make sure that game tape of senior Kameron White came out OK.

After White picked up the copy, he gave Mueller a hug before he left.

"I love you," Mueller said. "I love you, too, coach," White replied.

Apparently before making the game fun again, Mueller wants to make sure all the players know he cares.

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Dale Widolff
Occidental coach on Vance Mueller

track and baseball can be overheard discussing friends who now want the chance to play for a former NFL player.

"I think it's big for the program," said junior Curtis