

No Debate *Both Teams* Are Great

Football success helps highlight academic excellence

BY BOB EVANCHO

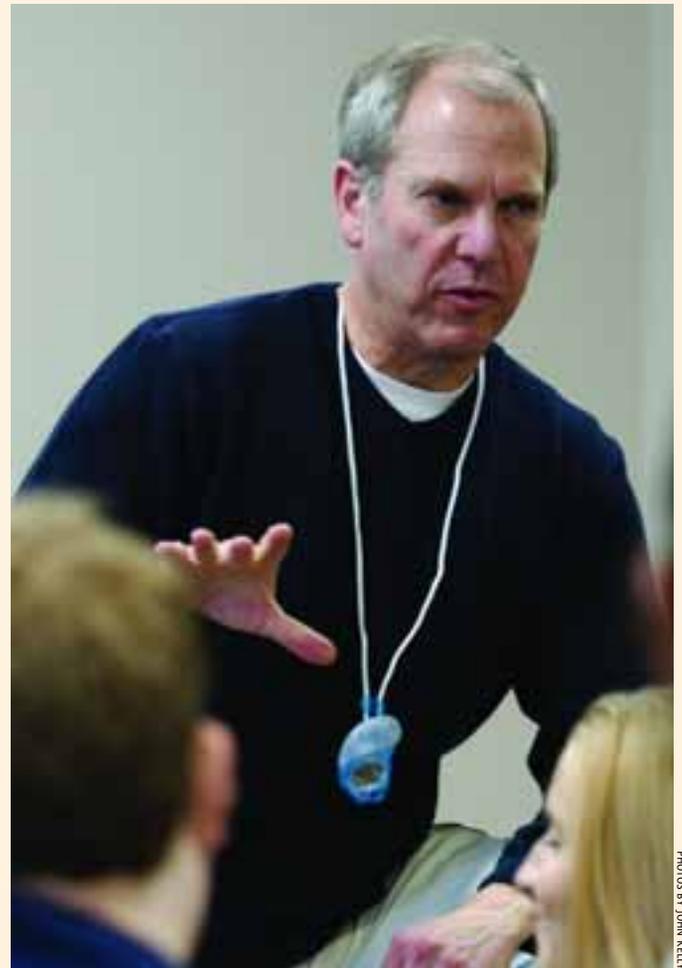
How 'bout them Broncos! Some kinda team, eh? Boy, they sure have delivered the goods the last several years – winning a slew of conference championships and earning spots in the national rankings. What great exposure for Boise State!

And that Marty Most. Can that guy coach or *what?* His kids always bring their “A” game, put up big numbers and give 110 percent. I mean, they’re starting to make some noise and –

Huh?... Who’s Marty Most?

Oh, you thought I meant *those* Broncos, Boise State’s 12th-ranked, 11-1, three-time WAC champs coached by Dan Hawkins. The ones who play on the blue turf – not Most’s Talkin’ Broncos, the university’s debate and speech team that in the last decade has piled up eight conference championships, four regional team titles and four consecutive top-five finishes in the national forensics tournament.

Most (BA, education, '77; MA, education, '86) is an assistant professor of communication and BSU’s foren-



PHOTOS BY JOHN KELLY

sics director who has guided the Talkin’ Broncos to national prominence since assuming the program’s reigns in 1988. And while he and his charges have achieved a rate of success that’s comparable to the football-playing Broncos, it has been with considerably less fanfare.

Not that Most is complaining, mind you. “They’re catching on,” he says with a laugh when asked to compare the gridiron Broncos’ amazing run the last few seasons to his program’s success. “The football team finally has something in common with the debate team: We haven’t lost to a Pac-10 team all year, either. But then, we haven’t finished behind a Pac-10 team at a tournament in six years.”

Most’s tongue-in-cheek reference is to the football team’s 53-34 win over Oregon State in September, which



Most (far left) and Hawkins coach different programs but enjoy similar success at Boise State.

And it's already working, Kustra adds. "Our donors have been reawakened to a new future at Boise State," he says. "I hear over and over again [from donors and potential donors who say], 'I'd like to sit down and talk to you about what you're doing here.' And it's not just about football. Football has recaptured their attention and recaptured their imagination about the future of this institution; many people have asked questions about our academic side."

While the cultivation of donor relations is a long-term process, current financial figures from Boise State's bookstore provide further proof that the football team's success has delivered a major infusion of funding into the university's coffers.

According to Kim Thomas, bookstore director, sales of Bronco apparel and merchandise have skyrocketed this year – a 66 percent increase in apparel purchased and a 227 percent increase in online sales – compared to last year's record-setting sales figures. Last year the bookstore contributed \$752,000, or 7.5 percent of its sales – including \$200,000 to the academic scholarship endowment fund – to the university. Based on sales figures so far, Thomas expects the overall number for this year to be more than \$1 million. In addition, Boise State is now ranked No. 50 nationally in collegiate licensed product sales.

To be sure, BSU's recent gridiron glory has led to more media exposure, the potential for a larger and more generous pool of donors, and more T-shirt sales. And with the 2005 Broncos expected to be just as competitive, it's a good bet that they will continue to play on the national stage for the foreseeable future – and in the process help direct the spotlight on the rest of Boise State.

ended its nine-game losing streak to Pac-10 opponents. "OK, and we're not drawing 30,000 paying customers to debate tournaments, either," he adds with a laugh.

But seriously, thanks to the attention Hawkins and *his* Broncos have received, top-notch faculty, students and programs at Boise State – Most, his debaters and their team serving as just one of many examples – are now more likely to catch the attention of the media, prospective students and current and potential donors.

"Highlighting the work of some of our most accomplished faculty has clearly caught the attention and imagination of donors; they're now saying things like, 'Well, I've given to athletics over the years, I think it may be time for me to pony up even more to give to academics as well,'" says Boise State President Bob Kustra. "That's awfully encouraging for a president to hear."