

# Bengals' Pride Returns, But Playoffs Don't

By Bruce Smith  
MatchupUT.com

When the 2009 Brighton High School football season will be remembered, it will reflect how much the team had improved, but how disappointing it was the way it ended.

The Bengals finished with a 6-4 record, which was good to tie for fourth place in Region 4. Brighton won all three of its non-region games, but was 3-3 in region, and that ended up being one victory short of making the post-season.

Brighton was the talk of the season the first three weeks of the season, outscoring Davis, Taylorsville and Hunter by a combined 111-0. All the media descended on Brighton when it showed the potential of being the prominent 5A team it used to be.

"I appreciated the efforts," said coach **Ryan Bullett**. "They turned some things around. We were always getting 5-10 kids that were dedicated, but we had a lot more this year. That was the biggest difference.

"This group of kids was sick of what had been going on," he added, noting Brighton's 4-6 and 2-8 records the previous seasons. "We actually won games in the offseason."

A major improvement was necessary because Region 4 was – by far – the most difficult in 5A. In the end, Alta, Lone Peak and Pleasant Grove reached the post-season, but Brighton fell to Jordan in a tie-breaking game. The Beetdiggers then lost in the first round to top-ranked Bingham.

Ironically, Brighton defeated three of the four teams (Davis, Hunter and Alta) that reached the 5A semifinals.



**Daniel Hanna picks up a fumble early in Brighton's season-opening win over Davis.**

"If we had been in any other region, we might have been there, too," shrugged Bullett.

Leading the group who made a difference for Brighton was senior lineman **Ricky Heimuli**, a 6-foot-4, 295-pounder who dominated opposing linemen and had college scholarship offers waiting before the season even ended. While Heimuli was far behind tackles leader **Andy Tominaga**, he often forced opponents to double-team him, and blew open big holes playing center on offense.

It was important for Brighton to get big plays from him because an injury in the season

***Continued on next page***

## BRIGHTON FOOTBALL: 2009 season in review

Continued from previous page

opener ended LB **Alex Whittingham's** season.

"There were games when he just dominated up front," Bullett said.

Bullett pointed to the Alta game, a 21-10 win in front of Brighton's homecoming crowd. Heimuli was even crowned homecoming king. After the Bengals handed Alta its first region loss, the crowd ran onto the field to celebrate.

The first three victories made opponents notice Brighton's upgrade. The Bengals lost to Lone Peak in week before, but the win over Alta brought back their confidence.

"After that Lone Peak game, the kids realized they had get a lot better," Bullett said. "Against Alta, we played with a lot of passion."

Quarterback **Derrick Newell** and new running back **Sosaia TaKai** also helped. Like the previous season, Newell battled injury problems, but sophomore **Andy Jones** filled in well.

Both signal-callers were helped by TaKai, a transfer who took over when **Darren Later** was hurt in the second game against Taylorsville.

Later had 82 yards in

in the opener, and then 144 against Taylorsville. After his injury, he played very little.

TaKai, who enrolled at Brighton the previous June, took over the running chores and gained 1,050 yards, which made him Region 4's top rusher.

That also gave Brighton a running game to compliment Newell's passing. During the season, Brighton had several big plays, taking advantage of the speed of Newell, TaKai, **Stephen Robinson** and **Zane Smith**.

Newell might not have been among the region's top passers, but that's only because the region had so many. However, he averaged an amazing 18.6 yards per completion.

**Jace Felix** was the top receiver, but Robinson was the primary deep threat, averaging 32.3 yards per catch. Robinson also teamed with TaKai to be great return threats. In the team's final two games, each returned a



QB **Derrick Newell** and RB **Sosaia TaKai** proved to be an impressive 1-2 punch for the Bengals.

kickoff for a touchdown.

But this season will be remembered most for the defense. The first three games drew statewide media attention and made opponents focus on that aspect, and only Jordan really had any success. This came even though injuries took their toll.

Overall, the 2009 season had a lot of highlights, and fans were excited see Brighton play most of the season to its potential. The only problem was it needed a bit more.

"It felt good to be back," said Bullett. "We lose a lot of seniors, but we got some momentum and we'll have a good quarterback coming back. In this league, that means a lot."