

# THE EVOLUTION OF THE BFS REVOLUTION



by Dr. Greg Shepard

## An in-depth look at America's most popular strength training program for athletes

**Y**ou can't argue with success. More than 9,000 high schools have implemented the Bigger Faster Stronger program, and of these schools, more than 300 have won state championships in football after having had BFS clinics. Many college teams and high-profile professional athletes are making dramatic improvements with BFS, and each year our clinicians schedule more than 250 seminars. And there's more!

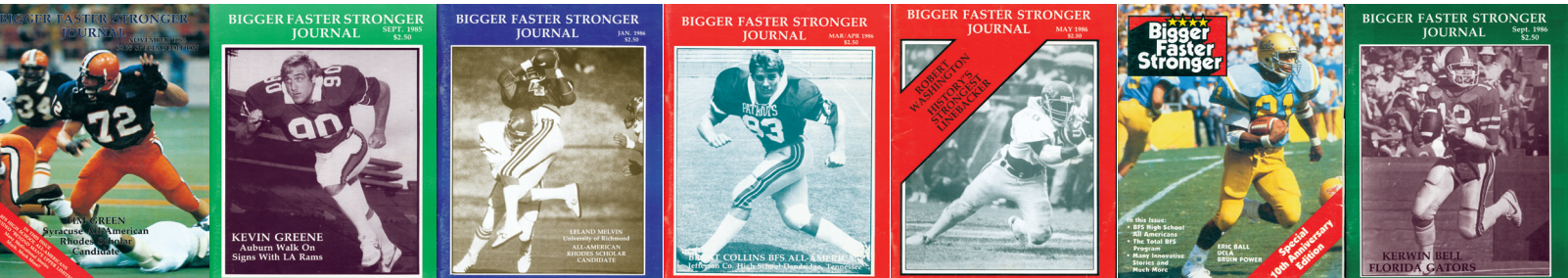
The popularity of the BFS program has reached such a level

that in one independent survey through the University of Minnesota, 40 percent of the high school football coaches polled said they use BFS as their primary source of strength and conditioning information, and over 250,000 students have gone through a BFS clinic. What this means is that BFS is not one of those here-today-gone-tomorrow workouts but a popular and effective training method with a 30-year history of success.

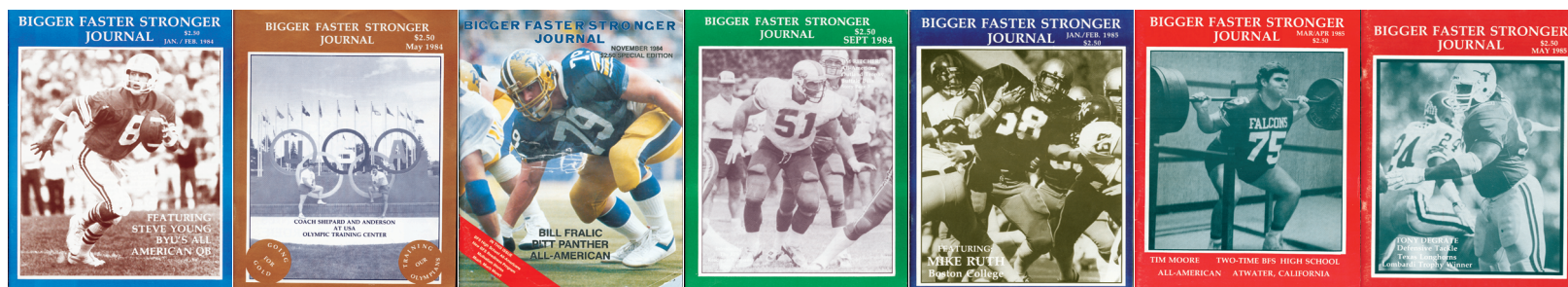
What is not widely known is how the BFS program developed

from events that are a vital component of the achievements of BFS today. So, where did the program come from?

As I think about the real origins of today's BFS, I can point to three primary sources: First, there's George Frenn, who personifies the throwers in track and field in the late 1960s who achieved remarkable results on the field and in the weight room. Second, there are the high school and college athletes I coached from the mid-1960s to the late 1970s, the very first BFS athletes.







Finally, there's the late Stefan Fernholm, an elite discus thrower. Stefan shared with me many remarkable training methods, especially in the area of proper technique, from the Eastern Bloc nations in the 1980s. All these athletes provided me with the practical experience to refine the BFS system so it could be easily taught and implemented in the US.

### George Frenn's Secret

By the late 1960s, I had already been a high school football coach and a strength coach at the University of Oregon and Oregon State; and before that, in the mid-1960s I had trained with the San Diego Chargers, who at that time were at the forefront of weight training for pro football. I had won many powerlifting competitions, including the National Collegiate Championships, and was a member of an Olympic weightlifting team in Salzburg, Austria. I had also paid my dues academically, eventually earning a doctorate in physical education. So as far as training knowledge and experience goes, I didn't exactly just fall off the turnip truck. But, when I saw George Frenn train, I knew I still had a great deal to learn.

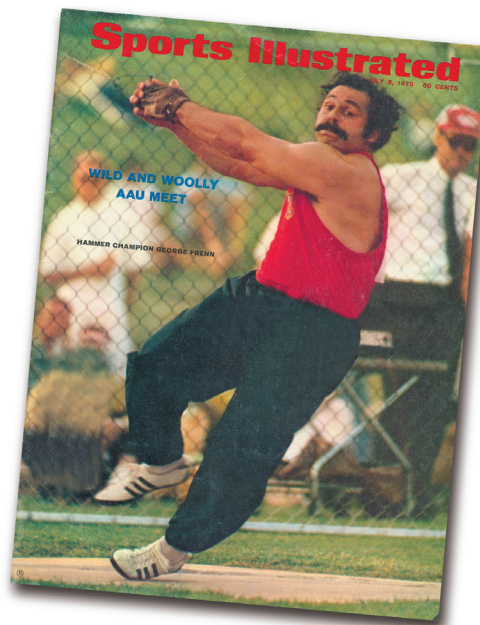
One of the best hammer throwers in the country, George

had a best competitive squat of 843 pounds – long before the days of supersuits and other special supportive equipment. He was so far ahead of everyone else it was obvious there was something different about his training. I wanted to know his secrets! So, in the late 1960s, I spent my summers in the Los Angeles area to be near George and pick his brain.

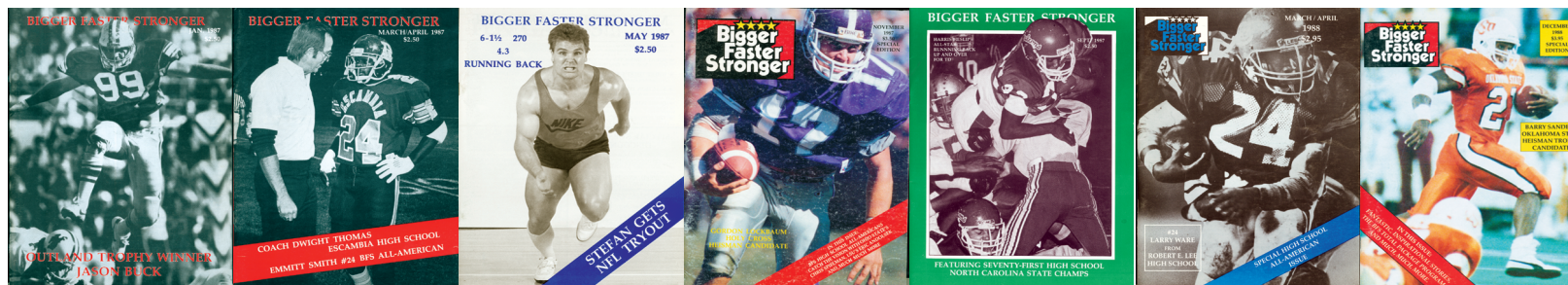
Also joining George were many other elite throwers who came from all over the country to live in the LA area, where they could throw all year round with many of the best athletes in the world. As a football coach, I looked at these guys

and was amazed at their conditioning. There were at least 30 of them, and they weighed an average of 270 pounds and ran 4.6 to 4.7 in the forty. They were far bigger, faster and stronger than the pro football players of that era. I wanted these types of athletes on my football team.

George was the master, along with Jon Cole, a discus thrower who in powerlifting competition squatted 905 pounds and deadlifted 880. Jon also entered a few Olympic lifting meets and, with best lifts of 430 pounds in the standing Olympic press, 340 in the snatch and 430 in the clean and jerk, he came close to making the US Olympic team in weightlifting. Everybody learned from Jon and George. Athletes from



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the Soviet Union were even in awe of these two, and their coaches and athletes came over to our country to observe and learn. We were the dominant force in the world at that time in the throwing events, and

everybody wanted our secret.

What was the secret? It was simple, but quite radical at the time:

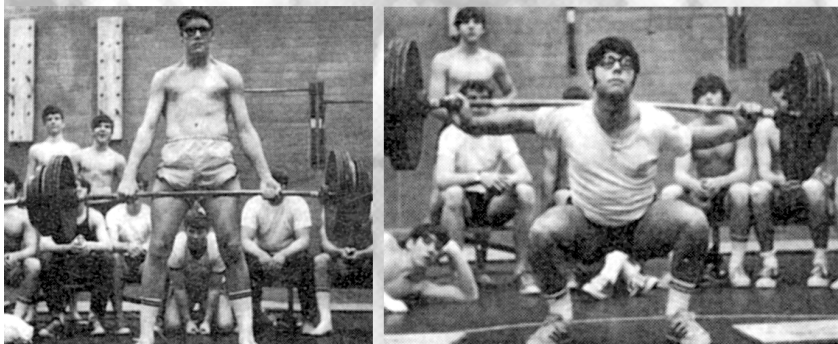
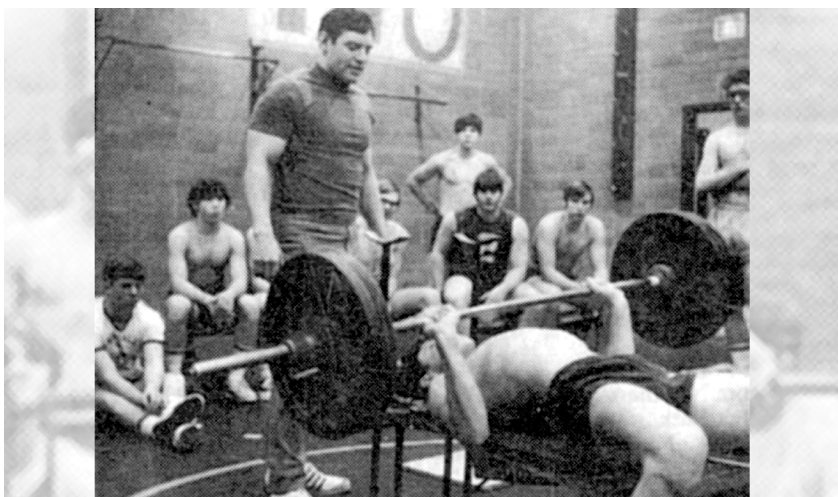
Stretch, lift hard with free weights, vary your workouts, and

concentrate on the big multi-joint lifts that develop the legs and hips. You've got to do that, plus add sprinting and jump training.

This means that all athletes, regardless of their sport, should focus their strength training on the squat and the power clean. These lifts may be augmented by doing a few, but only a few, auxiliary lifts. And the lifting and stretching should be complemented by doing speed and plyometric jump drills. Simple ideas, but the best.

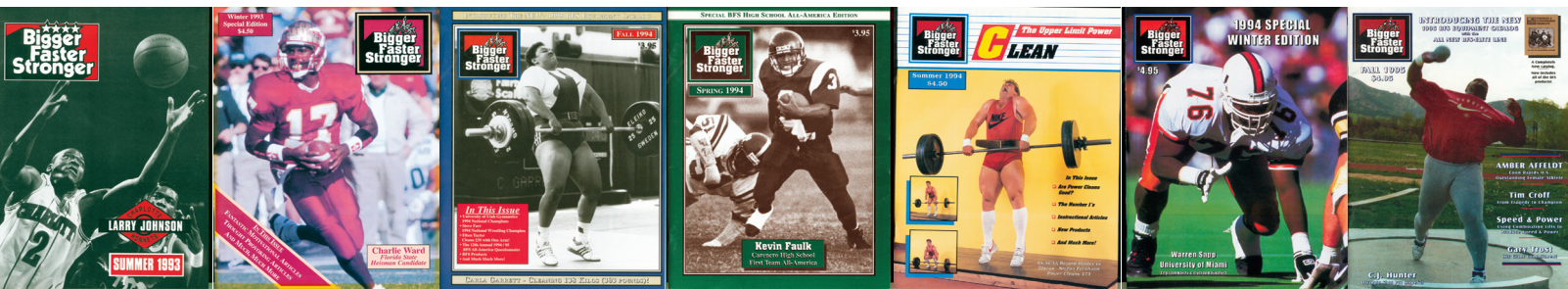
### The First BFS Athletes

The next contribution to BFS as it exists today came from my experiences from taking what I learned from George back to my high school. In 1970 I was a coach at Sehome High School in Bellingham, Washington. Sehome's enrollment of 1,400 nudged us into being considered a "big school," but it was among the smallest in its classification. Despite our size, we won the unofficial state championship against a school with almost twice our enrollment. Our athletes were simply too good – the only thing the opposing team could produce in that championship game was minus 77 yards! I also coached track, and 11 of our guys could throw the discus between 140 and

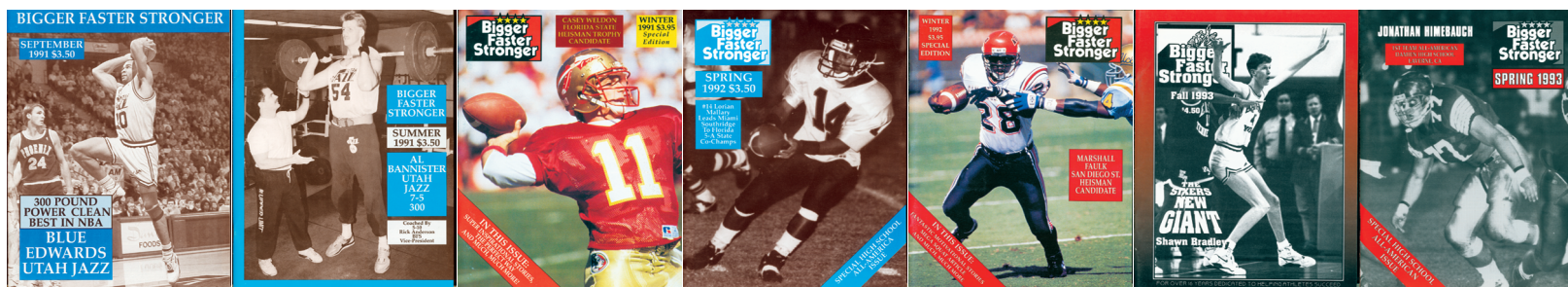


Photos: 1970 Strength & Health magazine

Back in 1970 at Sehome High I coached football and track. Eleven of our guys could throw the discus between 140 and 180 feet. If you couldn't throw 155 feet, you were a JV guy. We had bunches of kids who could bench 300, squat 400 and power clean 250 pounds – lifts that college athletes would be proud of.







180 feet. If you couldn't throw 155 feet, you were a JV guy; to this day I don't believe any high school has ever been able to say that. And we had bunches of kids who could bench 300, squat 400 and power clean 250 pounds – lifts that college athletes would be proud of.

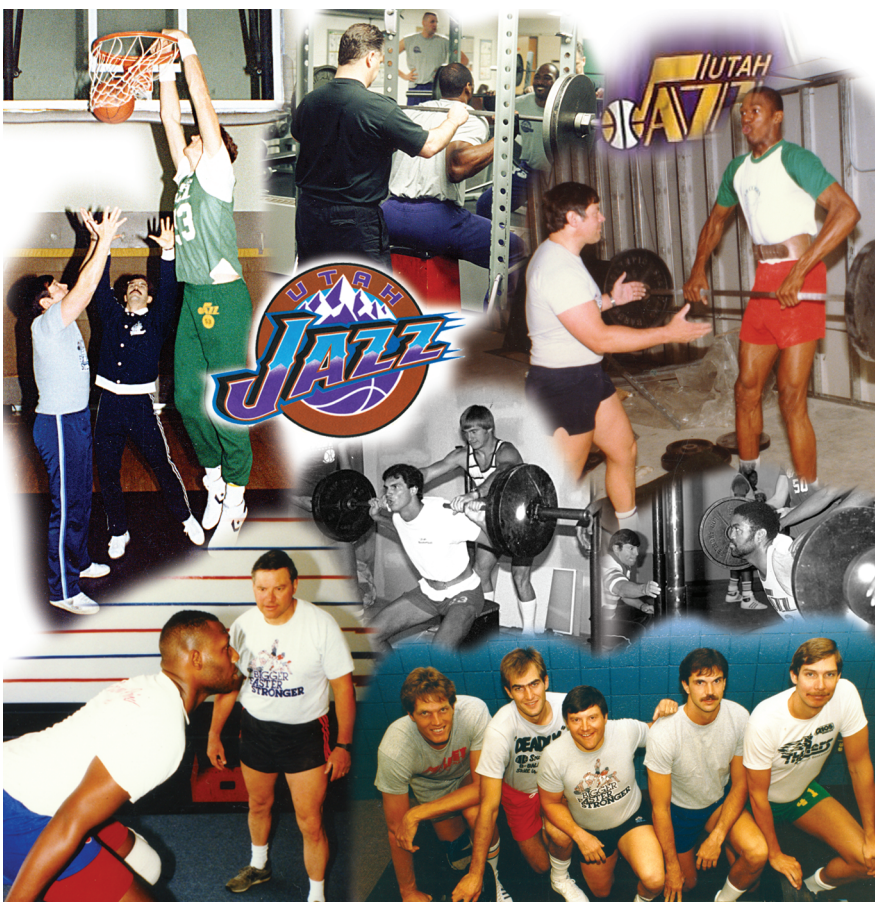
My next challenge was as head football coach at a high school in Idaho. I inherited a team that was 0-6 and had lost homecoming 72-0; the kids were so dispirited that they just quit, forfeiting their last three games. We trained hard, and the following year our team won the country championships and scored a fantastic 29-16 victory over the team that had beat us 72-0. And this is despite the fact that the opposing team had a school enrollment of 1,600 kids to our 850! Then I took over the Granger High School team in Salt Lake City, a team that had won only two ballgames in four years, and we achieved what is still considered the most dramatic turnaround in the history of Utah. This got everyone's attention.

Coaches were asking me, "How can you take a disaster school and turn it around in just one year?" When I said it was our weight training program, they would ask me to come to their schools and show them how to do it. That was how our BFS clinics

began, and those schools that I worked with also saw dramatic turnarounds in their programs.

In between my football jobs in Washington and Idaho, I was hired as the strength coach at

Brigham Young University. At BYU I did a movie called *Bigger Faster Stronger*. The movie was a hit, and the secret was out nationwide. Football coaches nationwide began doing the BFS



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program, but even so, it seemed to be a slow process. It was also amazing to me that coaches from other sports just could not get it.

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strength coach. At that time I was the only strength coach in the NBA. I, along with my BFS partners Rick Anderson and Rob Rowbotham, was with the Utah Jazz for 16 years. Pro baseball did

not start hiring strength coaches until the 1990s. Even today, if you took all the high school athletes in all the boys' and girls' sports, you would still find that less than half possess the key to becoming bigger, faster and stronger. It is very simple – if you want to make your success happen and unlock your full potential as an athlete, you must use the key.

Today, about 95 percent of college strength coaches use the methods I learned from George in one form or another. The remaining five percent focus on a different approach, with injury prevention as the primary goal instead of winning and performance. But our BFS goals go far beyond that. We constantly measure performance. How fast can you run? How high and far can you jump? How much can you lift? How much can you improve in those areas? Personal records are meticulously kept in order to verify that improvement. That is what drives throwers and most other athletes. We need concrete proof that we are getting better every day. As for injuries, we have countless testimonials from schools that show dramatic decreases in injuries, in the weight room and on the playing field, from implementing the BFS program.

### Stefan Fernholm: The



Stefan weighed 273 at a little over 6-1 in height. He could run a legitimate 4.3 forty, vertical jump 40 inches from a stand, and power clean 476 pounds from the floor. Stefan was flawless in everything he did. This is what he brought to our BFS table: perfect technique!







## Soviet Connection

The third major contributor to our BFS program was Stefan Fernholm, a discus thrower from Sweden who came to BYU to compete at the college level. He broke the NCAA collegiate record and was a past Olympian. Stefan became a part of BFS in the mid-1980s. We owe him a great deal. He bridged the gap between the United States and the old Soviet Union. Stefan was privy to and knowledgeable about the Soviet training methods. The Soviets took their training seriously, spending hundreds of million of dollars on developing their system. Their coaches, for example, could get a doctorate in discus, sprinting or weightlifting at the University of Moscow. In the early 1970s they were discreetly building on their methods and elevating them to new levels.

Stefan took full advantage of this knowledge. I have never seen an athlete like him. Those of you who were able to see Stefan know I am not blowing smoke. Stefan weighed 273 at a little over 6-1 in height. He could run a legitimate 4.3 forty, vertical jump 40 inches from a stand, and power clean 476 pounds from the floor. Stefan was flawless in everything he did. This is what he brought to our BFS table: perfect technique! All our

clinicians, including me, became better coaches and much greater technicians because of Stefan. Perfection became our focus. By all means, know all the secrets, but you had better execute every facet perfectly to put it all together. Stefan demonstrated this perfect technique in many of our videos. Unfortunately, Stefan died in Sweden several years ago, but his legacy lives on in BFS.

## BFS Today

The next step was putting all these unique elements into a unified program for coaches and their athletes. It was not an easy task, considering that some sports such as track are individual sports; and throwers, for example, traditionally could train only themselves and maybe one or two others at the same time. The Soviet coaches I had observed would get nervous if they had to coach more than three athletes at a time. My own challenge for BFS was to figure out a way to

implement all the basic elements of advanced training used by athletes such as Stefan and put them into a package that could be used by multiple teams at the same time.

Now, with solid research, 30 years of practical knowledge and tens of thousands of athletes using the program, we think we've got it right. The BFS program is the perfect program for any high school athlete, male or female, and it's ideal for

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coaches who deal with large numbers of athletes. The program also has shown remarkable success at the college level. Why not join the BFS team and make memories you'll be proud to share? BFS

*This article comes directly from the all new Bigger Faster Stronger book. See page 51 to order your copy today.*

