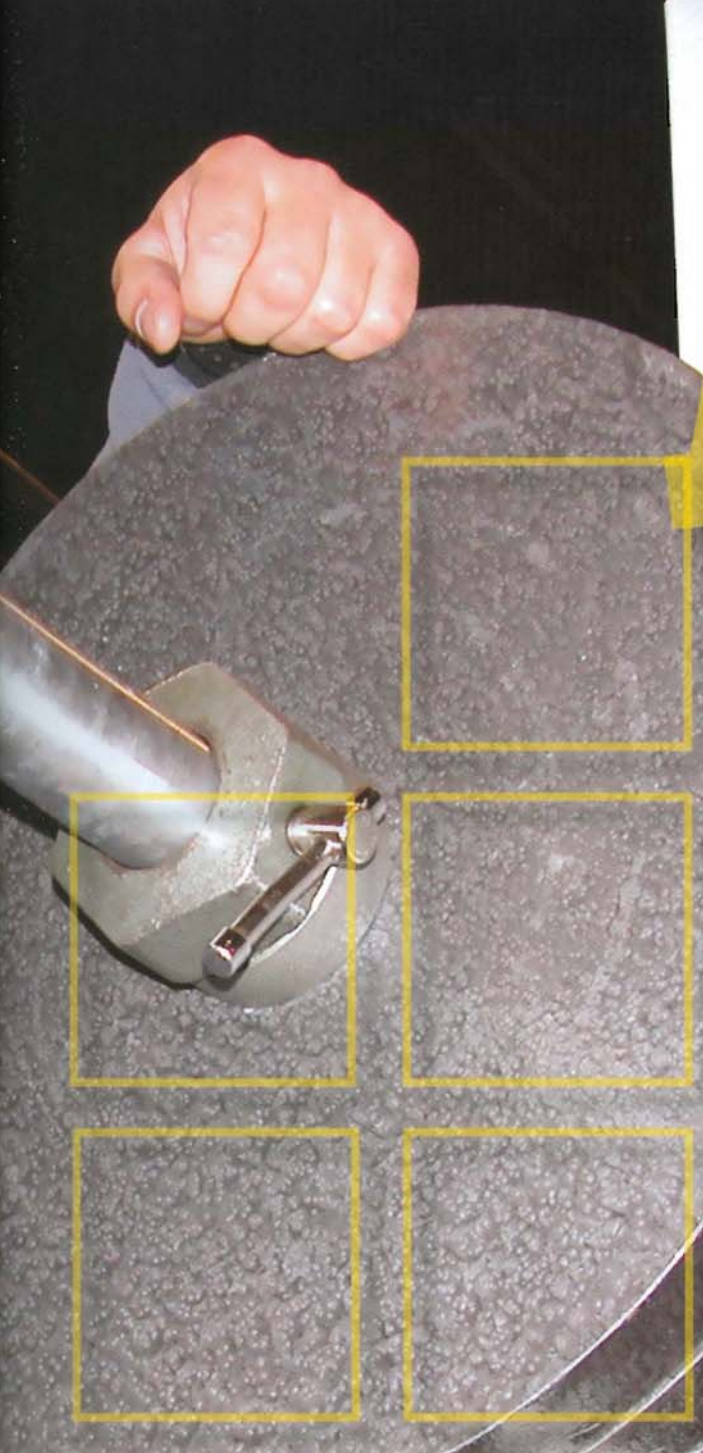


# COMMON SENSE SOLUTIONS

ALL  
WE  
DO  
IS  
WEIGHT  
LIFT

There's nothing special about **Mike Carroll's** heavy-duty weightroom — *except the results*

by Kim Goss



# A

Ask any child what they want to be when they grow up, and a typical response is “The ice cream man!” And that’s OK – kids are kids and ice cream is the most perfect food. But ask any serious strength coach what they would secretly want to do with their lives, and a typical response is “Own a gym.” Not a franchised health club with air-resistance machines and perky instructors who teach rubber-band aerobics – but a free-weight, use-chalk-if-you-wanna, hardcore gym. And that’s exactly what Mike Carroll is doing.

Along with his business partner, Chris Marchetti, Carroll runs **The Edge Training Center** in Salt Lake City, Utah. With the exception of a treadmill in the corner of the gym (with lots of flashing lights for which Carroll has yet to find a use), The Edge is a free-weight gym for serious trainees. Their client list runs the gamut of Olympic champions and professional football players to middle-aged housewives who are determined to get into the best shape of their lives. Want to get ready for the NFL Combine? Carroll will make you faster. Got a weightlifting or powerlifting competition coming up? Carroll will refine your technique and make you brutally strong. Got a problem with your spouse and just want someone to talk to? Carroll will give you a blank stare and show you the door.

Carroll was a member of the wrestling team during the years he attended the University of Maryland and studied political science. But his wrestling aspirations were cut short when injuries from a motorcycle accident required steel rods to be inserted in the femur and tibia of his right leg. Eventually, Carroll recovered, and after working a series of jobs in sales, he went on to become a personal trainer and then sales manager at several health clubs.

In this exclusive interview, Carroll gives us an inside look at what it takes to make it as a personal trainer and strength coach in the private sector.



The Edge Training Center  
Salt Lake City, Utah



Coach Carroll teaches Team BFS lifter Lindsay Nelson to "lock-in" her lower back at the start of the snatch.

**BFS:** Obviously, you weren't destined for a career in politics or wrestling. How did you wind up in strength coaching?

**Carroll:** That road had plenty of detours, for sure. After my motorcycle accident, I needed rehab for my leg and I really got interested in powerlifting and Olympic lifting. But the jobs I had were mostly in sales, one as a sales rep for Pepsi. The ironic thing about that job is that I don't drink soda. That was challenging – trying to sell something I didn't believe in. I wanted to work doing something that made real sense in my life.

**BFS:** Did you do anything special to prepare yourself for a career as a strength coach?

**Carroll:** Book smarts and college work only take you so far. Ultimately, I went to the school of hard knocks and experience by training with powerlifters, Olympic lifters and others in this profession.

**BFS:** Are there any certifications that you would recommend to those interested in this field?

**Carroll:** I like the direction BFS is taking with the hands-on portion of their certification to ensure that the coaches can demonstrate and teach the lifts. You need to prove that you can coach.

**BFS:** Many certifications say that trainers can make \$100 to \$150 an hour. Isn't this unrealistic?

**Carroll:** Absolutely. I think they do a real disservice in trying to promote the business that way. That's not to say that there are not some trainers pulling in that type of money, but they're a very small segment of the overall field.

**BFS:** What was your first job as a trainer?

**Carroll:** I started working in a private studio about ten years ago. About four years later I heard that a major health club was looking for a trainer, so I applied and got the job.

**BFS:** Why did you switch clubs?

**Carroll:** The first studio wasn't very busy and was not in a good location. A large gym has a lot more traffic, so it's

easier to find clients. Unless you have a pre-existing reputation, most trainers will have to start at a major health club if they are to survive in this profession.

**BFS:** At the major health club chain, what was their approach to the business of personal training?

**Carroll:** They think of training as a way to generate revenue for the club, and they have two concerns. One is to generate revenue, and the second is to reduce liability. This club had their own certification program, and they taught their trainers liability first and results second.

**BFS:** What do you mean by "results second?"

**Carroll:** Don't do anything that has a high risk of injury – or rather, what they think has a high risk of injury. For example, in the bench press, they will teach you not to bend your arms beyond 90 degrees; in the squat, don't go to parallel. And use mostly machines.

**BFS:** When you started at the club, how did you get your own clients?

**Carroll:** You had two ways of getting clientele. The salespeople try to match a client and their goals with a particular trainer. They also match them up with who they think are the better trainers who are going to get results with their members. The other way is for the trainers to try to sign up current members for training; it's a big part of what the club expects from their trainers on staff.

**BFS:** What's it like for trainers trying to sign up members for personal training?

**Carroll:** There's a tremendous amount of pressure, and it works from the top down. There are financial goals set for the gym, and those financial goals are broken down into the different segments of the gym business, such as membership enrollment and training revenue. That's further broken down into the number of sales staff and trainers, so that everybody basically has a financial goal that they have to meet.

**BFS:** What was the turnover rate for trainers?

**Carroll:** It was very high – you either sank or swam. The typical trainer would last six months, so over the course of a year you would turn over your entire department.

**BFS:** How long were you a trainer?

**Carroll:** For about a year, then I was promoted to fitness manager.

**BFS:** And what did that job entail?

**Carroll:** More pressure! Now I was responsible for not only my own financial goals but also the financial goals of an entire department.

**BFS:** Why did you leave that job and go into business for yourself?

**Carroll:** I much prefer to work with athletes who have specific goals, such as training for a competition, as opposed to general physical fitness goals. Also, I like to train with squats and the Olympics lifts, not

just putting someone on a machine for three sets of ten.

**BFS:** *How did you come up with the concept of The Edge?*

**Carroll:** The Edge was a concept that my business partner Chris Marchetti and I came up with. In looking at the industry and the market, we felt that there was a need for people who were serious about their training. We wanted to offer an environment suitable for training in the specific ways athletes need for competing at a high level. We put the concept in place in December of 2002, and we opened the doors in 2003.

**BFS:** *Why did you choose the location you did?*

**Carroll:** We wanted a location that was easily accessible and would attract a more affluent clientele. The location we chose was right off a major freeway, and we were lucky because we got a great deal on the lease.



Ade Jimoh, a defensive back for the Washington Redskins, prepares to perform a bench press with chains at the Edge Training Center.

**BFS:** *How did you plan your facility in regard to equipment selection?*

**Carroll:** We wanted a facility that was going to be designed around athletic training. The Olympic lifts are first and foremost, as they develop speed and power. This meant lifting platforms and heavy-duty power racks were the number-one requirement. We knew that BFS put out high-quality equipment and offered great prices, so we looked at BFS first for all of our equipment needs.

**BFS:** *Did you buy everything all at once?*

**Carroll:** We bought most of what we've got all at once because we could get a better deal that way, plus buying equipment from the same line is always more pleasing aesthetically.

**BFS:** *What type of clients have you been able to attract?*

**Carroll:** We work with every level, from general fitness trainees all the way up to world-class athletes. Our client list includes Jeremy Bloom, a mogul skiing World Cup champion; Travis Cabral, another World Cup champ in mogul skiing; Justin Johnson, ranked in the top

20 worldwide in downhill skiing; Ade Jimoh, a defensive back for the Washington Redskins; and Tristian Gale, a gold medalist in skeleton in the 2002 Winter Olympics. We also have many top athletes training here on their own, such as Chris Witty, an Olympic champion and world record holder in speedskating.

**BFS:** *How do you do the initial assessment of elite athletes like these?*

**Carroll:** What I like to do is figure out what their weaknesses are and then design a program specifically to address those weaknesses. If an athlete has weak hamstrings, I might prescribe glute-ham raises. The other thing we try to do is spend some time on technique; even though you may have a college athlete who went through a college strength program, their technique may not be what it should be for optimal performance.

**BFS:** *What is the major problem you see with strength coaches working with young athletes, especially those in the private sector?*

**Carroll:** Trying to become sport coaches! One of the biggest problems in the strength coaching profession is sport coaches trying to influence the strength training program. Now I'm seeing strength coaches doing the same thing in trying to give sport-training advice. It's in the best interest of the athlete if the coaches understand their role and stick to it!

**BFS:** *You've done some powerlifting. What are the major issues you see with that sport?*

**Carroll:** Powerlifters have become too caught up with the numbers and are doing almost anything to increase those numbers, such as changing to new equipment, getting more lenient rules in some federations and not having drug testing. There are too many federations, and the differences in rules make it impossible to compare athletes from different federations.

**BFS:** *What's the problem with the sport of Olympic lifting? Why haven't we been able to make the sport grow?*

**Carroll:** I don't think it's been marketed properly. Also, we have too many other sports that are far more high profile so that weightlifting takes a back seat.

**BFS:** *Tell us about your work with Dr. Shepard's Olympic lifting team, Team BFS?*

**Carroll:** It was an interesting experiment and a successful one, as he was able to have something like 60 new athletes compete in at least one sanctioned weightlifting competition. I also liked the idea of Greg trying to promote such an important sport because I believe the Olympic lifts should be the foundation for training for most sports. I appreciate that BFS shares this belief, as the power clean has always been a core lift in their program.



Mike Carroll demonstrates proper bench press technique to Chris Witty, Olympic Champion and world record holder in speed skating, and Team BFS lifters Gina Smith and Autumn Howe.

**BFS:** How does aerobic training fit into your program?

**Carroll:** It might play a larger role if I could ever figure out what all those buttons do on my treadmill! Seriously, since most sports are anaerobic in nature, aerobic training has minimal value, except perhaps in making a certain weight class or preparing for a bodybuilding competition.


**BFS:** What is your philosophy about young kids lifting weights?

**Carroll:** I think there's a misguided opinion out there that kids should not train with weights, which is especially ironic when you consider the high-impact nature of sports that young people play. The most important thing for kids is that they learn the proper techniques and positioning for all the lifts, which is emphasized in the BFS Readiness Program.

**BFS:** What is your opinion of in-season weight training?

**Carroll:** It's extremely important – just because you're competing doesn't mean you should stop weight training. If you stop training, you're going to get weaker and become more susceptible to injury. I think one of the reasons the BFS program has been so successful in turning around sports programs is that it emphasizes in-season training.

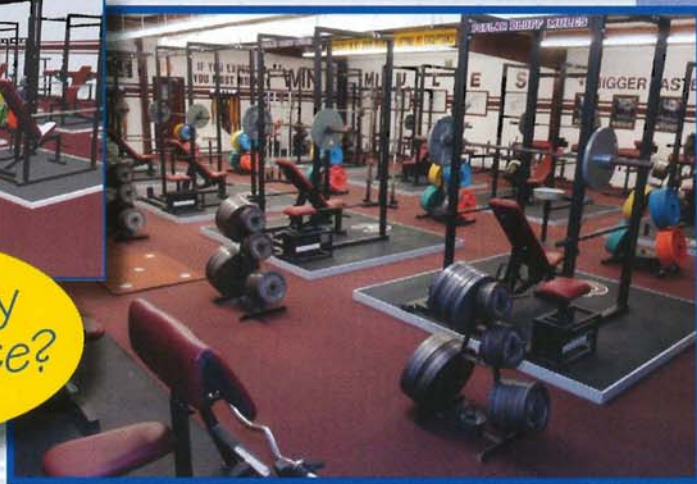
**BFS:** What's next for you?

**Carroll:** I would like to see our gym grow and possibly expand into other regions. I know that there is a market for this type of training, not just for high-level athletes but also for non-athletes who take physical fitness seriously. 

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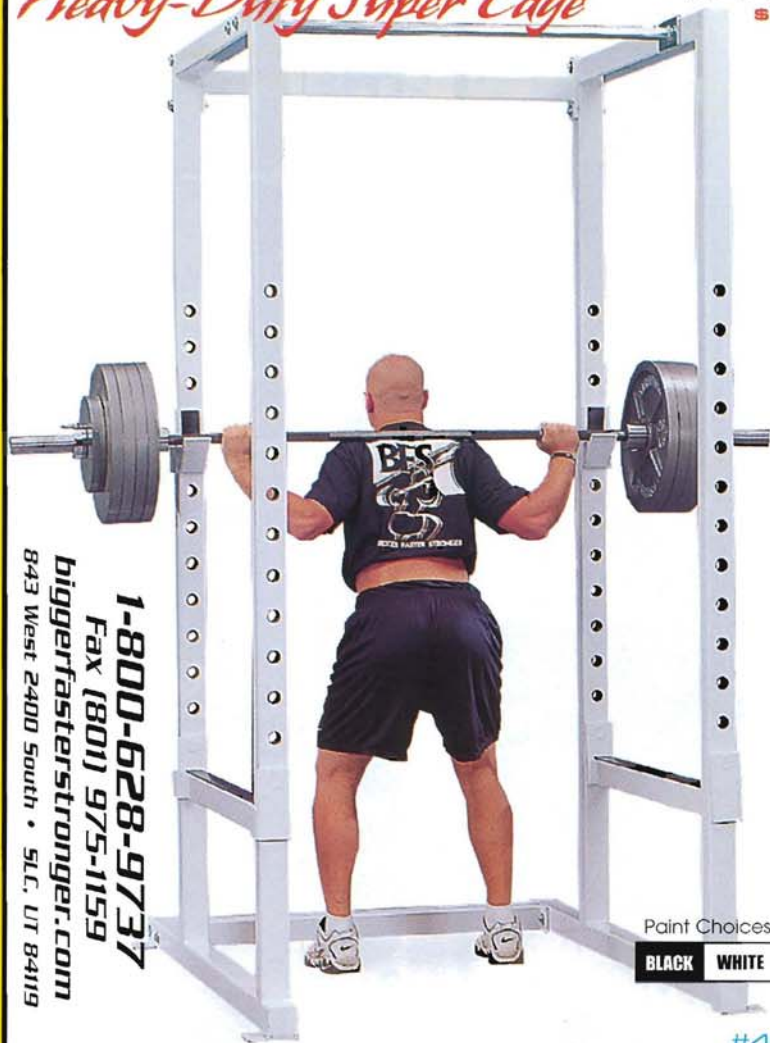
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