

#79 Jesse Boone

WITH ONE MIRACLE  
SEASON COMPLETED, THE  
UNIVERSITY OF UTAH

HOW THE Utes GET STRONG

FOOTBALL TEAM IS  
WORKING HARD TO  
STAY ON TOP

by Kim Goss







#9 Spencer Toone

Although USC earned the national title, the University of Utah captured the hearts of the college football fans. The team's undefeated season, a BCS bowl victory, the number-one draft pick – this was truly a Cinderella season that will forever be remembered in Salt Lake City. But anyone who thinks the season was an anomaly, especially since the team has lost head coach Urban Meyer to Florida and superstar quarter Alex Smith to the 49ers, should think again.

To return to a bowl game the Utes will have to battle through an unpredictable Mountain West Conference. Top contenders include New Mexico, which has earned the runner-up position for the past three years, and Wyoming, which returns 19 starters. Then there's the well-coached and always tough teams of Colorado State and Air Force and – well, you get the idea. It's a season where you must take one game at a time.

“Our goals are to get better each week and win the Mountain West

Conference. Winning the conference should always be our primary goal,” says first-year head coach Kyle Whittingham. Although Whittingham says it's unrealistic for the Utes to expect another undefeated season due to their key losses at graduation, he says he expects to stay “at or near the top of the conference this year and every year.”

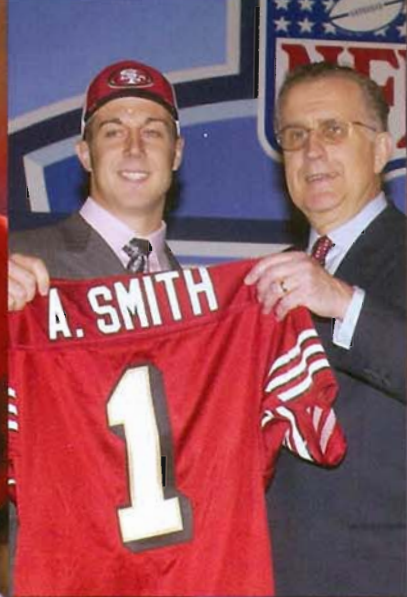


Coach Barry Johnson

To ensure their success, strength coach Barry Johnson has been working hard to push the Utes to even higher levels of speed and strength. A BYU graduate, Johnson has worked at the University of Virginia, Washington State and the University of the Pacific. Among the athletes he has coached who have gone on to play on Sundays are Drew Bledsoe, Robbie Tobeck, Tiki Barber, Ronde Barber, Aaron Brooks, Jamie Sharper, James Farrior, Patrick Kearney and Jared Allen.

A personable gentlemen who has achieved the highest level of respect from his peers, Coach Johnson shares with *BFS* readers his training philosophy and the outlook for the 2005 Utah football team.



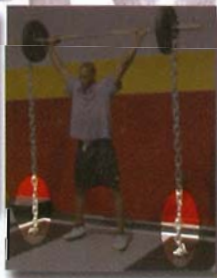


Alex Smith lead the Utes to an undefeated season and was the #1 pick in the NFL Draft.

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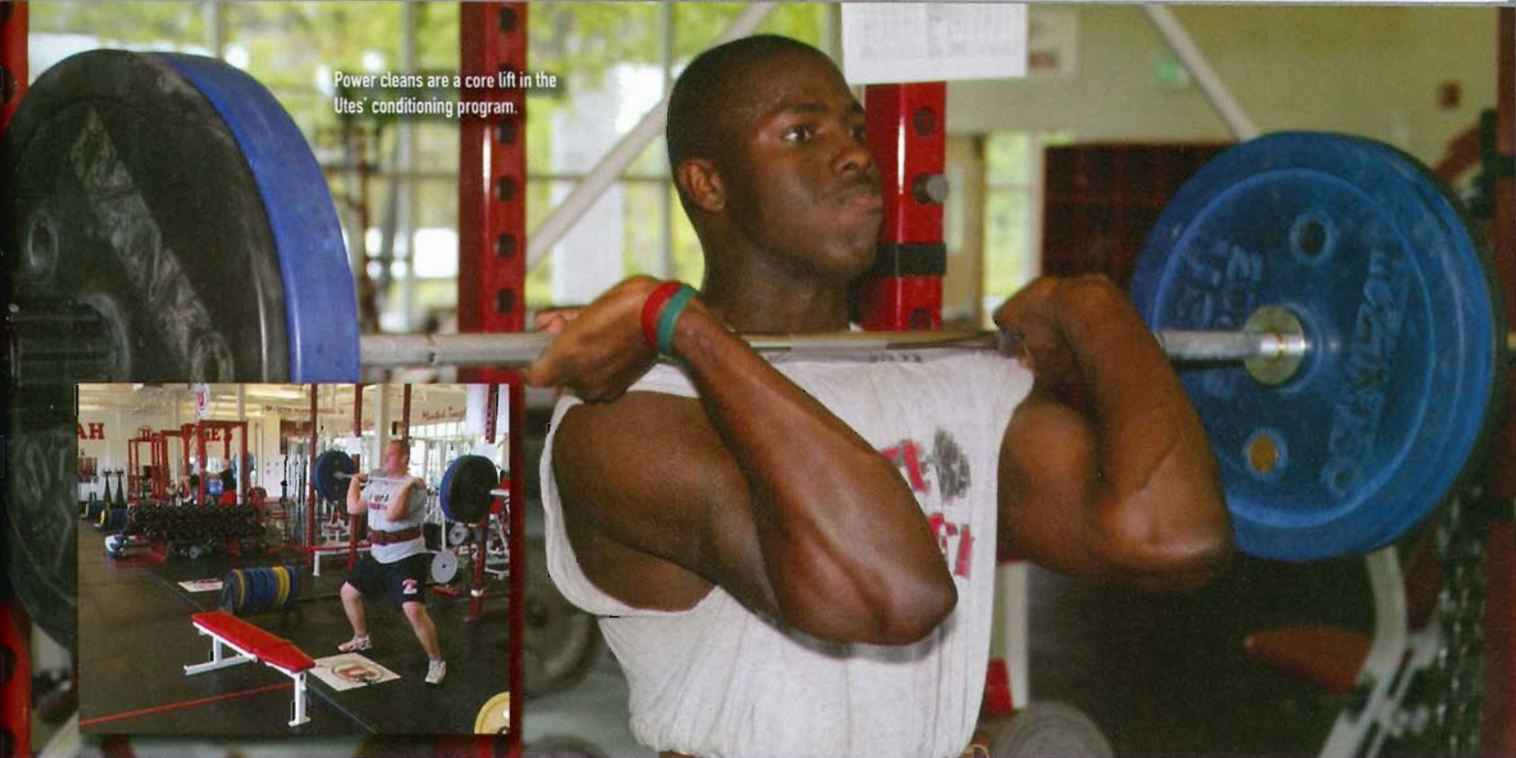
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Power cleans are a core lift in the Utes' conditioning program.



**BFS:** You've worked with many college athletes who went on to successful careers in the NFL. Are there any common characteristics among these athletes?

**Johnson:** Almost all have been people of high character who were focused on the end result, looking at the future versus the moment. They never made decisions that would interfere with achieving the prize. For example, if not getting along with a coach was going to be a detriment to their goals, they would find a way to get along with that coach.

**BFS:** Jesse Boone is the Utah center who appears on the cover of this issue. What can you tell me about him that sets him apart?

**Johnson:** He's focused on the end result, which for him is becoming an All American and playing at the next level. He is going to work on exactly what he needs to reach his goals.

**BFS:** You left college coaching to coach at the high school level for several years. Why did you come back to college?

**Johnson:** Very few high school athletes have their eyes on any kind of prize, and it was very difficult to get them to attend my weight sessions. It was a big letdown for me to have all this knowledge and not able to impart it because of unmotivated kids.

**BFS:** What are the major differences between coaching high school athletes and college athletes?

**Johnson:** A high school strength coach needs to be very adaptable, while a college coach can come in with a particular philosophy and

have a chance to get things done with it. A college coach has the advantage of having athletes knowing they need to lift, and he never really has to fight for attendance. And because he can work with single-sport athletes, he can give periodization plans that fit them really well. In high school you have multi-sport athletes, and it's harder to implement your philosophy.

**BFS:** Some strength coaches believe that athletes just need to perform powerlifting and play the sport. Do you disagree with this type of approach?

**Johnson:** I think you have to have a movement approach, and that's how I would describe what I try to do. I gear everything towards movements, with tools such as the squat and the clean to get the movements we're looking for.

**BFS:** Is that something you recommend for high school athletes: a more balanced approach with plyometrics and running – not just lifting?

**Johnson:** That's absolutely right. Weight training is just one main tool. Plyometrics is another, as are sprinting, overspeed running and agility drills.

**BFS:** Do you recommend cleans from the floor over hang cleans?

**Johnson:** If I clean two days in a row, I'll do one day from the floor and one day from the hang to give more recovery to the back extensors. So to answer your question, yes, I like to go from the floor, but I still use the hang clean as part of my training.







#94 Steve Fitila

Head Coach Kyle Whittingham

**BFS:** You also like your players to perform jerks. How would that Olympic lifting movement benefit a football player?

**Johnson:** To me that lift is one of the best measures of upper body strength, and I also like it because during the jerk the hips and shoulders move together; and the hips and shoulders are always moving together in sport.

**BFS:** You've said you prefer vinyl surfaces on platforms to a wood surface. Is that because the athletes who lift in tennis shoes are more likely to slip on wood?

**Johnson:** Yes, I prefer the vinyl platforms. When wood gets sweat or chalk on it or if it's walked on a lot, it gets slick; and athletes can slip when they lift.

**BFS:** Do you have any special training devices you like to use, such as chains or acceleration ladders?

**Johnson:** I use all sorts. It's hard for a guy to do the same lifts for five years and stay really motivated. I like chains, and all different types of running tools, such as harnesses that have a quick release on them so you can go from overload to overspeed training, sleds, parachutes and medicine balls. One of the devices I really love is suspension bands, which are nylon straps with handles on the end we suspend from power racks. We do suspended push-ups, incline pull-ups, and we even have ab routines we do with them.

**BFS:** How do you train linemen differently from skill-position players?

**Johnson:** For me there's not a lot of difference, because the linemen have the same needs as the skill guys, especially the ability to move really quickly in a short distance — what I call “three-step quickness.” They have to run, they have to move well, they need to be explosive — so

I don't train the linemen a lot differently from the skill people. The major differences are in the supplementary exercises, so I might have interior players do more shoulder work, as these players often injure that area of the body.

**BFS:** Is it a common trend you're seeing in college football, to make linemen more mobile and not be as concerned with getting them as large as possible?

**Johnson:** That's been the philosophy almost everywhere I've been, and we use bodyfat testing to help determine the right bodyweight for our linemen. We'd like these athletes to weigh around 300 or 310, but it's more important for them not to be “sloppy” so they can move. So we may have a guy play at 290 versus 320 if it makes him less sloppy. Now if we can get a guy weighing 320 and he moves well, then that's fine.

**BFS:** How would you describe your working relationship with Kyle Whittingham?

**Johnson:** Coach Whittingham has as much knowledge about strength and conditioning as just about any football coach in the country. He fully realizes the importance of it, more so than anybody I've been with. He knew about it as a player, and he's really stayed abreast of what's going on in the profession. He likes to know the reason for everything that we do, and he likes that I bring more science and knowledge to this area.

**BFS:** Here's a loaded question: What do you think of BFS magazine?

**Johnson:** I really like *BFS* magazine. I like its content, as the stories help athletes see how many of their athletic dreams can come true if



BFS Editor Kim Goss and Coach Johnson





they do the right kinds of things. I'm also an advocate of BFS training because it gives a high school program a philosophy and goals to work toward.

**BFS:** Is there a team that you're personally looking forward to playing this year?

**Johnson:** I'm really looking forward to the BYU game, as it's an in-state rivalry – that's really exciting for me.

**BFS:** Who will be your toughest challenge in the Mountain West Conference?

**Johnson:** That's a hard question to answer, but I will say that Wyoming is certainly a team that needs to be reckoned with this year in the race for the title.

**BFS:** With your success last year, are you concerned that your team may be overconfident going into this football season?

**Johnson:** There is anything but complacency – this is the hardest-working, most focused team I've ever been with. Our theme throughout the off-season has been "It's hard to get to the top, but it's harder to stay there."



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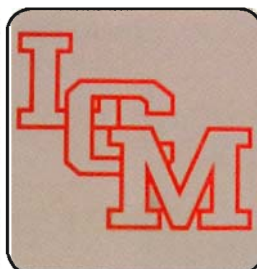
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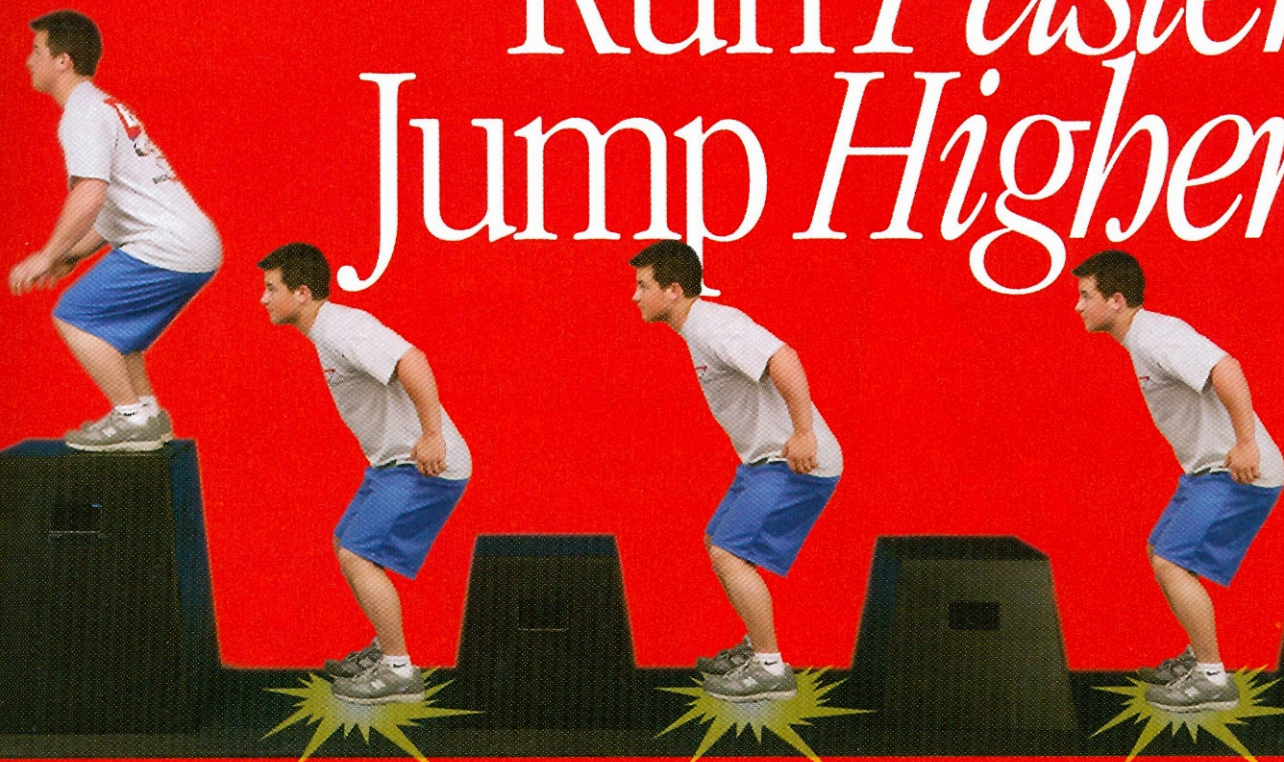
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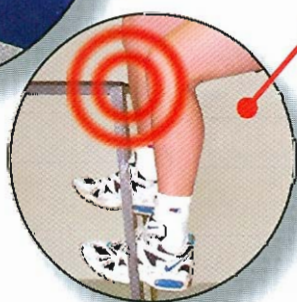


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