



Here is *BFS* Editor Kim Goss when he was a sports editor in college. The device he is working with his fingers was called a typewriter.

INSIDE SCOOP:

The Editor

Spills the Beans

After three decades, this magazine editor has plenty to say about the world of fitness and bodybuilding publications

BY KIM GOSS

I started competitive weightlifting in the '70s, and at the time my “coach” was *Strength and Health* magazine. Seriously. What other choice did I have? There weren't many Olympic lifting coaches where I lived at the time. The same was true for anyone who was interested in powerlifting and bodybuilding back then, as there were few coaches for these sports and high school coaches generally couldn't provide much help with training. Naturally, much of our information came from magazines.

I'm not alone in this experience. Many *BFS* readers are coaches and former athletes (who are now parents of young athletes) who were similarly brought up on various weight training and bodybuilding magazines. That's one reason that *BFS* magazine has been such an inspiration to high school coaches for almost three decades. I've interviewed countless coaches who tell me they still have every *BFS* magazine they ever got. That is a point of pride for us at *BFS*, but it's only half the story I have to tell. Having written for dozens of major

fitness and weight training publications over the past 30 years, I am disturbed at what is going on in my profession. Let me explain.

In the Biz

Although I had done freelance writing since 1977, my first full-time editing job was in 1984, when I became a senior editor at *Runner's World*. There I worked on several fitness magazines, including a women's bodybuilding magazine called *Strength Training for Beauty*. My boss was Laura Dayton, whose brother, Mike Dayton, was a former Mr. America who had roomed with Arnold himself. Laura was an ideal mentor for me, as she was one of the most widely published magazine writers in fitness and bodybuilding.

The most important lesson Laura taught me about writing in this business is that, when dealing with the general public, emotion is much more salable than logic. This is why Richard Simmons is a bigger household name than Louie Simmons and why Dr. Phil can come across as an expert on diet and

exercise. It's also why, now that I'm a magazine editor, I seek out experts such as Charles Poliquin, Paul Gagné and Dr. Guy Voyer to appear in *BFS* – brilliant men whom the mainstream media often ignore.

Anyway, the title of this article requires me to divulge some trade secrets, so here are a few.

First, what many people don't realize is that virtually all the content of most newsstand fitness and bodybuilding magazines is influenced by advertisers. Often two thirds of the copies you see on a newsstand don't sell by their pull date (although the vendors do not have to pay for what they do not sell); thus, the cover price is not going to take care of the expenses involved with producing the magazine. One reason a vendor would carry a magazine that doesn't sell well is that they may not have a choice – some publishers “bundle” their titles to distributors. Want *Sports Illustrated*, which is published by Time Inc.? Then you may also have to carry *Sports Illustrated for Kids*.

Because it's so important to have advertisers to stay in business, magazine editors often need to make ethical compromises to attract advertisers and keep advertisers happy. If an advertiser gives you \$10,000 for a full-page ad about their cellulite thigh cream, chances are you will never allow any negative comments about such products to appear in your magazine and may even run an article about how effective these products are. I know this firsthand.

When I worked for a business in Southern California in the '90s that conducted fitness seminars, I was visited by an ad salesperson representing one of the largest fitness magazines in the world. This woman said she loved our work and that if we would agree to buy several ads over the next few issues, they would write an article about our seminars. An article would do more to promote our seminars than the ads would, so in effect we would be buying a news article. And if you doubt the effectiveness of news over advertising, just look at the number of books that sell after an author appears on Oprah!

The control over content is one reason that it is so difficult for freelance fitness writers to get published in many national magazines. The magazines simply use in-house writers who work closely with their advertisers to make certain that they are pleased with what is being said about their product or service. And the more expensive the ad, the bigger the plug. For example, the back cover is the most expensive place to advertise. Buy a full-color ad on the back cover instead of a one-page black and white on the inside, and you might see a three-page article about that product instead of a one-page. You get what you pay for.

And what about peer-reviewed journals? In theory, journals can be more objective because they are often published on a print-to-order basis,



In addition to working as a writer, Goss also was involved in the professional modeling aspect of the magazine business. Here is the lead photo for an article about the health benefits of wine – notice the stylin' way he wears a sweater!

which profmeans that the approximate number of copies that will be sold is known beforehand. Thus, if you become a member of a fitness organization, part of your membership dues goes toward buying their professional journal. The problem is that many of these journals still accept outside advertising, and when you're talking hundreds of thousands of dollars in additional revenue for that organization, there is always potential for conflict of interest.

What Can Be Done?

While there is still much valuable information in fitness magazines, the lesson is to be skeptical about what you read. That goes for online magazines as well. And when the potential reader is an impressionable young person, there's another level of concern that goes beyond mere bias: There is an endless supply of garbage instantly accessible online or on display in stores. Everyone who works with kids can appreciate the challenges in avoiding unsavory sources in favor of information that is safe, reliable and helpful.

While we're not advocating censorship in a country where freedom of speech is our birthright, we all have the responsibility to make sure the information we introduce to young people is age appropriate and reliable. If you are a coach, PE instructor or school administrator, you can contribute by being proactive in providing information to your athletes, whether the medium is paper, video, film or the Internet.

The Message Is the Medium

Elsewhere in this issue we discuss how to have a great website with Varsity Networks, and in essence you can also have your own TV station on the Web with Maxcast. Maxcast allows you to create your own TV station on the Web in which you not only control all the content but also who is allowed to watch it. Want to broadcast your homecoming game? You can do it. Want to have a school news channel? You can do it.

Is BFS involved in Varsity Networks and Maxcast? Yes, we are. We are pleased to say we offer their services because they can have a positive impact on today's youth and can give athletes an alternative means of acquiring information. We'll have more about Varsity Networks and Maxcast in the future. In the meantime, I'm going to look back at my old issues of *Strength and Health* magazine and reminisce about the good ol' days! BFS

