

Secrets of Speed: The BFS Push/Pull Sled



BFS introduces an amazing new tool for increasing running speed and power

Running and resistance training are two basic components of virtually all sports conditioning programs, and one of the challenges to strength coaches is finding activities that do both at the same time. This concept is known as *specificity of training*.

Specificity refers to working athletic qualities as they occur in specific sports; as such, athletes who compete in multiple sports can reach higher levels of ability by participating in sports that require complementary skills.

For example, a football lineman could benefit from joining the wrestling team, and a volleyball player would do well to go out for basketball. Likewise, it's smart to use this concept when deciding what exercises to perform in the weightroom.

In the BFS off-season program, after the core lifts are completed, BFS recommends that several auxiliary exercises be performed that are specific to that athlete's upcoming sport. Want to throw harder and swim with more power? Then upper back exercises such as lat pulldowns and chin-ups would be a good use of your time. Need to jump higher? Then glute-ham raises are a must. But what

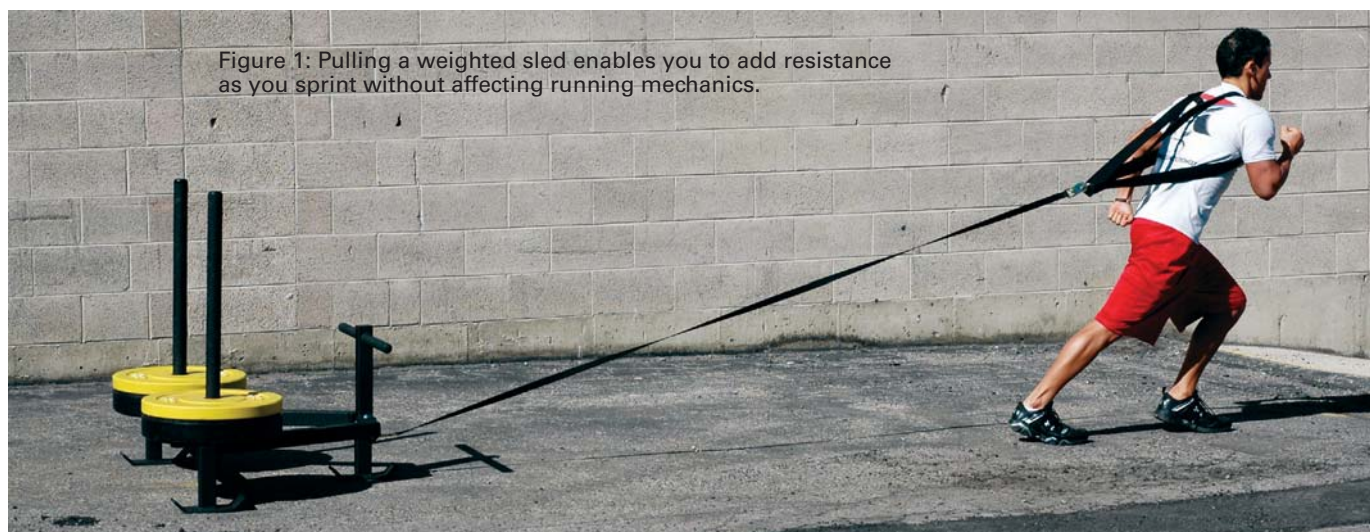


Figure 1: Pulling a weighted sled enables you to add resistance as you sprint without affecting running mechanics.

about exercises for sprinting?

High-velocity weight training exercises work the muscles at the high speeds that occur during sprinting; so to run faster, power cleans and power snatches are a must. But to simulate the running motion, you should seriously consider the sport-specific exercises that can be performed with the BFS Push/Pull Sled.

The Evolution of Sled Training

According to strongman Art McDermott, we may have the Scandinavian forestry industry to thank

for sled training, as loggers would drag trees from areas of the forest not accessible by trucks. In his book, *Applied Strongman Training for Sport*, McDermott says that Finnish powerlifters were known for their deadlifting ability, and powerlifting guru Louie Simmons learned from these athletes that dragging trees was a key factor in their success in this lift.

The BFS Push/Pull Sled, which is made in the USA, allows you to attach a pulling harness to the weighted sled so you can run with resistance (Figure 1). This method is superior to running

uphill and/or adding ankle weights, as both of these methods affect the biomechanics of the running motion. The method of running with a parachute is valuable for developing speed endurance, but because you must take several steps before the parachute opens, resistance is delayed. In contrast, pulling a sled provides immediate resistance; besides, a parachute cannot provide the high levels of resistance to the muscles that a sled can. Being able to accelerate quickly from the start is key to athletic success.

According to Mario Greco, a



Figure 2. The low horizontal handles enable you to use more weight to develop more strength and acceleration from a low position, whereas the high vertical handles will work the transition phase between the start of a sprint and the upright sprint position.

strength coach from Canada who has worked with many of the fastest sprinters in the world, you should only use a pulling sled for short distances. “You seldom want to pull a heavy sled past 25 yards, because that ignores how your body works,” says Greco. “Once your body goes into an upright position through the transition phase of a sprint, acceleration is basically zero. The problem with using the sled this way is that if you keep pulling it, let’s say for 100 yards, you’re always working to drive, drive, drive – it’s not natural. Plus you start fatiguing, and when you fatigue, you start to see a breakdown in body mechanics – it’s like doing sets of 15 in the power clean.”

When Greco introduces sled training to his athletes, he doesn’t use any additional weight. “At first I just use the weight of the sled – I just want them to feel that something is there.” He adds that during practice he varies the weight according to how the athlete is performing that day. “This is where a coach has to watch, because you don’t want to see a breakdown in technique – you don’t want the athlete muscling down the track.”

While pulling a sled is valuable, there are many advantages to pushing a sled. When you push a sled, your arms are stationary, and this allows you to focus more on leg drive. With lighter weights this can be valuable in perfecting running technique (because you don’t have to concentrate on proper arm action), and with heavy weights you can develop power and strength.

There are two basic ways to push the BFS Push/Pull Sled: grasping the low horizontal handles or grasping the high vertical handles (Figure 2). The lower position will enable you to use more weight to focus on developing more strength and acceleration from a low position, whereas the high vertical

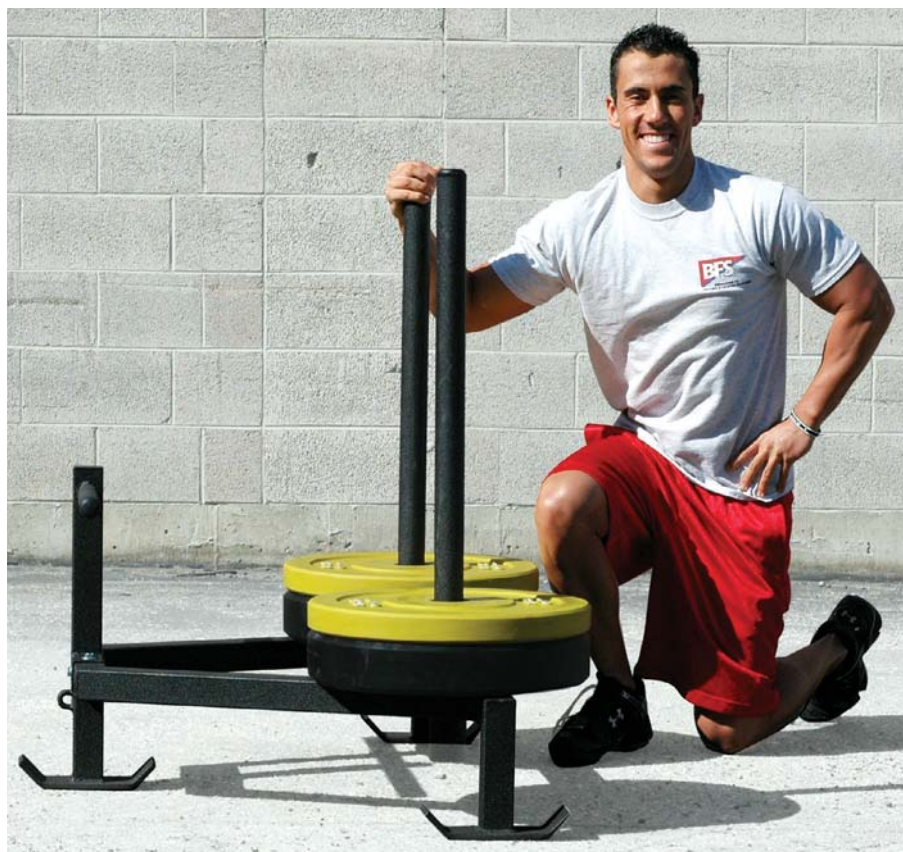


Figure 3. The BFS Push/Pull Sled is an American-made product of the highest quality.

handles will work the transition phase between the start of a sprint and the upright sprint position. One effective workout is to perform several runs in the lower position, followed by several runs in the high position with slightly less weight. You could then finish the workout by either pulling the sled or simply performing several regular sprints.

Another great workout with the BFS Push/Pull Sled is to use a contrast method of training, in which you push the sled with the high vertical handles for about 10-15 yards, then release the handles and take off in an all-out sprint. What you’ll find is that when you release the handles, you will experience a sudden burst of speed, as if someone were pushing you from behind. In effect, what is happening with contrast training is that when you push the sled, you activate the most powerful fast-

twitch muscle fibers, and these fibers are still activated for several seconds when you release the sled. The result is that you will run faster than you could otherwise.

Unlike football sleds, which are designed to be used on grass, the BFS Push/Pull Sled is designed to be used on concrete, asphalt or any hard surface, making it much more practical (Figure 3). The frame is made with heavy, 11-gauge steel tubing, and the slide plates are made of 3/8-inch solid steel (which is twice as hard as aluminum and longer lasting). And to add enough resistance for the strongest athletes, the unit comes with two Olympic plate holders. An instructional video is provided.

BFS is excited to introduce the Push/Pull Sled to athletes serious about becoming faster and more powerful, regardless of their sport. Consider it a push in the right direction. **BFS**



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