

The Power Clean *for Athletes*

Can a transfer of power take place between the weightroom and athletics?



BY DR. GREG SHEPARD, BFS FOUNDER/CEO

[Editor's note: Although this article on the origins of Coach Shepard's training methods was written 18 years ago, the ideas are still relevant today.]

At BFS we believe the power clean is essential for athletes who want to achieve their full athletic potential. Moreover, athletes who have attained an elite status of physical development in size, speed and power would rapidly get slower, weaker and less explosive if they were to replace power movement exercises with some

other type of training.

As a college football player in the early 1960s, I did cleans, snatches and jerks. I lifted in Olympic-style weightlifting meets in Austria, but I did it solely to become a better football player. A nice side benefit was that it was fun, and besides, I liked competition.

At this time there were no strength coaches, and strength training in any form was not generally done. I'm sure that in the early 1960s only a handful of football players nationwide did a

"quick" lift such as a clean, snatch or similar type of movement.

In 1967 while finishing up a master's degree in exercise physiology at the University of Oregon, I also trained the football team. We did power cleans. At that time, we may have been the only college in America to do power cleans with a football team. One All-American defensive back I trained, Jim "Yazoo" Smith, snapped up 275 pounds on his power clean.

In the late 1960s I trained in

Brian Doffing is one of the 10 football players from Conway Springs High School in Conway, Kansas, to power clean 300 pounds last season. In 2011 the Cardinals won their seventh state championship since 1998 and had a string of 62 straight wins!



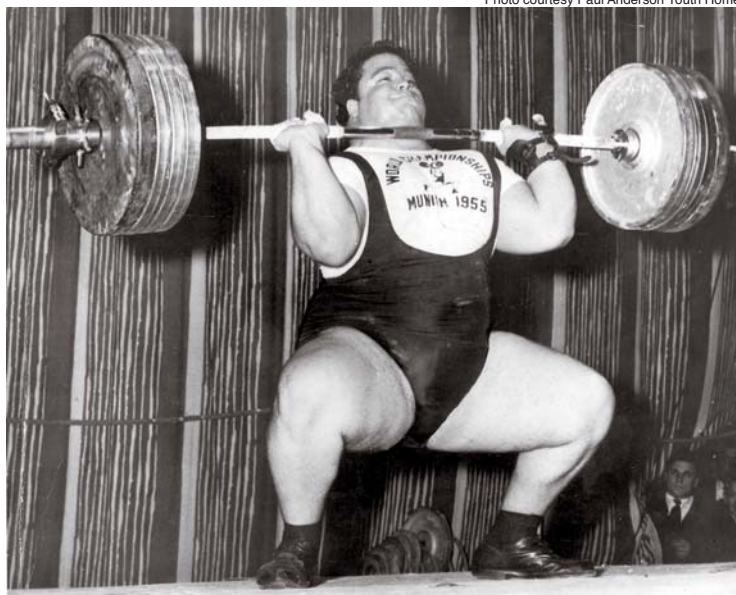
Photo: Nate Jones, Wellington Daily News.

Los Angeles during the summers and coached football and other sports at Sehome High School in Bellingham, Washington, during the school year. In LA I had the opportunity to see how throwers in track were trained. About 30 guys weighed in at about 275, and most of them could run a 4.6 forty. I was amazed. Were they just genetically gifted above every pro football player, or were they doing something that could be duplicated? I chose to think the secret of reaching one's athletic potential was by doing power cleans and parallel squats combined with flexibility, speed, jumping and agility drills.

I wasn't the only one looking for an edge. Back then there were Russian coaches sneaking around to see what we were doing. We were stronger and were beating them in the discus and shot. They took our training secrets back to the Soviet Union and then to Eastern Europe. Soon after, we had our hands full at the Olympic Games in the 1970s. The US could no longer dominate in these two throwing events. In the meantime, unfortunately, our college and pro football teams were screwing around with Nautilus training principles and machines. Our throwers looked at them and just shook their heads.

When I took the secret of the LA throwers back to Sehome High School's track and football programs, the results were amazing. That next track season we had 11 guys who threw the discus 140 to 180 feet. If you couldn't throw 155 feet, you had to throw on the JV team. In football we played Snohomish

High School for the state championship and held them to minus 77 yards. I believe we were the only football team – high school or college – doing cleans in the state in 1970. Incidentally, we had 50 players who ran the forty in 4.5 to 5.0 seconds.



Paul Anderson won the Olympics in 1956 and that year officially clean and jerked 440 pounds. Outside of the sport of weightlifting, during Anderson's era few athletes did power cleans.

All-American and get drafted high by the pros?"

"Well, sure," he stammered, "and who the heck are you?"

"I'm the weight training coach for football. Put down those wimpy little weights and come over here." I was con-

fident – I had the secret and no competition. To my knowledge Georgia was the only other college with a weight coach, and I was pretty sure they didn't clean or train like throwers.

Five months later Howard weighed 275 pounds and ran a 4.8 forty. That was the fastest time of any lineman that year. He power cleaned 300 pounds, became an All-American and enjoyed a 12-year career with the Denver Broncos.

The following year

Boyd Epley was hired as the Nebraska strength coach, so then there was competition. Boyd had roots in track as a pole vaulter. Not only that, he was a genius at organization and had great vision. He organized the NSCA, and many of his assistants went on to become college and pro strength coaches.

What has always astounded me is the time it takes people to catch on. It wasn't until last year [1993] that all Division I football schools had full-time strength coaches. Incidentally, in the 1980s the NSCA organized clinics to travel to Russia and East German countries such as Bulgaria to find out the real secret. Want to know what they found out? You have to combine the quick lifts with plyometrics, speed and flexibility training. It was the same

College School Daze

The next year I went to Brigham Young University to earn a doctorate in physical education and exercise physiology, and also to become a strength coach. My first experience was fantastic. I saw this football player, Paul Howard, working hard with a bunch of body-building exercises. I asked him what he was doing.

"I'm working out for football," he replied, sweating profusely.

"How'd you do last year?" I asked.

"Okay – All-Conference Honorable Mention on the defensive line, but next season they're switching me to offense."

"How big and fast are you?"

"Almost 6-4, 235, and I run a 5.15 forty."

I looked at him dead-serious and asked, "Do you want to be an



2009 BFS High School Male Athlete of the Year Jared Abbrederis' hard work with the BFS program at Wautoma High School in Wautoma, Wisconsin, enabled him to help lead his Hornets to a state championship; and after graduation Abbrederis went on to become a starter at the University of Wisconsin.

thing our American throwers were doing in the 1960s and still do today.

My heart has always been in coaching high school football, and the joy of turning a program around is deep in my blood. After two years at BYU, I looked for the worst football program around. I found the requisite school in Idaho, and after three highly successful seasons I took on a similar situation in Salt Lake City. I was named football coach of the year in my first season. In every situation we used free weights. Our big lifts were the parallel squat and the power clean. We also produced the shot put state champ.

Coaches began asking how in the world a program could turn around so fast. Thus, the Bigger Faster Stronger program began as a business in 1977. In 1981 I began another pioneering effort with the Utah Jazz. At that time and for several years I was the only strength coach in the NBA. Now [in 1994] there are 18 full-time NBA strength coaches and five consultant coaches. The average annual salary is

over \$50,000. The Jazz have led the NBA the last eight out of nine years as the team with the fewest games missed by players due to injuries. Our best power clean was 300 pounds, achieved by Blue Edwards, who is now a star for the Milwaukee Bucks.

Slowly, each year more and more high schools, universities and pros caught on to the secret. Each year I am progressively impressed with our BFS High School All-American teams. This year we had 22 football players power clean 300 or better! I was also pleasantly surprised at the response when I decided to talk to each PAC-10 strength coach. Everyone does the power clean or a variation and thinks it is a top three – or better – lift to do.

Throwers still do extraordinary feats. Stefan Fernholm at his peak was 6-1 ½ and 270 pounds while running a 4.25 forty with a 40-inch non-step vertical jump. Another one of his Swedish teammates, shot put champion Soren Tallhem, high-jumped 7 feet at a bodyweight of 250 pounds. Are they genetic wonders?

My sincere feeling is that every Division 1 university has 10 football players at the same genetic level. They need to train like Stefan and Soren consistently for a few years. That means doing power cleans with flawless technique.

I am convinced the power clean can help an athlete achieve a fluid athletic build. This is quite different from a bodybuilder's physique. A big football lineman who currently concentrates only on benches, squats and bodybuilding exercises with an upper body/lower body workout mentality can make a noticeable improvement in his athletic build by performing power cleans correctly and making them a number-one priority. This same lineman would improve his playing ability and decrease his risk of injury on the field.

The BFS program has changed very little since our business began in 1977. We do the power clean, snatch and jerk press each once per week. The key is not so much what to do anymore but knowing how to get your technique flawless. **BFS**

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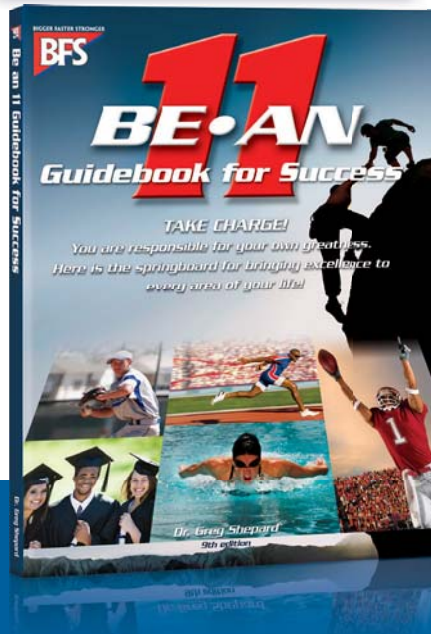
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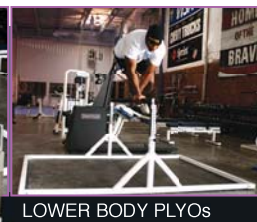
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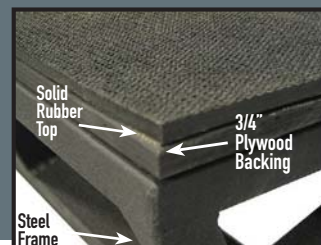
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