



The Power to *Prevail*

#4 Michael Perkins

Athens athletes are using BFS to win games and prepare for life after high school

BY LAANNA CARRASCO, MA

*“Nothing can duplicate the confidence you gain from working hard in the weightroom. It gives you a physical *and* mental edge.”*

— Luke Mroczenski, senior at Athens High School

Less than four years ago Coach Ryan Bargender introduced the BFS program to the Athens High School athletes in Athens, Wisconsin. With BFS providing solid groundwork for their physical and psychological development, the Athens athletes have completely transformed themselves and are winning more games in a variety of sports.

The football team made school history this past season, finishing 8-2 with a share of the conference title. Prior

to 2009, a year in which the football team went over .500 for the first time in five years, the team had been losing season after season, with a disappointing 20-35 record over the previous half decade. Coach Bargender's enthusiasm and commitment to BFS started the turnaround, and Athens football has had greater success ever since.

In 2012 the team won its first-ever home playoff game 48-0, and the returning players have set their sights on a state title in 2013. They are ready

to work hard for it – their 2013 motto is “No Grind, No Glory.”

Building strong, fast, powerful and balanced athletes is what a periodized weight training program like BFS is all about. For example, Luke Mroczenski, a senior football player who will attend the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse next year, says that “the most important thing I’ve learned from being part of the BFS program is how important working in the off-season is.” He explains that Athens’ intense summer weightlifting program has allowed him and the rest of the football team to continually gain size and strength since his freshman year.



Game Day!



Under the leadership of Coach Ryan Bargender, the Athens Bluejays turned around their struggling football program to finish the 2012 season with a share of the conference title.

“Doing the BFS program as a team was a huge role in our success,” Mroczenski says. “Lifting together pushed teammates more, causing a little friendly competitiveness, which resulted in better performance on the game field.” The structured training cycles also contributed to increased athleticism. Mroczenski says he never found himself overly fatigued and that “BFS is simple and efficient.”

Football is not the only sport that has benefited from the BFS program. Baseball has made the sectional playoffs for the last three years (2010 was their first sectional berth since 1982!). Girls volleyball and girls softball have been

conference champions for the past three years as well.

The middle school gym classes at Athens also use the BFS weightlifting program. Grades 7 through 12 are all in one building at Athens – it’s a small school with only 216 high school students, making it easy to reach a lot of kids with BFS and the Be an 11 program.

Along with Coach Bargender, Coach Dale Westfall runs a beginning weight training class for grades 3 through 6 using PVC pipes to teach kids form, flexibility and body control. Starting young is a smart plan because recent research shows that weight

training is appropriate for youth as early as age 7. By doing technique-oriented training in elementary school, kids can accumulate training years at a younger age and can have up to 10 years of serious training behind them by age 17.

In addition, age-appropriate training throughout puberty can help kids to manage adolescent awkwardness. Studies show that weight training, which encourages the building of neuromuscular strength in youth, can help kids maintain coordination during growth spurts. Being able to “move well” doesn’t just prevent injury, it gives kids confidence in school.

Both Bargender and Mroczenski

affirm that when kids break records in the weightroom in the morning, they carry that confidence with them for the rest of the day. Physical confidence and social self-assurance are irresistible for kids. Bargender has noticed that more kids who aren't playing sports are entering the weightroom on their own at 6 a.m. as part of the school's POWER club (**P**ersistence + **O**rganization + **W**ork ethic + **E**nthusiasm = **R**esults). Students who aren't athletes "see the gains made by the athletes, and it's appealing to them," Bargender says.

"I absolutely believe that the BFS program has been a positive influence in the lives of students outside of athletic endeavors," says assistant football coach Craig Diedrich. He's heard parents say that BFS makes the athletes' lives better at home. "It teaches mental toughness and values that are necessary to survive in everyday life," Diedrich says.

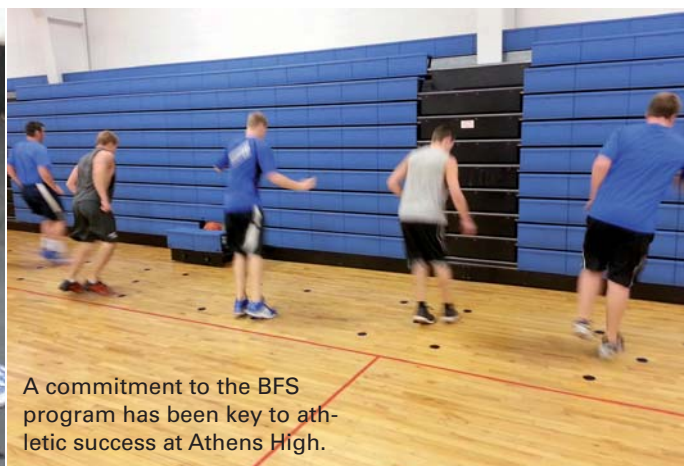
The Athens community has bought into the program as well. Not only does the community enjoy and support the school's sports teams, Bargender says that many local employers have encouraged the kids who have summer jobs to work out with the summer BFS training program in the morning before reporting to work.

Athens is not the only school in Wisconsin that has a strong weight training program to prepare kids for a life of fitness. As a high school athlete in 1993, Bargender himself used the BFS program at nearby Edgar High School under football coach Jerry Sinz. Bargender's experience using the BFS program under an elite coach like Sinz (who has led Edgar to numerous state football championships) showed him that an organized program like BFS is the way to go to build solid athletes.

Mroczenski plans to take the BFS

program with him to college, where he will play intramural sports and lift weights. He will use what he's learned from BFS to create a training program to keep him in shape, and "maybe even keep that 'freshman fifteen' away from me," he says.

Mroczenski and other athletes continue to benefit from Bargender's determination to use BFS to the fullest at Athens. As a student himself, Bargender experienced what a proven weight training and exercise program can do for a young adult. He knew BFS would give Athens athletes the skills to be healthier and live better in the world while negotiating the difficult challenges that set back kids who don't have that same training. Further, with the way BFS builds camaraderie and cohesiveness in the teams, he knew that wins would follow. It's all happening as planned, and Athens athletes are ready for greatness. **BFS**



A commitment to the BFS program has been key to athletic success at Athens High.



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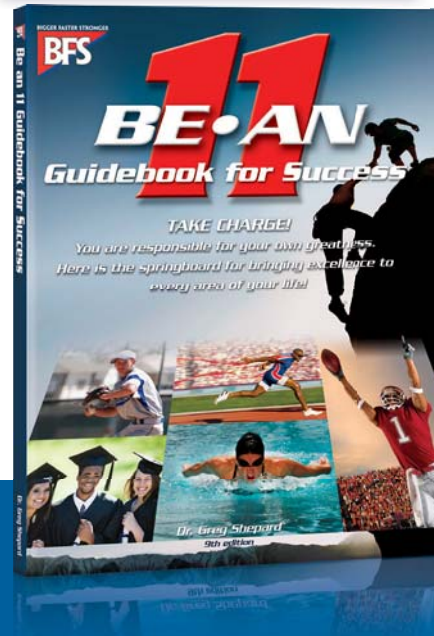
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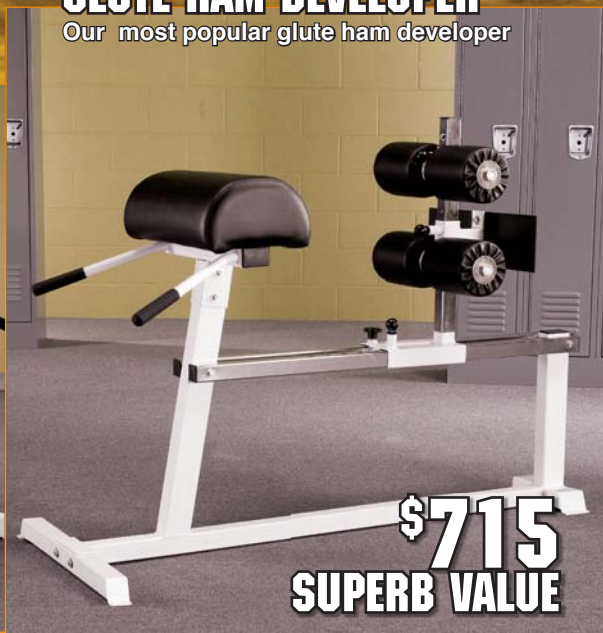
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