BFS is a company dedicated to helping young people succeed on and off the athletic field.

Frequently Asked Questions about BFS

Information for our readers about the company and its program

BFS is a unified program designed to get all the coaches in a school working together to improve the overall physical and athletic fitness of young people. Moreover, BFS goes beyond by helping athletes achieve success in the classroom and in all other areas of life. Through our clinics and publications, over the past 37 years we have been helping coaches improve the effectiveness and safety of their programs to help athletes fulfill their physical potential. We're always pleased to talk about the BFS program, and in this article we answer the questions we get most often.

Q. Who runs BFS?

A. The company was founded by Dr. Greg Shepard in 1976. Now in his 70s, Coach Shepard is in retirement and has left the CEO position in the capable hands of Bob Rowbotham, who has been with BFS since 1979. The president of the company is Bob's son, John Rowbotham. Says Bob about John, "It's often a father's dream to have his son take over his business, but it's more than that. John has lived BFS – from starting the BFS Readiness Program in elementary school, progressing to the BFS program in high school to continuing to perform the BFS core exercises when he played college football. Having 'walked the talk' enables John to relate to athletes and coaches at all levels."

Q. Where is BFS headquartered, and where is the equipment manufactured?

A. The headquarters, manufacturing facility and warehouse for BFS are in Salt Lake City, Utah. Approximately

80 percent of the equipment is manufactured in Utah, but some equipment, such as Olympic bars, are outsourced to other manufacturers that specialize in these products. The warehouse is 70,000 square feet, and the inventory and efficiency of the company is such that regardless of the size of the order, BFS is able to ship stock equipment within 48 hours.

Q. When does BFS recommend that kids begin lifting heavy weights?

A. BFS believes that as our young athletes strive to achieve the highest levels in competitive sports, they must participate in serious training at a younger age than the champions of the past. We also agree with the preponderance of research available on this subject showing that weight training does not present a high risk of injury to young athletes, especially to their growth plates. However, we also recognize that one of the issues in deciding when a young athlete is able to lift heavy weights is that athletes mature at different rates. Thus, a 13-year-old girl may have the physical maturity of a typical 11-year-old girl, whereas another 13-year-old girl may have the physical maturity of a 15-year-old girl.

As a general guideline, at BFS we believe that a properly supervised weight training program is appropriate for young athletes, and that the best time to start teaching proper weight training, lifting and spotting techniques is in middle school. That way, when these young athletes enter high school and a coach determines on an individual basis that they are physically mature enough to lift heavy weights, heavy lifting can be performed safely.

Q. Is the box squat a mandatory exercise in the BFS Program?

A. We believe the box squat is

In 2012 Bob Rowbotham assumed the position of CEO of BFS, and his son John became president of the company.

unparalleled for overcoming plateaus and building hip strength and hip tendon strength. However, the box squat is not a mandatory exercise in the BFS program. The box squat is considered a "squat variation" and can be performed as the first exercise on Monday in the BFS off-season program or as the first exercise on Thursday in the in-season workout.

We understand that there are coaches who refuse to use the box squat, just as there are coaches who reject power snatches or full Olympic lifts because they believe those lifts are too dangerous. And that's fine. The BFS program is flexible, and if for whatever reason a coach refuses to use the box squat in your program, there are alternatives. Use another core lift instead, such as the front squat – or even the hip sled.

Q. Many strength coaches believe the straight-leg deadlift is dangerous. Why does BFS promote it?

A. The straight-leg deadlift is a safe stretching exercise that will not only decrease the risk of injuries but also enable athletes to perform better. But unlike the hex bar deadlift, which develops strength and requires the use of heavy weights, we think of the straight-leg deadlift as a stretching exercise, and therefore only very light weights are used.

Unfortunately, we occasionally hear that some high school athletes are using as much as 400 pounds in the straight-leg deadlift, which is a sure way to seriously injure the lower back. The absolute max anyone should use in the straight-leg deadlift is 40 percent of their best parallel squat; at the junior high school level, boys and girls should use 45 pounds or less.

Q. Does BFS believe that its program has value for endurance sports?

A. Strength and flexibility training can help endurance athletes avoid injury. For example, one of the most common ailments among cyclists is lower back pain. A properly designed conditioning program that includes strength training and stretching may help prevent this type of injury.

Adam Zucco of TrainingBible Coaching, which specializes in training cyclists, triathletes and other endurance athletes, says that because the types of injuries most commonly incurred by endurance athletes are related to overuse, weight training is essential for them. "Since putting my young triathletes on the BFS program, I've seen not only a drastic improvement in performance but a reduction in injuries as well. Also, a lot of athletes I work with don't have a lot of time to train, and weight training is a very efficient way for them to overload the muscles." This overload, adds Zucco, is especially important to cyclists.

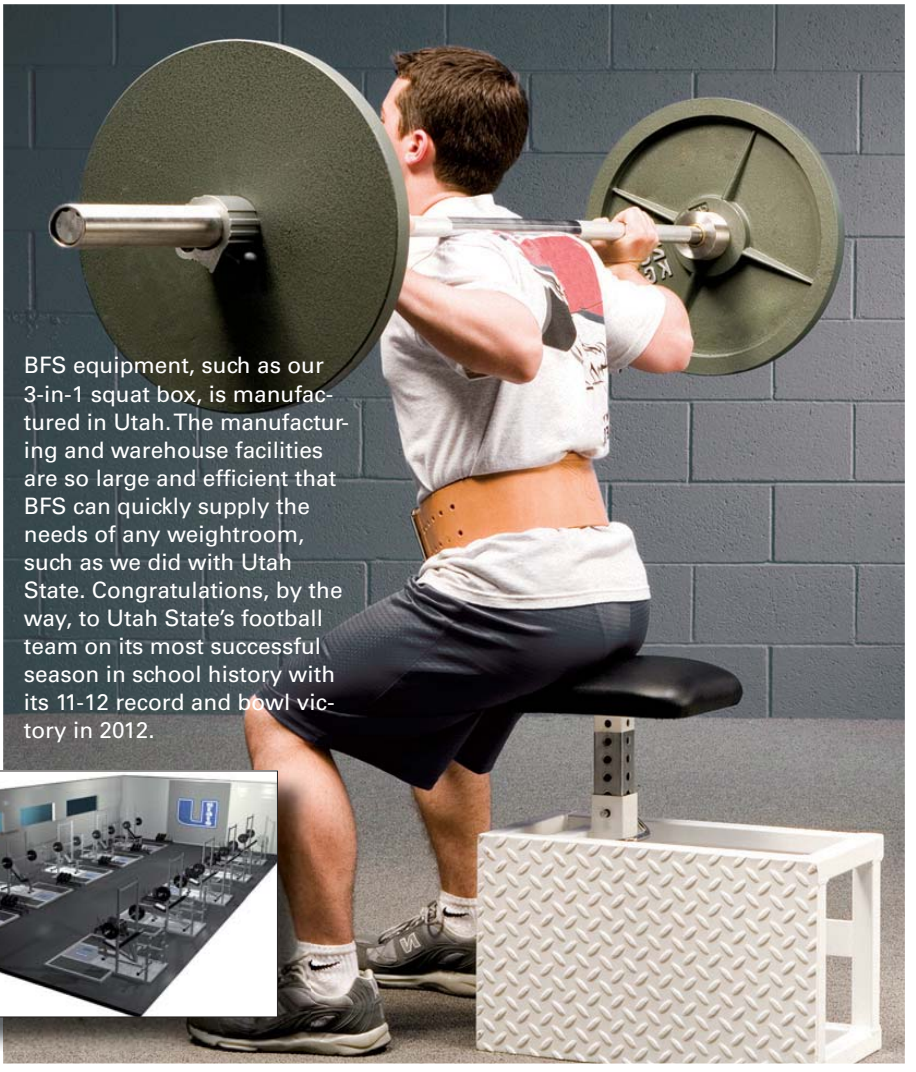
In cycling, Zucco says, stronger athletes can make up for lost time or expand a lead because they can more easily handle hills and accelerate quickly at key points of a race. "With marathoners you are not going to have the sudden bursts of speed as you will in cycling, but a stronger runner will be able to more easily maintain their form on hills. So much of running performance is based upon efficiency, and the more a runner's form breaks down due to fatigue, the more energy it will take to run and the

more likely the runner will be susceptible to injury."

Q. Does BFS believe that free weights are safer than machines?

A. Although machines do have their place in an athlete's training, as a general guideline BFS agrees with strength coach Charles Poliquin that no more than 20 percent of an athlete's training should be performed with machines. Some valuable exercise machines include neck machines and leg curl machines, as it is difficult to isolate these muscles with free weights.

Many of today's gyms feature impressive exercise machines by manufacturers that make extensive claims about their effectiveness, but many machines that seek to emulate free-weight exercises have several drawbacks. For example, one problem with squatting using a Smith machine is that it places significantly higher shearing forces (i.e., forces that work to pry the joint apart) on the knees because the hamstrings are not as active during the exercise. Further, squatting with a barbell on a guided vertical (or slightly angled) path does not allow for natural compensations in the movement of the spine, a restriction that can place unnatural shearing forces on the spine.



BFS equipment, such as our 3-in-1 squat box, is manufactured in Utah. The manufacturing and warehouse facilities are so large and efficient that BFS can quickly supply the needs of any weightroom, such as we did with Utah State. Congratulations, by the way, to Utah State's football team on its most successful season in school history with its 11-12 record and bowl victory in 2012.

The safety of Smith machines has been questioned in court. In earlier issues *BFS* discussed lawsuits in which sports-liability consultant Dr. Marc Rabinoff served as an expert witness. Four of these cases involved individuals who were paralyzed (one of them died during the litigation process) using Smith machines because they didn't know how to properly use the safety apparatus on these machines.

This is not to say that machine exercises have no place in an athlete's training – in fact, they are especially valuable in rehabilitation – but that free-weight exercises such as squats should form the core of an athlete's training.

At BFS seminars, our clinicians emphasize teaching perfect form before lifting heavy weights.

Q. Does BFS believe in stability training, such as using exercises performed on rocker boards?

A. BFS believes that our program develops stability. Kinesiologist Mike Wahl of the fitness company Definitions found that stability training with

The straight-leg deadlift is a safe stretching exercise that will not only decrease the risk of injuries but also enable athletes to perform better. However, it should be performed with only very light weights.

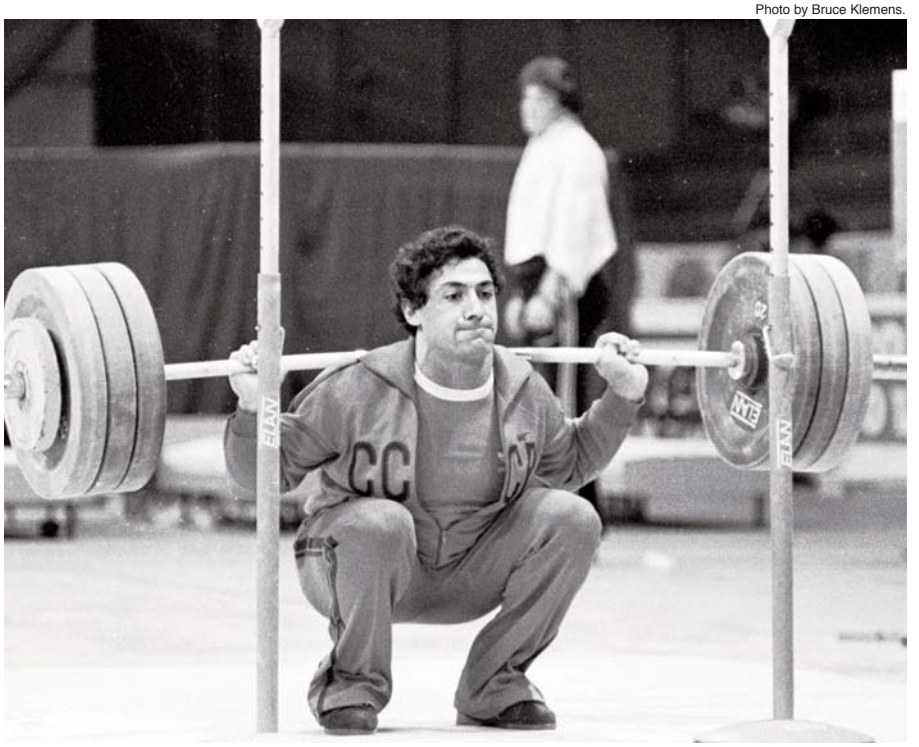
unstable objects can make exercises harder, but that doesn't necessarily make them better.

"What you have to consider is that free-weight training is unstable by nature," says Wahl. "Remember the first time you did a bench press and your arms went everywhere and you had trouble stabilizing your joints? Sure, a Swiss ball exercise can be taxing for someone who has never done any exercise before; but get a first-year physics student to explain the disrupted torque on the body that occurs when someone squats 500 pounds and you'll see that the entire muscle system has to work tremendously hard to handle that type of weight. When an athlete turns their ankle, it's often because they are not strong enough to handle the disrupted force of the activity, so why not train to get used to that excessive force using the principle of progressive resistance?"

Q. What is BFS's position on sport-specific exercises?

A. We have to take into consideration that there is limited carryover of proficiency from most exercises to specific sports. A skill will not transfer to a primary exercise if the skill deviates 2.5 percent or more from the original motor program. Says Wahl, "Baseball players and javelin throwers both throw implements, but EMGs show that these movements are not similar, and therefore the skills from performing one of these activities do not transfer to the other. Likewise, balancing on a rocker board while juggling tennis balls might not necessarily improve your footwork in tennis, but it is certainly the best way to get better at balancing on a rocker board while juggling tennis balls!"

Photo by Bruce Klemens.



The back squat is an exercise that fulfills the requirement of functional training because the athlete must deal with the disruptive forces the exercise creates on the body. Shown is Russian 1980 Olympic weightlifting champion Yuri Vardanyan. At a bodyweight of 181 pounds, he snatched 402 pounds and clean and jerked 493 pounds.

Triathlete Natalie Russell (left) is a 2008 champion, and triathlete Jan Howland (right) is a six-time national champion. Coached by Adam Zucco, a son-in-law of BFS clinician Roger Freeborn, both these athletes have benefited from weight training programs.

However, BFS does believe in using auxiliary exercises in a workout to help sport performance. For example, because a strong neck is important in football and wrestling, specific exercises for the neck muscles are valuable for these sports.

In future issues of *BFS*, we will address more of these FAQs. If you need an answer soon, contact BFS headquarters at 1-800-628-9737 and also check out the magazine archive section of our magazine on our website, *www.biggerfasterstronger.com*. BFS

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