

A Few Words *with BFS Clinician Len Walencikowski*

About 36 years ago Laurence J. Peter wrote a book called *The Peter Principle*. This bestseller had a significant impact on business managers with its theory that in every organization a competent person will eventually rise to his or her level of incompetence. BFS clinician Len Walencikowski has been the strength and conditioning coach at Miami Southridge High School in Southridge, Miami, since 1979. *Apparently the Peter Principle does not apply to him.*



Whereas many high school football coaches feel fortunate to have a few athletes earn Division I college scholarships, let alone make it to the pros, Walencikowski has seen 30 of his athletes earn Division I scholarships and 18 play professional football. He has also coached five All-Americans in track and more than 18 pro baseball draftees. Then there are the countless championships his athletes have earned and his coaching awards, such as the prestigious 2004 High School Strength Coach of the Year award, presented by the Professional Football Strength and Conditioning Coaches Society.

Walencikowski (pronounced Wall – en – see – cow – ski) was a multi-sport athlete in high school and went on to wrestle and play football at Springfield College in Springfield, Massachusetts. After earning a master's degree in physical education, he served for a short time in the Marines. In 1979 he became an assistant wrestling coach, assistant football coach and the strength and conditioning coach at Southridge High School.

Walencikowski is one of our most experienced clinicians, having given over 150 clinics, including many Be an 11s. In this exclusive interview, Coach Walencikowski shares his insights and experiences as a successful high school strength coach and BFS clinician.

BFS: Did you do any weight training when you played football at Springfield?

Walencikowski: Yes, but it wasn't like the intense workouts that you see today. We did a lot of exercises on a Universal machine and some free-weight exercises. The bench press was the big thing.

BFS: What were your first impressions of the BFS program?

Walencikowski: I liked the magazine for its motivational articles, but initially I didn't like the workout. I didn't like the towel bench because it wasn't a full-range exercise, I thought the box squat compressed the spine too much and I thought the power clean was too sophisticated for high school athletes.

BFS: You were hired by Don Soldinger, a former head coach at Southridge who had previously coached at the University of Miami and who returned there in 1995. We know he likes the BFS program for high school athletes, so what was his response to your concerns?

Walencikowski: Donny said, "You're the expert—that's why I hired you! Then I remembered that when I was at the University of Miami all the incoming freshmen who had leadership qualities and a great work ethic had a common dominator—they had used the Bigger Faster Stronger program in high school. After that discussion I got on the phone and spoke to Rick Anderson, a vice president at BFS. I also got the logbook and the BFS Total Program Book, which I call "the bible." I read all that material, and in January of 1991 we started implementing the BFS program at Southridge.

BFS: What happened next?

Walencikowski: I was calling Rick four to six times a week—I thought he was going to tell me to stop talking to him because I was

running up his phone bill! Rick was very supportive and answered all my questions, but he kept telling me that our school needed a clinic.

BFS: Did you eventually have a clinic?

Walencikowski: Yes, but we had to have a lift-a-thon to raise the money for it. The clinic was held on June 1, 1991—that was a Saturday—and we had finished spring football that Friday night. We probably had 200 student-athletes and most of the various coaches.

BFS: Did you notice any improvement right away?

Walencikowski: In December of 1991 we won our first state championship in football, so yes! Our success was attributed not only to having good coaches but also to the impact of the Bigger Faster Stronger Total Program.

BFS: Did any other sport teams see immediate success?

Walencikowski: The following June our women's track team won their first state championship. Since then we have won 17 state championships: seven in wrestling, five in girls' track, two in football, two in bowling and one in women's softball.

BFS: What about those concerns you had about the BFS program?

Walencikowski: I really didn't understand the program until I spoke to Rick, and then of course when we had our clinic. My problem when I first starting coaching at Southridge was that I was looking for reasons not to use the BFS program because I wanted to take parts from successful colleges and try to put a program together. Before BFS our kids were working hard and getting stronger, but they were missing that element of the great character that the Bigger Faster Stronger program develops.

BFS: Do you think it's a mistake for the high schools to be looking at the college programs?

Walencikowski: The college programs deal with the elite athlete, one who has been successful. We, in the high school ranks, are trying to develop athletes to reach that upper-limit level and to being the type of athlete who will work for you. I think BFS goes back to the very basics of technique, and I like the way the program is set up for rest and recovery so that there is never that plateau.

BFS: When did you give your first clinic?

Walencikowski: I went through the training in the fall of 1993, and in January of 1994 I did my first clinic.

BFS: Is there anything you remember about that first clinic experience?

Walencikowski: I remember being deathly afraid that I wouldn't be able to get everything in that I wanted. And the fact is you can't get everything in. You just need to make certain that what you put in is sound, and that the athlete and the coaches understand that this is a program where you go step by step—you don't skip anything. If you leave something out, then you don't develop balanced athletes who will excel in multiple sports.

BFS: Are there any clinic experiences that you vividly remember?

Walencikowski: Every clinic I do is unique in its own way. I will say, however, that I look forward to the coaches who spend the whole day with us and truly understand what we're trying to accomplish, rather than just sticking their head in the gym and letting the clinician do the work. I've done probably 150 clinics, and they're all similar in that people want to win, and they really get it that the Bigger Faster Stronger program helps them add to the burn—the desire—to be better.

BFS: Is there any physical aspect of the BFS program that you place special emphasis on in your clinics?

Walencikowski: I try to emphasize to the coaches that speed and jumping ability are what will win for them, and everything we do in the strength world and on the running field is to improve one's speed and agility.

BFS: You've given several Be an 11 seminars. What sets them apart from other character education seminars?

Walencikowski: I think what the Be an 11 seminar does is keep things very focused in that what you do away from the weightroom or athletic field has a bearing on everything you do. I don't think you can be a buzzard in the community and at home, and then all of a sudden become successful in the athletic field.

BFS: Do you teach regular weight training classes at Southridge?

Walencikowski: I teach six weightlifting classes a day, all Bigger Faster Stronger. Our last class of the day is football, a dual-sport athlete class. That is the only one that has pure athletes in it. I joke with our coaches that periods one through five are "farm teams," where we teach them how to be balanced athletes. I have the best job in the world.

BFS: What are the major differences between coaching girls and coaching guys?

Walencikowski: Girls are more successful in strength training because they don't have the male ego. They don't have to impress each other with how much they can lift. They become more technicians than the men. I have to fight with the men to not worry about the poundages but concentrate on perfect technique so that it transfers into athletic movements.

BFS: Do you have any motivational sayings to inspire your athletes to win?

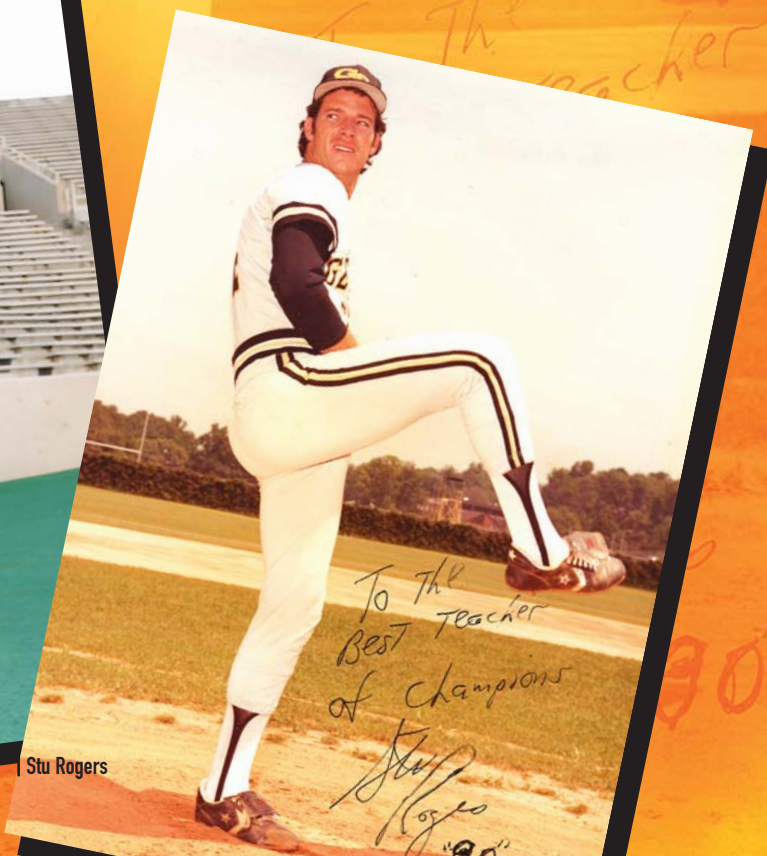
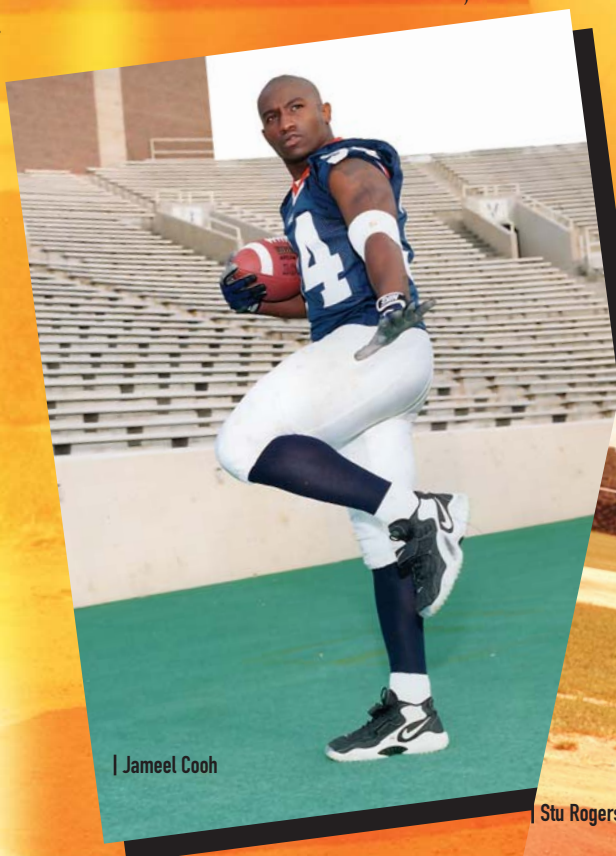
Walencikowski: I don't tell athletes to try to win, because everyone tries to win. I tell athletes instead that the harder you work, the better you are prepared to win.

BFS: Many of your athletes have gone on to play college and professional sports. Was there a common denominator among all these players?

Walencikowski: They all had a great work ethic and great character. They were never in trouble in any school; they kept things right so they could get their education and be successful in the athletic field and be leaders when in school.

BFS: Is there any advice you'd give to young people who would like to be a high school strength coach?

Walencikowski: Yes—get on the Bigger Faster Stronger program! Have a clinic. Get everyone in your school, all the teams, to be on the same page. I think more coaches today want their kids to be specialized, and I think when you become specialized in one sport, that leads to overtraining and overuse injuries. In Miami they play baseball year-round; but by the time the kids become seniors, think about how many innings they have played. How many pitches have they thrown?



Every coach wants to put that ace in there to win, but the body can only take so much. I think that's why there are so many more overuse injuries occurring in the teenage years than there were 20 years ago, even ten years ago. I think this is a mistake; more is not better—correct is better.

BFS: Tell us about this high school strength coach award, and what it means to you?

Walencikowski: I was selected by the Professional Football Strength and Conditioning Coaches Society as the high school strength coach of the year. It's a great honor, and the neat part about it is that last year's winner, Matt Meyer, from Evangelical Christian, is also a clinician for Bigger Faster Stronger. Mike Mashburn, the executive director of the Professional Football Strength and Conditioning Coaches Society brought up Dr. Greg Shepard's name. He said, "You know, I'm

putting Dr. Shepard's name in my brain for next year for what he has done to develop strength and conditioning in the high school ranks." I think it's remarkable that last year's recipient and this year's are both Bigger Faster Stronger-trained individuals under Dr. Shepard. It made my heart feel really great to know that Greg is recognized for what he has done for so many of us coaches. I think he's had a great influence because of the way he entwines and balances the spirit, the mind and the body as a foundation to develop the upper-limit athlete.



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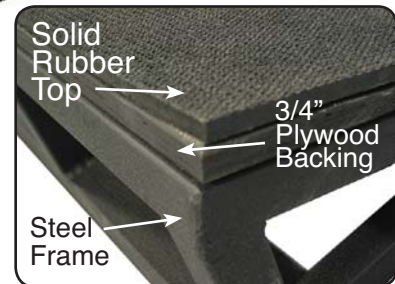
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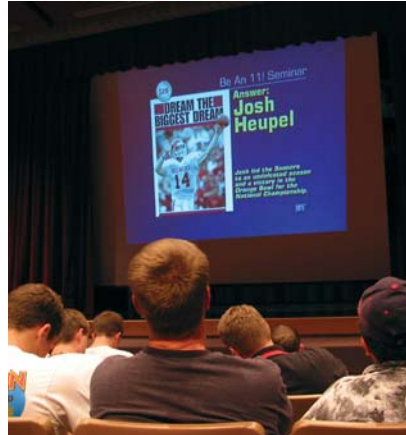
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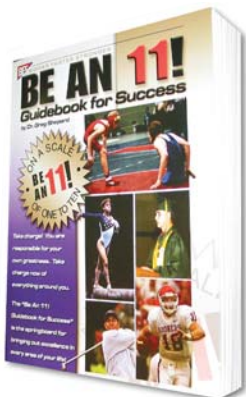
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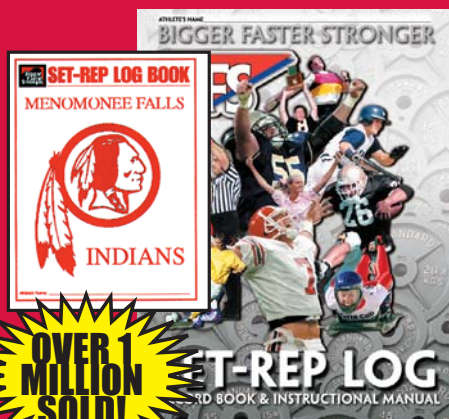
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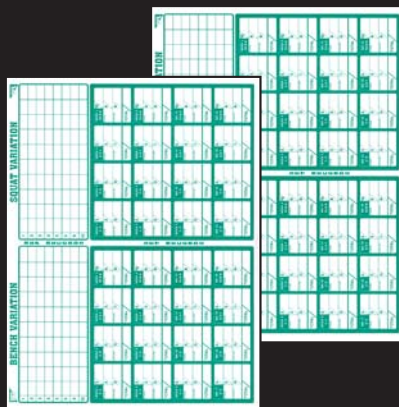


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