



BFS editor in chief Kim Goss began his education in strength coaching as a weightlifter, and is shown here competing in the 1977 Junior Olympics.

The Evolution of *Strength Coaching*

A personal look at the recent history of athletic and physical fitness

BY **KIM GOSS, MS**

Granted, there's a lot of self-indulgent writing in the field of strength and conditioning, but as a magazine editor I generally try to take myself out of the story. After all, when I'm interviewing sports coaches or experts in sports medicine, it's only right to keep in mind that the reader will want to know about *their* ideas, not mine. But just this one time – and because it comes at the request of Bob Rowbotham, president of BFS – I'm making an exception. So here's my take on strength coaching and personal training, then and now.

Physical Culture 101

When I was in secondary school, during our physical education classes we would often perform up to 30 minutes of calisthenics and running before we got into our primary activities. As a result, I could do 14 strict pull-ups and 600 nonstop sit-ups and I could run five miles at a pretty good clip. And we had to suit up, endure jockstrap inspections (I'm serious) and take showers. Nowadays, having volunteered in the high school environment, I've seen countless physical education programs

that can only be described as a joke.

I joined my first commercial gym in 1972: Bob's Athletic Club in Fremont, California. This was a gym that offered a "key club" service in which members could purchase keys to the gym so they could work out after hours. Bob's was a typical gym in that we had bodybuilders, powerlifters and Olympic lifters all working out in the same facility and often performing the same exercises. The top bodybuilder at our gym was Ed Corney, who went on to place second in the Mr. Olympia contest and often

would go down to “Muscle Beach” in Southern California to train with Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Unlike today, where the iron game sports are very specialized, bodybuilders back then would often perform the exact same exercises that powerlifters and even Olympic lifters performed. Heavy power cleans, bench presses, front squats, back squats – these exercises were the core of everyone’s strength training programs. Even the average gym members were doing standard free-weight exercises – our gym didn’t even have a treadmill. It was a time when it was OK to be strong, and all the iron game participants shared a mutual respect for each other, an attitude that is unfortunately not prevalent today among the various disciplines.

At this time Olympic-style weightlifting was my primary sport, and my most noteworthy career accomplishment was placing in the Collegiate National Championships. I had the privilege of training under Jim Schmitz, who went on to become a two-time US Olympic Team coach. I also played tennis and was on my high school wrestling team (although the only significant thing I can say about my wrestling experience is that my coach’s daughter married Clint Eastwood). This background in the Olympic lifts led me to start working with other weightlifters and college throwers, who would use this type of training to supplement their skills. My best athlete placed fourth in the world championships and broke the world standard in the snatch, and I had over a dozen athletes compete in US national championships.

Also at this time I was working for Runner’s World Publications, writing and editing articles on physical and athletic fitness. We also published one of the first women’s bodybuilding magazines, *Strength Training for Beauty*, which

was edited by Laura Dayton, an amazing journalist whose brother was a strongman and bodybuilder and at one time was Arnold’s roommate. At this time heavy



Although tempted with offers in fashion and fitness modeling, Goss decided to pursue a career as a strength coach and fitness writer.

weight training was not widely accepted as a method of conditioning for women, so we were pioneers in that field. But to this day I still encounter misconceptions about weight training for girls and women. When I volunteer-coached at a high school in Salt Lake City not long ago, I found I still had to work hard to dispel myths about weight training and to get the girls to train hard. I’m glad to say it paid off: Our single weight training class had 12 girls who could power clean 135 pounds or more.

Regarding my work at the Air Force Academy from 1987 to 1994, I designed all the workouts for not just the football team but also the 875 varsity athletes who used the weightroom. Thanks to an innovative computer program made for me by computer whiz Terry Curtis, every athlete knew exactly how much weight they should lift for every rep of every set of every workout.

After returning to the private sector to work for fitness magazines for several years, I moved to Dallas, where I ran a private gym. My primary clients were figure skaters and hockey players, although I did work with many adult men and women who just wanted to stay

in shape. In figure skating, more than a dozen athletes I trained competed in the Olympic Games.

From the private sector I went on to work at BFS headquarters in Salt Lake City, and in 2009 I moved to East Greenwich, Rhode Island, to work full-time for Charles Poliquin as his head writer.

A View from an Ivory Tower

All this talk about what I’ve been up to for the past few decades is just to show I’ve “walked the talk” in numerous areas of athletic and physical fitness training. So, just this once, here are my observations on the current state of several important topics.

Weightroom Facilities. One disturbing complaint I often hear from high school, and even college, strength coaches is that they lack money for good weight training facilities. However, these same schools often have physical fitness rooms with over \$50,000 of cardio equipment and exercise machines. Apparently, physical fitness is not possible today without electricity and fiber optics.

Program Design. Just because a college football program uses suspension push-ups and flips 500-pound tires doesn’t mean these exercises are valuable for a high school athlete. I’ve talked to a lot of college coaches who just don’t get the value of the BFS program, but oddly, they are often hard-pressed for an appropriate response when I ask them, “OK, you’re a high school coach with no assistants who has five 45-minute classes a day and 45 multi-sport athletes but mostly non-athletes in each class – how would you design a workout program for this situation?”

Training Fads. In the field of strength and conditioning, one problem I routinely see is that many coaches play

“follow the leader,” doing whatever the current national champions are doing in their weightroom. For example, when one college football team won the national championships and our head coach found out that they did aerobic dance, we had to do aerobic dance too. This experiment provided considerable amusement for the hockey team. And there were the phases of heavy emphasis on plyometrics, periodization (and all those 12-letter words and fancy gross national product graphs associated with those workouts), strongman protocols and (excuse me while I throw up in my mouth) core training.

Coaching Competence. What you have to consider when looking at successful college sports programs is that the big schools have an edge in recruiting exceptional athletes. In fact, during my first year at the Air Force Academy when I saw that our recruiting class for the football team had only three players who could clean 230 pounds, all I could say was, “You’ve got to be kidding me!” Further, there are many factors that determine success in athletics – just because one championship basketball team trains with Bosu boards does not necessarily mean that this made a difference in their success.

Nutrition. Once I told an athlete that white bread was bad and that she should only eat toast, and she took me seriously! This silliness aside, very few



Goss’s first job as a writer was at Runner’s World Publications in 1984, working with Laura Dayton. Here he is shown with Dayton in her “Purple Palace,” her women’s gym in Napa, California. Goss and Dayton worked with Charles Poliquin to produce *The Poliquin Principles* in 1995, one of the most successful and revolutionary books on bodybuilding and strength coaching in the ‘90s.

athletes, and even coaches, know how to eat well for athletic performance. As for recognizing the value of supplements, there are two major opposing views: 1) supplements are necessary for optimal performance and 2) except for a multivitamin, supplements are a waste of money. You won’t get at the truth by reading product ads – for that you’ll need to peer-reviewed literature on nutrition.

Sports Medicine. The field of sports medicine has evolved tremendously with soft-tissue treatments such

as Active Release™, frequency-specific microcurrent, posturology, structural balance, and surgical techniques that enable athletes to come back from many devastating injuries. Charles Poliquin, for example, has rehabbed post-surgical knees in as little as six weeks – three of these individuals went on to win Olympic gold. Unfortunately, these services are not available to some athletes, and they just have to follow the well-intentioned but often irresponsible advice of coaches to simply “put ice on it and take some aspirin!” Come on,



Goss was a strength coach at the Air Force Academy for eight years, working with Jack Braley. He also trained weightlifters, including Glenda Ford (white shirt), who placed 4th in the World Championships. Goss went on to operate a personal training gym in Dallas, which focused on free weight training. He is shown at far right with Amy Mareno, a figure skater he trained who overcame dyslexia to achieve a master’s degree in religion.

people, stop playing doctor unless you are a doctor.

Personal Training Profession.

The major difference between a personal trainer and a strength coach is that the strength coach usually does not have to “sell” his or her program, and can get away with being a power-abusing jerk by, for example, withholding a scholarship or otherwise disciplining an athlete. Personal trainers, on the other hand, have to treat their clients with respect and in a sense “earn” the privilege of working with an individual. As a result, some strength coaches do not do well in the private sector.

Attitude. When I first got into strength coaching, I found most of my colleagues were all-around good people and very easy to get along with, but more and more I’ve found coaches who are simply jerks – especially at the college level, and especially if they just came out of a winning program. There are exceptions; for example, Chris Carlisle gave me a wonderful

interview and goes out of his way to help high school coaches, and the strength coaches at Utah State were very good to me by allowing me to work with one of my weightlifters in their facilities. But the inflated egos of many college strength coaches are a big disappointment to me.

Academic Education. Last year I finished my master’s degree, so I have a pretty good understanding of what is being taught at the university level in the area of exercise science. The courses are getting better all the time, using many multimedia tools to enhance learning. What I find disturbing are the students – often they are doing only the minimum to pass the course and are reluctant to challenge the teachers. Maybe it’s the journalist in me, but sometimes it’s important to plant your feet and take a stand, especially when an instructor is feeding you outdated or inaccurate information. You need to demand – and get – your money’s worth in your education!

Certifications. Certifications are a great way to continue your strength

coaching education, but they are not a substitute for an academic degree. Dr. Marc Rabinoff has written extensively about the perils of believing that a weekend certification is anything but risky business, and I hope that you’ll visit the *BFS* archives and read his articles on this subject.

Strength Coaching Research. In the past most of the great research on strength training came from Eastern Bloc countries, but now there is a lot of great material coming from North America and Australia. The problem is, coaches need to read beyond the abstracts and see how the studies were conducted before drawing conclusions about the topic. And as for those meta analysis papers, many are extremely annoying examples of “junk science.”

OK, that’s enough about me and my opinions. Maybe I’ve given you some useful ideas, and maybe you have better ones. I’ve been involved in this field for nearly 40 years, and I’m looking forward to seeing what comes along in the next 40. *BFS*



While living in Salt Lake City, Goss was a volunteer coach at Hunter High School, where he helped coach a girls weight training class who were big fans of *BFS* magazine.

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