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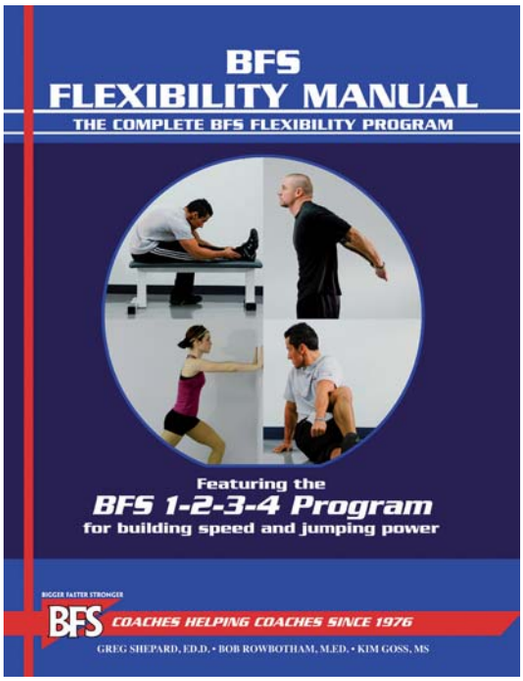
A New Look at *Flexibility Training*

A look at what's inside the new *BFS Flexibility Manual*



After giving thousands of BFS clinics over the past three decades, we've found that stretching is the one component most often missing in an athlete's training. This omission is odd, considering the tremendous amount of research available on the value of stretching – not just for athletes but also for those who simply want to improve their quality of life. Our society is becoming a nation of couch potatoes, and as a result we have made ourselves far less flexible than ever before. BFS is determined to reverse that trend. The only way to make that happen for our athletes is to incorporate

flexibility training into a total program. Let's talk facts.

Flexibility training performed correctly and consistently will increase the range of motion of an athlete's joints. Sport scientists generally agree that an effective stretching program is important in preventing injury and promoting good posture. For these reasons, flexibility exercises should be regarded as a critical part of any athletic fitness or physical education program. That being said, how do you stretch? BFS has the answer in the second edition of the *BFS Flexibility Manual.*

Static stretching is the basis of the BFS 1-2-3-4 Flexibility Program. Shown demonstrating two BFS stretches are Emilie Williams (top) and Sheriann Decker, dance team members at Hunter High School in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Stretching: the Truth

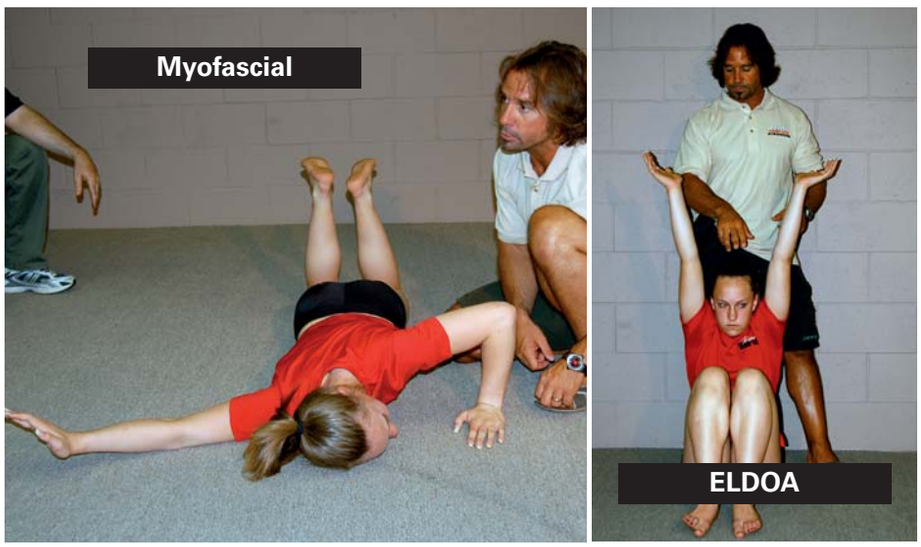
It is our intention at Bigger Faster Stronger to provide coaches with a stretching program that not only benefits the athletes but also is useful in coaching situations where important considerations are time, facilities and number of athletes. After reviewing the potential benefits offered by a host of stretching exercises, we decided that the best flexibility program for most young athletes would focus on the static stretching method.

The static stretching method is performed in the basic BFS total program, which we call the BFS 1-2-3-4 Flexibility Program, and it has been used successfully by young athletes for over 34 years. This type of stretching involves maintaining a stationary position that enables the muscles to be held at a greater-than-at-resting length. Some advantages to using static stretching with young athletes are that the techniques are extremely safe, can be mastered easily and can be performed without a partner.

In addition to presenting the regular BFS static stretches, the *BFS Flexibility Manual* shows several additional stretches that will add variety to your program. We also include a test to easily measure progress with a large number of athletes. And although we dislike having to condemn any exercise, we describe several stretches that we believe present a higher risk and should be avoided.

Another stretching method discussed in this manual is called modified proprioceptive neuromuscular facilitation (PNF). These stretches are for those athletes who want even better results, have the time to perform this method, and have a good partner. However, it must be understood that for athletes to achieve their optimal potential, they

Flexibility can be measured frequently with the sit-and-reach test.



There are many other types of flexibility training, such as PNF, dynamic, myofascial, and ELDOA.

must deal with all aspects of training (strength, speed, cardiovascular endurance, agility, flexibility and skill development) and should not sacrifice one component of a total athletic program to focus on another. So although performing 10 sets of bench presses three times a week may increase an athlete's ability in this lift, such a program would likely interfere with the ability to progress in other lifts or aspects of conditioning.

Dynamic stretching is another popular method of stretching, and it is used to some extent in physical education classes. Jumping jacks, arm circles and freehand squats are examples. The BFS straight-leg deadlift and our power balance drills also belong to this category of stretches. This manual will show you many exercises and how to arrange them most effectively for physical education classes.

Finally, we've included a section called "The Future of Stretching," which describes some of the advanced stretching methods used in many physical rehabilitation programs. Two such methods are called myofascial stretching and Longitudinal Osteoarticular Decoaptation Stretching, which translates from the French acronym ELDOA. These types of stretches involve placing the body in specific postures and contracting muscles to stretch the fascia tissue that is contained around and within the muscles.

The goal of stretching is not to become super flexible but to have muscles that are balanced. We want to make strong athletes more flexible and flexible athletes stronger. When athletes have both assets going for them – flexibility and strength – they have a competitive edge. To learn more, pick up a copy of the *BFS Flexibility Manual* today! BFS

Back to the Basics with Static Stretching

Model: Emilie Williams, Hunter High School, Salt Lake City

Sound advice on developing a safe and effective stretching program

It is our intention at Bigger Faster Stronger to provide coaches with a stretching program that not only benefits the athletes but also is useful in coaching situations where important considerations are time, facilities and number of athletes. After reviewing the potential benefits offered by a host of stretching programs, we decided that the most practical flexibility program for most young athletes would focus on the static stretching method.

The static stretching method is performed in the basic BFS 1-2-3-4 Flexibility Program, which has been used successfully by young athletes for over 38 years. This type of stretching involves maintaining a stationary position in which the muscles are held at a greater-than-at-resting length. Some advantages to using static stretching with young athletes are that the techniques are extremely safe, can be mastered easily and can be performed without a partner.

The benefits of stretching go beyond injury prevention and rehabilitation. Many movements in athletics require exceptional levels of flexibility that may take years of stretching to develop and daily workouts to maintain. For example, if baseball pitchers can get their arms back a little farther, they will throw harder and faster because they can accelerate the arm over a longer distance. And if football players can improve flexibility in the hip flexors so their stride is longer, that alone may significantly improve

running speed. Dr. Greg Shepard, BFS founder, estimates that a two-inch improvement in hip flexor mobility may improve a 40-yard-dash time by two tenths of a second.

The BFS 1-2-3-4 Flexibility Program is especially useful for increasing running speed. Kevin Devine, who was one of the fastest players in professional football, believes that stretching is key to developing speed.

"If you don't stretch hard every day, you will never be as fast as you could be." ~Kevin Devine

Says Devine, "If you don't stretch hard every day, you will never be as fast as you could be." Although Devine certainly has a genetic gift for running, he says he has made the most of his talents with stretching. "You stretch to win," he says. "It's that simple."

Principles of Safe Stretching

Although static stretching can be one of the safest types of exercise, athletes should not stretch under certain conditions. For example, stretching the muscles around a recently fractured bone or around an area that has been recently sprained or strained, especially around the back or neck, is usually not a good idea. Here are a few other guidelines:

Warm up before you stretch. Stretching is not a warm-up. To avoid injury, you want your muscles to be warm before you stretch. The BFS dot drill is a perfect warm-up because it will help you break a light sweat.

Stretch in the proper environment. A firm, nonskid mat is ideal for stretching, and the area you're stretching in should be free of distractions so you can concentrate.

Stretch slowly and gently. Do not be forceful when you stretch. Always stretch slowly, moving gradually into each stretch and easing out of every stretch smoothly and slowly.

Listen to your pain. Do not force a joint to the point that you feel pain. You do need to be uncomfortable, but do not extend a joint beyond the point of discomfort. Never yank, pull or jerk, but do stretch hard. You should be sweating at the end of a stretching workout.

Concentrate on breathing. Proper breathing methods can significantly enhance the quality of your stretching program. Don't hold your breath. You should breathe normally, trying to ease deeper into a stretch during each exhalation.

Don't overdo it. Although what constitutes overdoing it is always up for debate, you'll gain the greatest benefit from stretching by holding each position for at least 30 seconds. But for beginners, especially those who are extremely tight, performing three sets of 10-second holds is an effective alternative.

Personalize your routine. You should consider your individual needs when designing a stretching program. For example, if you are hypermobile in the knee joint, striving to increase the

BFS clinician Jeff Surran uses a hands-on approach when teaching the BFS 1-2-3-4 Flexibility Program at BFS clinics.

Static stretching is the most practical method of flexibility training for young athletes. Sheriann Decker, a former dance team member at Hunter High School, demonstrates several static stretches performed in the BFS 1-2-3-4 Flexibility Program.

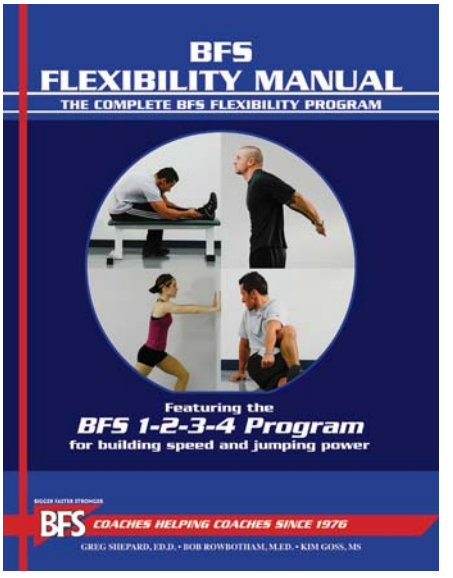
flexibility of your hamstrings may not be a good idea. If you are an athlete in a sport that requires exceptional flexibility in one area of the body – such as swimming, which requires flexible shoulders –
you may want to add a few additional stretches for that area.

Vary your routine. You should occasionally vary the stretches you perform. We recommend that you experiment with these other stretches only after you have performed our standard BFS 1-2-3-4 Flexibility Program for several months.

Stretch after workouts. Most coaches and sport therapists agree that the best time to stretch is after a workout, especially when it comes to preventing hamstring pulls. Dr. Michael Ripley, a specialist in flexibility therapy who has worked with 10 sprinters who won medals in the Sydney Olympics, says that after training, muscles often develop a higher level of tension than they had before the training. "This tension will cause muscles to shorten, and without post stretching I've found that over time this causes shortening of the athlete's range of motion. In my opinion it's most important to stretch immediately after the workout because you help keep the body symmetrical. In contrast, if you waited several hours, you'd have to stretch for a considerably longer time to achieve the same effects."

If the training environment is crowded and time is short, such as in a classroom situation, athletes would be better off stretching at home. If facilities are spacious and plenty of time is available, the ideal scenario would be to stretch after performing the dot drill and again at the end of the workout. Also, stretching in a group environment may be especially effective to ensure this important work gets done.

There are other effective methods of stretching, such as PNF and dynamic stretching. These are covered in detail in the *BFS Flexibility Manual*. In the meantime, consider that a goal of stretching should not be to become super flexible but to achieve balanced muscularity. We want to make strong athletes more flexible and flexible athletes stronger. When athletes have *both* assets going for them – flexibility and strength – they have a competitive edge. BFS



The complete BFS stretching program, along with many other types of stretching, such as dynamic and PNF, is covered in detail in the *BFS Flexibility Manual*.