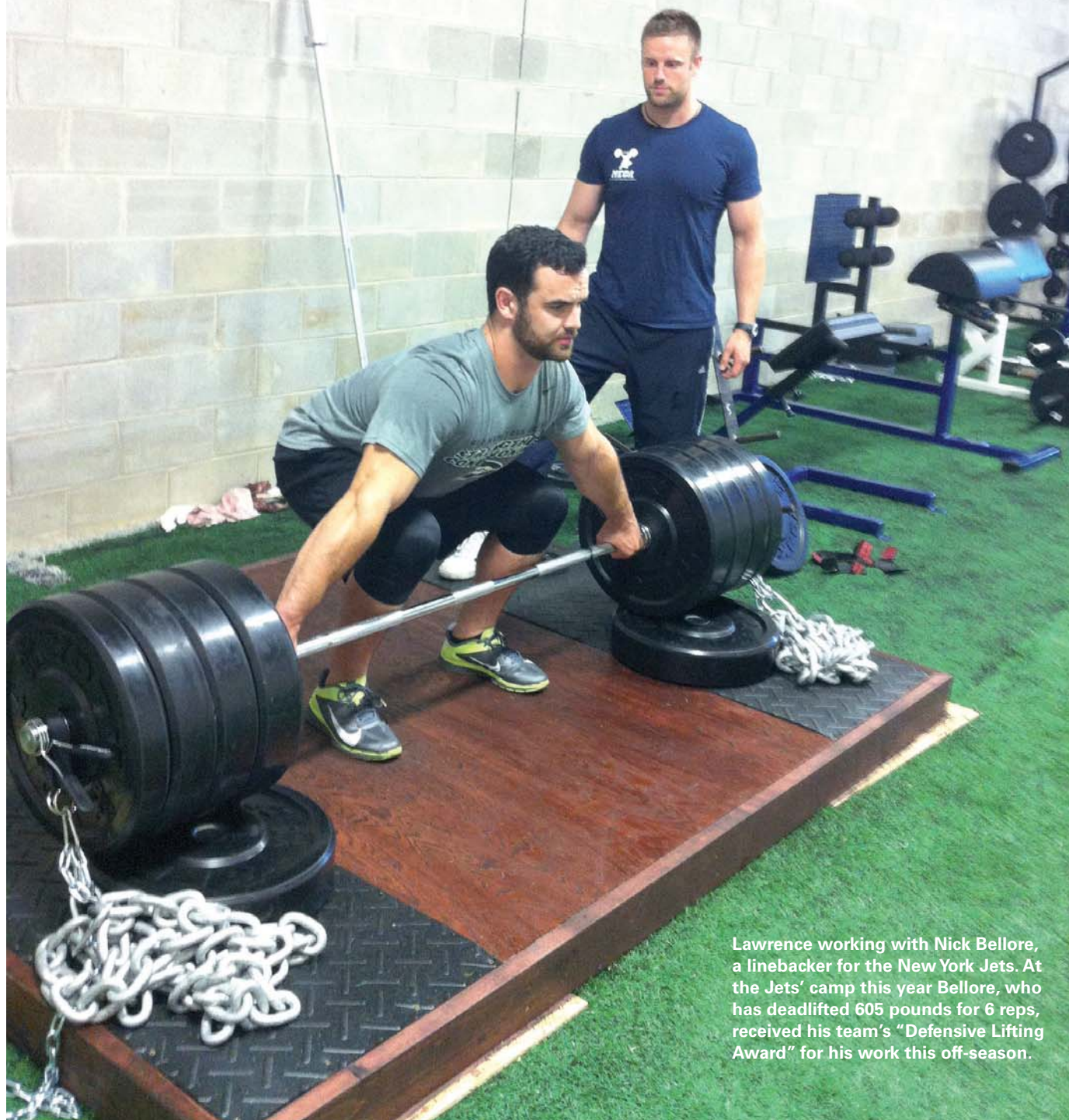


A Few Words with **David Lawrence**

A look at this young strength coach's rapid rise to success



Lawrence working with Nick Bellore, a linebacker for the New York Jets. At the Jets' camp this year Bellore, who has deadlifted 605 pounds for 6 reps, received his team's "Defensive Lifting Award" for his work this off-season.

The private sector is saturated with personal trainers and strength coaches hoping to turn their passion into a profitable profession. For consumers, it's difficult to determine who is best qualified to help them achieve their goals. Do you look at academic accomplishments? Athletic achievements? The best physique? Who they've coached? It's a difficult choice, but there's one coach who is the total package as a trainer: David Lawrence.

Lawrence earned his BS degree in physical education and health promotion from Central Michigan University. Despite being a walk-on for CMU football, he earned a scholarship and played safety on two MAC championship teams (2006-07). After graduation he got a job working for Mike Bystol at the Poliquin Performance Center in Chicago (Bystol was featured in our March/April 2010 issue).

In 2011 Lawrence went on to open his own facility, Michigan Elite Conditioning for Athletes, in Wixom, Michigan. The facility is continually expanding, and Lawrence now has three strength coaches working under him. To date, Lawrence has worked with elite athletes in 13 sports, including 20 in the NFL, five in the NHL, and one professional soccer player.

BFS is always interested in accomplished young strength coaches, so we interviewed Lawrence about the trends he is seeing in his profession as well as the advice he would give to those who want to emulate his success. Here is what he told us.

BFS: Is focusing on training athletes a good idea if your primary goal is to make as much money as possible?

DL: No – you need to focus on fat

loss. I have pro athletes, but they may train with me for only three months, in the summer. If you want to have a successful business, then you should focus on developing a reputation for improving people's health.

BFS: Is there a good market for training kids one-on-one?

DL: It's a market that is about to explode, but it's not there yet – I think it's about five years away. If this is an area a coach wants to pursue, they will have to focus on group training.



Lawrence played safety on two MAC championship teams.

BFS: Do you think there is a problem with single-minded approaches to training, such as focusing on powerlifting or Olympic lifting?

DL: In the case of powerlifting, the goal is to lift the heaviest weight over the shortest distance. When training athletes other than powerlifters, you want to train the muscles through the greatest range of motion and in many different directions. I do like Olympic lifting movements, and I found that my vertical jump improved when my power snatch went up. When I was in college, I got my snatch up to 250 pounds and my vertical jump improved to 36 inches.

BFS: What do you think is the major problem with the way

many strength coaches design their programs?

DL: The biggest problem I see is that these coaches have their athletes do the same movements over and over. They have them bench three times a week and squat three times a week – without varying the movements. That type of design is likely to create structural imbalances that can make athletes more susceptible to injuries.

BFS: Do you have a few core exercises that you keep going back to as benchmarks of your progress?

DL: Yes – for most sports the deadlift is one of the exercises that will give you the most “bang for your buck.” For example, a lot of the hockey players I work with have very weak hamstrings, and the deadlift is a great exercise to balance out the development between their quads and hamstrings. Yes, we do cleans, but I really appreciate the benefits of the deadlift.

BFS: What about strongman training and pushing or pulling sleds?

DL: We'll use strongman and sled pushing for energy system training. After a client has been with us for a while, I will start incorporating this type of training into their workouts – for instance, as part of their Friday workout.

BFS: What about tire flipping? Is this exercise too dangerous for young athletes?

DL: If you look at the events in strongman, the tire flip is probably the most aggressive. I know of one popular strength coach who gets a lot of kids injured on this lift because it's too advanced for them. Also, if a coach has only one heavy tire, it could be too

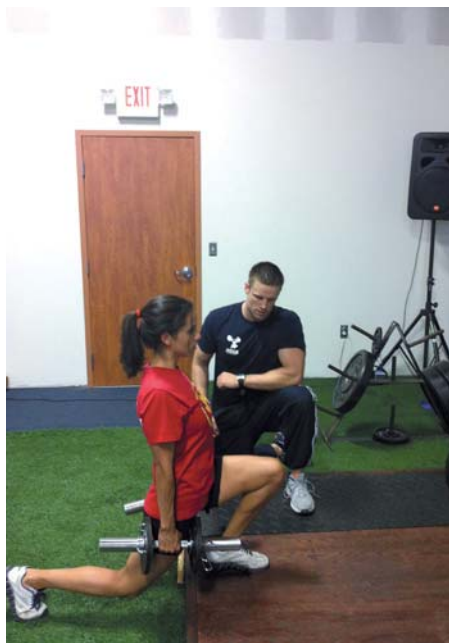
much for a young athlete you're working with.

BFS: What do you think about this obsession that so many coaches who promote themselves online have with pushing special exercises?

DL: It's usually just marketing hype. With coaches who promote a special variation of exercises they developed, you have to ask yourself, "Who have these guys trained?" I probably use over 800 exercises in my training, and it's ridiculous to put too much emphasis on just one.

BFS: What has influenced you about your current training methods?

DL: My dad, who was the "winningest" coach at Mattawan High School in Michigan, subscribed to *Bigger Faster Stronger* magazine – and I read every issue. I read about Charles Poliquin in the magazine, and that turned me on to his work and investing in his educational programs. I



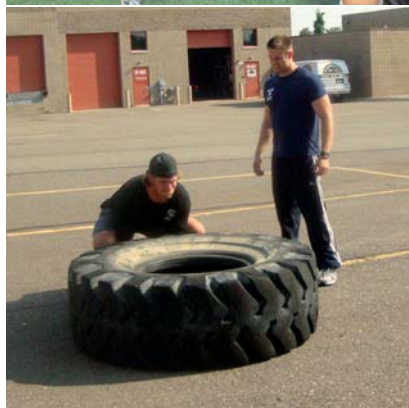
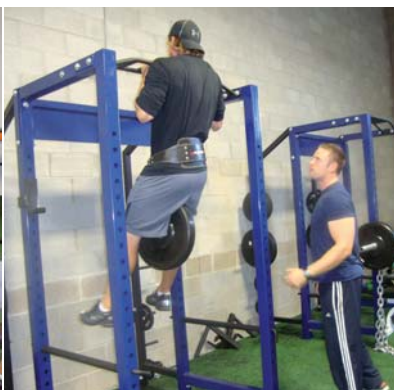
Alison Heydorn plays professionally for Hamilton Football Club in Hamilton, Ontario. Lawrence helped Heydorn recover from a serious hamstring strain that sidelined her for several months. Within a few weeks she could sprint full speed and perform box jumps on a 36-inch box.

also wanted to work with Mike Bystol because of the success he had with training so many NFL players.

the BFS program?

DL: When I went to college, about a third of the guys who were on my team came from schools that had the BFS program. They were always the

BFS: What impressed you about



AJ Jenks plays forward for the Carolina Hurricanes. By working with Lawrence for seven weeks he gained 11 pounds of muscle and lost 5 percent body fat.

most physically prepared to play college football. At one school in particular, Washington County in Sandersville, Georgia, the guys were phenomenal. The beauty of the BFS program is that you can't go wrong with it – it's a simple program that everybody can use to make progressive gains year-round.

BFS: Is an unwillingness to work hard in-season as much a problem with pro athletes as it is with younger athletes?

DL: Yes! One of the biggest problems with hockey players is that their in-season programs are often designed

able to jump as high or run as fast. It will interfere with your ability to gain muscle mass. We don't do "cardio" but instead do energy system conditioning through methods such as strongman training.

BFS: When it comes to nutrition, how knowledgeable are the top athletes who come to work with you?

DL: Most of them don't really know how to eat. I had one young hockey player who weighed 170 pounds and had great skills. But he hadn't been able to gain any weight for a year and a half, and he was getting pushed around

important classes that apply to what I do in my profession. And I can't stress enough that you should never stop learning. I'm going back to college to get my master's, and I set aside about 10 hours a week for reading research journals and other material relevant to my profession.

BFS: What special advice would you give potential strength coaches?

DL: Many young strength coaches are unsuccessful because they don't know what it's like to be strong, and they look for ways other than weightlifting to get there. There is something



In college Lawrence could power snatch 250 pounds, and he continues to "walk the talk" with hard workouts.

with the primary goal of avoiding injury. The problem with this approach is that they will lose strength throughout the season, and as they get weaker, they will become *more* susceptible to injuries.

BFS: Is there too much emphasis on energy system training among strength coaches?

DL: I believe so. The worst thing about it is that it will hurt your ability to produce power – you won't be

on the ice. When I asked him about his diet, I found that most of his meals centered around a protein shake and cereal. I got him eating more solid food, and he gained 16 pounds of solid muscle in just six weeks.

BFS: How important is a college degree to success in your profession?

DL: If you want to go into this profession, I think it's important that you get a background in anatomy and physiology – these are the most

to be said for getting under a bar and pushing really hard.

BFS: Do you do much functional training with balance training and core work?

DL: I think it's generally a complete waste of time. Many gyms that promote this functional training go out of business quickly because kids don't go back there a second time. In the private sector if you don't get results, you go out of business. **BFS**