



THE NEXT LEVEL

Former CU trainer offers strength, speed, agility training to young athletes

Colin Gallagher lifts a 95-pound bar off the ground and with a quick turn of the wrist, raises it to shoulder-level. At that same moment, his right leg steps backward into a lunge.

His trainer, Brian Blackwell, counts his reps of this quick maneuver, called a split power clean. The motion, which taxes the glutes, upper legs, back and stomach to boot, is all about explosive power, his trainer says.

"That's good," Blackwell tells his client after six reps on one side.

Gallagher, a Boulder High School varsity basketball player, is one of dozens of teenage athletes who Blackwell, a former University of Colorado athletic trainer, has trained in recent years. Blackwell, a certified strength and conditioning specialist, was CU's head trainer for men's basketball, as well as assistant trainer to football from 1985 to 1990. Today, he has taken his experience to help mold the best young athletes with his speed, agility and strength training business called BigTime Athletic Development.

Gallagher, 16, started training his freshman year to get bigger, he says, and step

up to varsity level. He has since put on 25 pounds of lean muscle and quickened his step.

"I don't get pushed around as easy," he says. "Knowing that I'm one of the strongest out there is a boost."

Blackwell's clients include teens who want to make the cavernous jump from junior high to high-school athletics. Some want to make the varsity team, others have their sights on a college scholarship. Blackwell's routines are geared for basketball, football, volleyball, soccer, tennis, you name it. They are all games of speed, he says, whether an athlete wants to explode away from a defender on the basketball court or leave them in the dust to catch a touchdown pass.

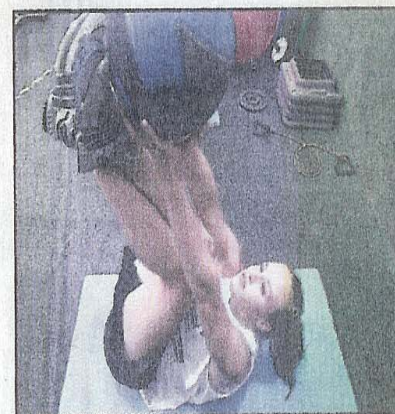
"I try to provide what kids need to take it to the next level, over and above what they are getting in their high schools," Blackwell says. "There is not one parent, coach or player who has not come up to me to say the same thing — they want more speed."

Blackwell's workouts are a blend of plyometrics — jumps to enhance fast, explosive power — weight training for strength, and field relay exercises for speed and agility.

Some of his football players claim to have been able to cut 2/10-3/10 of a second from their 40-yard dash.



Gallagher, foreground, works in the weight room at Flatiron Athletic Club under the supervision of Brian Blackwell, who runs BigTime Athletic Development.



Dietz performs crunches with a medicine ball to strengthen her abdominal muscles as part of her workout.

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Trainer offers workout for athletes

Continued from 1C

Parents and coaches say it's important to find an edge in today's climate of competitive sports. They are not worried about early burnout, they say, because they trust Blackwell's experience.

It can be disappointing when parents and players seek their own off-season training other than what the high schools offer, says Fairview High School head football coach Tom McCartney. His team advanced to the state championship game last year.

"We want to be a team and do it together, so I don't encourage it," he says. "I think we have a pretty good program here with speed, strength and conditioning. And it doesn't cost anything."

However, McCartney says, some players crave personal attention that coaches cannot give when having to look after 130 players. "Everyone it seems has a personal trainer these days."

Blackwell has a solid reputation, given his contacts in the field and experience, McCartney says.

On a recent weekday afternoon, Blackwell held a session with six teens at Flatiron Athletic Club in Boulder.

"How's the workout?" he asks Kimberly Dietz. The 5-foot-9 point guard smiles during a break from a push-press — a squat while holding a 45-pound bar above her head, which quickly evolves into an explosive upward movement as she presses the bar toward the sky.

"It's all for your vertical," Blackwell says to the 16-year-old, who started training with him this summer.

Dietz plays for a competitive club team called the Colorado Hoopsters and has her eye on playing college ball.

"I need to get more strength in my game and more power," she says.

Blackwell's clients have the option to train two, three or more times a week. He charges anywhere from \$25 to \$60 for a two-hour session, depending on an individual's needs. Some routines are sports-specific.

In a racquetball court, Tyler Knowles, a Fairview High School baseball player, hugs a medicine ball to his chest and throws the ball to a partner.



MARTY CAIVANO / Daily Camera

From left, Tyler Knowles, Jason Henritze-Hoye and Colin Gallagher run with parachutes to increase their running speed and power.

This drill, called a chest press, is good for the upper body, which Blackwell targets for baseball players. The duo changes it up to an overhead throw, working the triceps.

Knowles, 16, has worked with Blackwell for the past year to recover from three knee surgeries and being out for two seasons.

"He's really helped me get comfortable with my knee again to run on it," says Knowles, who hopes to play at the college level. "In the past month, I've noticed progress. My knee stays where it's supposed to stay."

Observing teens coming into CU's athletic program is what motivated Blackwell to start his business four years ago.

"I saw kids coming in as freshmen, girls and guys, who were so far behind upper-classes," he says. "I knew these kids needed help to get to the next level."

Matt Bartley, a senior at Fairview High School and varsity football player, first came to Blackwell in the eighth grade.

The changes have been dramatic, the outside linebacker says. Bartley initially ran the 40-yard dash in 5.2 seconds and brought it down to 4.7. After working with Blackwell this summer, he came back to football and won an award from his peers for most improved off-season.

"I feel it's a credit to Brian."

Bartley also cut down his time of 17 minutes for a 1½-mile run, to 10 minutes, which is what football programs want to see, he says.

"What colleges are looking for is your speed."

After the weight room session last week, the crew headed for an open field across the street to perform plyometric drills, such as single leg and lateral jumps for explosive power.

"(Plyos) use the elasticity of the muscles to enhance explosive movement," Blackwell says. "We are forcing muscles to stretch, then come back the other way like a rubber band ... we are teaching the body to absorb shock and explode, like you do in any sport, like a quick move on the basketball court or getting free for a jumpshot."

Any player can have skill, Blackwell says. "But if you don't have the athletic ability to match up against an opponent, you won't be able to show your skill."

The crew sprinted with parachutes attached to their waists for resistance to increase power. A shadow drill where one person runs and randomly switches directions while the other has to keep up tested their reactions.

"It's a drill where they have to think and see what the other person is doing, then change their movement in a split second," Blackwell says.

Blackwell's success is not just his routines and drills, says Mike Cameron, who had three of his kids train with Blackwell for tennis.

"The single most important thing is that Brian clearly loves working with kids."

Darian Hagan agrees. Hagan, who was inducted into the CU Athletic Hall of Fame last week, met Blackwell when Hagan was a freshman in 1988. Blackwell was one of his trainers when Hagan, CU's quarterback, and his teammates went on to win a national championship in 1990 and three Big 8 championships.

"Brian was one of the people I was drawn to right away," says Hagan, who recently sent his son and cousin to train with Blackwell. Both kids ended up starting varsity football in the ninth grade.

"If you want a kid to be able to step in right away from high school to college football, Brian's program will attain that for you," Hagan says, adding that it's a mental game.

"It's important to know in your mind you are in the best athletic shape you can possibly be."

For more information, visit www.bigtimeathleticdevelopment.com

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Athletes look for extra edge

Continued from 1A

offer to go as far as they want when they graduate.

But some question whether the sometimes-costly private training is necessary, and the programs require a serious commitment — one that some high school coaches said they wish was directed toward the school.

"Unless you just have a ton of natural ability, you probably can't make it," without special training, said Brian Blackwell, owner and operator of BigTime. "I hardly see any kids that don't need to be faster to make it at the college level."

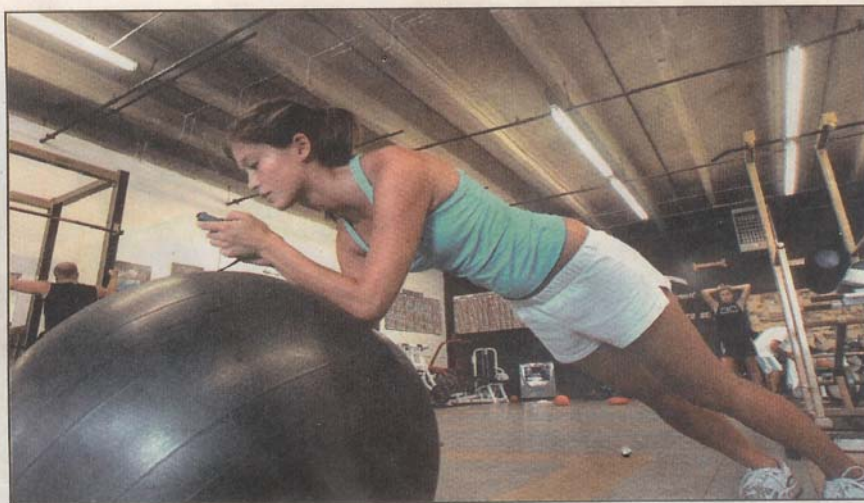
Kawulok, a Monarch High School graduate, has worked out at BigTime since he was in eighth grade, visiting as often as five days a week during his off season. Athletes at BigTime perform footwork exercises to increase speed and agility, lift weights to increase strength, and receive special diet and nutrition information to maximize performance in the game.

Kawulok has two older brothers, Matt and Chris, who also trained at BigTime before moving on to college teams, and his younger brother trains there now. Kawulok said sending four parents to BigTime has cost his parents "a lot," but the money his parents will save because of his scholarship helps offset the cost of putting him through Blackwell's training program.

Athletes who work out at BigTime pay anywhere from \$10 to \$30 per training session depending on the activity, or can pay a flat fee of \$325 a month for five sessions per week, Blackwell said.

While BigTime and other athletic programs promise to give their clients an edge on their increasingly competitive teams, high school coaches are skeptical that all the expense is necessary to make into college sports.

"They're saying it because that's their business," said Tom McCartney, head football coach at Fairview High School. "But I know my business, and I'm going to be doing it regardless. You've got to commit to weight training, a speed program, a nutrition plan and a hydration plan. The young man who goes through our program will have every opportunity that anyone else has."



Marty Calvano | Camera

Allyson Lee watches a timer while working her core at BigTime Athletic Development in Boulder. Lee will be playing tennis at Gonzaga University this fall.

ing were probably already going to make the college roster anyway.

"If a kid felt like, hey, do I really have to go out and pay that kind of money, I would say no, commit to the program and train in our weight room," McCartney said.

Instead, he asks students how they can support their school, by playing another sport for the school if they can, he said.

"But every now and then, we get someone who wants even more," McCartney said, and he doesn't discourage students from seeking that extra training. He said he'll let his players know what local, private training opportunities are available.

McCartney's nephew, T.C. McCartney, graduated from Fairview in the spring, and trains at BigTime for two to three hours a day, five days a week. His hard work may have paid off, T.C. said he will be a walk-on at Louisiana State University next year.

"I think I had to get extra work to compete against the athletes that go to LSU," T.C. McCartney said.

McCartney said he benefited most from footwork drills, which BigTime offers to a greater extent than his high school does.

Jody Bailey, director of basketball operations at the University of Colorado, said there are some

"Sometimes the parents have higher expectations," Bailey said, but "you can sit there and train that horse, and that horse is always going to come in eighth."

He said college sports are highly competitive, and an athlete who can't play for an elite school like CU may be able to play for a school in a lower division.

"If he's not CU, maybe he can play at Metro or one of these other great schools in our state," Bailey said.

He also said while young athletes can turn to training programs to improve ability, other programs for athletes are more focused on giving their clients visibility to college recruiters.

"It's rare that a player can go to a high-level team and have not gone to an AAU program," Bailey said.

He said the American Athletics Union, which offers young basketball players exposure to college recruiters during the "crucial July period," is becoming more popular with ambitious athletes.

"It has taken off year after year," he said. "Twenty years ago, you didn't have to do as much."

The AAU operates local and national tournaments in a number of major sports including basketball, football, soccer, mar-

years ago. His program touts a long list of athletes Blackwell says he has helped to succeed beyond the high school level or to win major competitions. He has plans to start a nonprofit to sponsor athletes who can't afford the program.

Blackwell works with several hundred athletes in a year, but the actual number he sees in a year fluctuates, he said.

"It depends on the community and how many athletes in the community are willing to do extra work" beyond their high school's athletic training program, he said.

Most of BigTime's clients are male, but Blackwell said sometimes there are more young women than men in the gym.

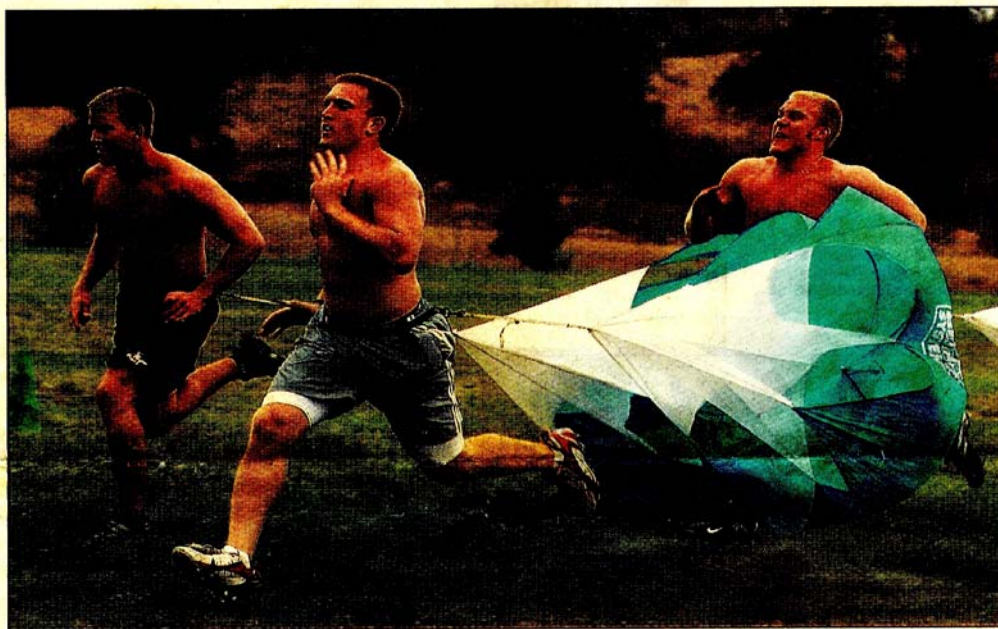
"The funny thing is that the girls are the ones who can really benefit from this, because there aren't as many structured programs for girls."

Among them is tennis player Allyson Lee, a recent graduate of Nivot High School. Before she started working out at BigTime last December, Lee said she was "weak to begin with. I haven't been clocked, but I know my serve has gotten faster."

In December, Lee found out she will play for Gonzaga University in Washington next year, and her college coach was impressed she'd been lifting



Going for the big time



Photos by Marty Caivano | Camera

Left to right, Marshall Wollum, Arthur Jaffee, and Charles Sander run with parachutes while training with BigTime Athletic Development in Boulder. More photos. www.dailycamera.com

Student athletes augment training privately

By Matt Pizzuti
For the Camera

Mike Kawulok says he might not have gotten a football scholarship to Colorado State University if he hadn't worked with a private training program for teen athletes. Inside Big-Time Athletic Development's gym in Boulder, Kawulok works with special intensity to ready himself for CSU, along with several other recent high school graduates heading to college teams this fall. A banner on a wall reads: "Being average means you are as close to the bottom as you are to the top."

Kawulok and his peers are not alone in putting in the effort. Many high school athletes believe they need more training than school programs



Marshall Wollum lifts weights at BigTime Athletic Development in Boulder. Wollum will be playing football at Western State this fall.

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