



BFS clinician Paula Davis double-checks the workout log of one of her athletes.

## *A Closer Look at the* **10-8-6** **Program**

Understanding the fourth week of the set-rep system

**T**he BFS Set-Rep System is designed to provide the optimal balance of structure and variety to ensure that athletes continue to break personal records – not once a month, not once a week, but often with every single workout. Such an approach is self-motivating, as the continual improvements encourage athletes to train even harder. Let's take a closer look.

The BFS Set-Rep System is based upon the pioneering work of endocrinologist Hans Selye. Selye developed a model of how the body adapts to stress: Selye's general adaptation syndrome. Selye found that when an individual is exposed to stress (a weight training workout is considered a type of stress), the body adapts to it by going through several phases.

These phases are commonly referred to as shock, countershock, stage of resistance and stage of exhaustion. BFS determined that to optimally support this adaptation process, athletes must vary the sets, reps and exercises on a weekly basis.

The workout for the BFS Set-Rep System consists of four 1-week phases. Using the common scientific terms of *intensity* (how much weight is lifted) and *volume* (how many total reps are performed), you can define the phases as follows:

**Week 1:** high intensity, low volume

**Week 2:** medium intensity, medium volume

**Week 3:** high intensity/peaking

**Week 4:** low intensity, medium volume

In more practical terms, this is

how the workout is defined in terms of sets and reps:

**Week 1:** 3x3

**Week 2:** 5x5

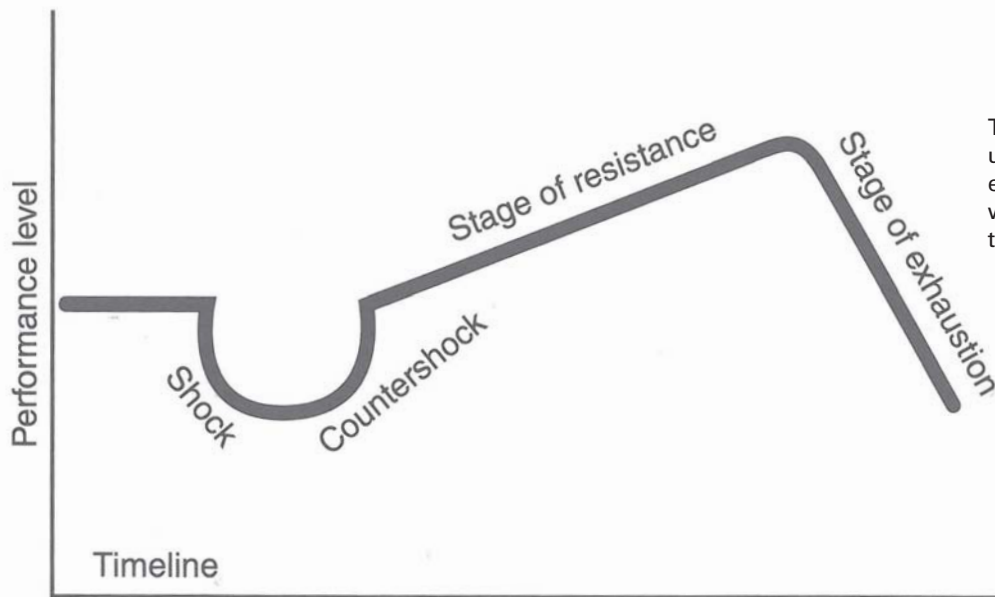
**Week 3:** 5-4-3-2-1

**Week 4:** 10-8-6; or 4-4-2 for clean and deadlift

Week 3 is the most stressful set-rep combination on the nervous system, and following it with another such week could result in exhaustion, or, as it is commonly referred to, overtraining. To avoid or at least minimize overtraining, BFS follows week 3 with a recovery week. And we believe the 10-8-6 workout is perfect to accomplish this goal.

### **A Brief History of the 10-8-6 Workout**

Although we don't know where



The BFS Set-Rep System is based upon the work of Hans Selye's general adaptation syndrome model, which shows how the body adapts to stress.

or when the 10-8-6 system originated, BFS editor-in-chief Kim Goss says he was first introduced to it in 1972 when he joined Bob's Athletic Club in Fremont, California.

Bob's Athletic Club, named after its owner, Bob Perata, was one of those basic, primarily free-weight gyms of the past where bodybuilders,

weightlifters and the general population all trained together and everyone helped each other out. In fact, the loyalty and trust of the membership was such that members could purchase a key to the gym from Bob and train at any hour of the day or night. The most notable member of the gym was Ed Corney, who challenged Franco Columbu for the 1975 Mr. Olympia lightweight title. Corney appeared on the cover of Charles Gains' book *Pumping Iron* as well as on the poster for the movie.

Goss says that the 10-8-6 program is especially motivating for beginners because the decreased reps on the second and third sets enable heavier weights to be used – in effect, it gives the trainee the illusion of getting stronger throughout the workout. At Bob's Athletic Club the majority of those who trained were primarily into general fitness and were not Mr. Olympia hopefuls such as Ed Corney, so three sets were enough for a beginner to make progress.

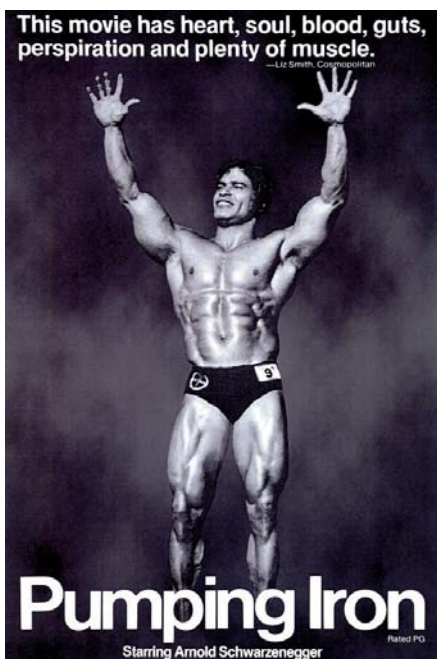
Often, trainees at Bob's club would use this program for a month and then would move on to another

program for variety – sometimes a client would simply add another set, doing permutations such as 12-10-8-6 if they wanted more muscle mass, and 10-8-6-4 if they wanted more strength.

The 10-8-6 program can be described as a pyramid system: higher repetitions form the base of the pyramid, which then tapers towards a point of lower reps. A classical pyramid system would look something like the following pattern (which, although it doesn't typify a true pyramid in an architectural sense, is fine for illustrating the concept):

Reps	Percentage of 1RM
12	70
10	75
8	80
5	85
3	90
2	95
1	100

For the purposes of the 10-8-6 program, however, the difference between the number of reps in the first set and the reps in the last set should be no more than 4-5 reps. Thus, if your first set is 10 reps, you would not want to go below 5 reps in the workout. The



Ed Corney of *Pumping Iron* fame. Corney trained at a gym that used the 10-8-6 program.

pattern in the 10-8-6 program is known as a narrow pyramid. Conversely, a repetition bracket that is too “broad” – i.e., a wide pyramid – is spread over too many reps to be effective. The reason – as suggested by Tudor Bompa from Romania and other strength experts – is that in a wide bracket, the body has a hard time figuring out what exactly the training stimulus is. Bompa believes that the difference in the amount of

weight used between the sets should be no more than 20 percent. So if an athlete uses 200 pounds on one set, then they should not perform so many reps that they could not use at least 160 pounds for any set. This respects a training principle known as the Law of Repeated Efforts.

Of course, a 10-8-6 set-rep scheme is not appropriate for all exercises, especially the Olympic lifts and their

assistance exercises due to the technical nature of these exercises. This is why for exercises such as the clean and the deadlift, we recommend a 4-4-2 protocol.

The 10-8-6 training system is a great workout, although we don't label it as the single best workout because such a workout doesn't exist. When it's used after week 3's stressful 5-4-3-2-1 workout, a week of 10-8-6 is just right. **BFS**

Dr. Greg Shepard is surrounded by many of his top clinicians (l-r): Lance Neven, Evan Ayres, Rick Bojak, Jeff Sellers, Rob Margardt and Bob Rowbotham.

