

# The **BIG** Red



## A Silly Toy Becomes A Valuable Training Device

By Charles Peeples



You've seen it: that big red button ubiquitous at the Staples stores. You squeeze it, and it croaks, "That was easy!" You giggle and squeeze it again and again, til someone takes it away from you. What's not so easy is guessing what Staples actually expected people to do with these things once the novelty wore off. Ostensibly millions of them were produced before that occurred to anyone, which accounts for their continued availability. Supposedly, proceeds from their sales go to charity. I own half a dozen, and I'm not especially eleemosynary-minded. But as a trainer I found a practical use for them, and for that, they're perfect.

Years ago I used to run an annual competitive event for girl athletes called the TEAM VALKYRIES FITNESS CHALLENGE. One of the events was pushups, which, even with cash prizes of hundreds of dollars, instantly guaranteed a minimal turnout (I don't even want to go there – I'll address it in a future article.) When you're judging pushups performed by non-devotees you see a lot of variations where bobbing heads and butts strive frantically to distract from the absence of legitimate (shoulder and elbow) movement. Arguments ensue. The EASY Button, placed on the floor below the sternum, solves all that; you either

hit it or you don't. And when you do, that croaking voice kindly reminds you how easy it was. If you need to adjust the height for anatomical or ability differences, you can put a hockey puck, paperback or your Egg McMuffin under the button. Know some stud who claims he can knock out umpty-ump legit pushups? C'mon, you owe it to him!

Of course the Button can be used to enforce full range of motion in many exercises – you're limited only by your imagination. You can even tape/Velcro it to a vertical or overhead surface, to a machine surface, or simply have someone hold it where necessary.

Full range of motion (ROM) is more important when working with athletes than with most personal training clients. With the latter the focus is more on improving appearance than performance, mainly incorporating bodybuilding-style regimens (yep, despite what you may hear from the functional fanatics, bodybuilding produces the most visible results) which don't require full ROM. Athletes, on the other hand, are after explosive power and quickness, and the Stretch-Shorten Cycle principle, which is the basis of plyometrics, does require it.

One of the most difficult movements to train for full ROM is the squat. While working with WC Eagles Field Hockey players at The Training Center near Pottstown, I found that the girls had no reluctance to pump out reps with increasing weight, but did have an apparent inability (or disinclination) to reach full or even parallel (femurs parallel to floor) depth, even when the weight was greatly reduced. Enter the Button: placed on a small inverted plastic bucket, it offered more than a simple enforcement mechanism – it offered a target. Psychologically, it changed the focus: it seems almost counterintuitive to be forcing yourself downward when you’ve got gravity (yourself and a barbell) already doing that, but such is the case with a target, and the girls affirmed it. Once they got used to the idea, they were hitting the button for reps easily with whatever weight I gave them.

No, I don’t have any deals with Staples, and for that matter you can also use a dollar-store touch light to do the same thing (or spend three times as much and get a push up counter). I just like the low-cost simplicity and making use of an otherwise useless gimmick. And I especially like that croaking taunt after each rep. Not sure if the girls do, so I put a soft pad under it for some dumbbell/barbell exercises because I could just see it: “Aah shaddup!” CRUNCH! “Oops, sorry, Mr. Peeples!”

In the accompanying pics, WC Eagles Laura and Julia Donald exhibit admirable restraint from such vindictiveness as they pump it out in the weight room at The Training Center ([www.thetrainingcenterpa.com](http://www.thetrainingcenterpa.com) )



*Charles Peeples, LMT, CSCS, NSCA-CPT, NCTMB, whose articles have appeared in numerous fitness and bodybuilding magazines, is a well-known proponent for girls' and women's physical advancement ([www.teamvalkyries.org](http://www.teamvalkyries.org)). In addition to being a Nationally-Certified Personal Trainer, he is a Licensed and Nationally-Certified Massage Therapist*

*([www.chesterspringsmassage.com](http://www.chesterspringsmassage.com)). Contact him at [Charles@PhillyFitMagazine.com](mailto:Charles@PhillyFitMagazine.com)*