

the **CrossFit** JOURNAL ARTICLES

Teaching the Jerk

Mike Burgener, with Tony Budding



The last phase of our teaching progression in the Olympic lifts is the jerk. The jerk moves the barbell from the shoulders to a locked-arm position overhead in a single explosive movement. The barbell is driven off the shoulders with a violent dip-drive. In the split second that the upward drive of the hips and shoulders makes the barbell weightless, the athlete drives the body down with the arms until the bar is locked out solidly overhead. The finished position can be in a split position or in a squat position. In competition, the jerk is always paired with the clean, and the lifter must complete both together for a successful lift.

Lift



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Teaching the Jerk (continued...)

Our previous articles on the snatch and the clean discussed the concept of creating momentum and elevation on the barbell by jumping and landing. This exact same concept applies to the jerk as well. The athlete begins with the feet in the jumping position and explodes upward to create maximum drive on the barbell. Once maximum upward momentum has been placed on the barbell, the lifter immediately drives the body down into the receiving position. This is the primary difference between the jerk and the clean and snatch: In the jerk, the athlete drives the body down to the receiving position, whereas in the others, the athlete pulls the body into the receiving position. In the clean and the snatch, the elbows are over the bar for most of the movement, so the lifter pulls himself under and around the bar into the receiving position. In the jerk, because the elbows are under the bar for the entire movement, the lifter drives himself directly down under the bar into the receiving position. Timing, change of direction, stability, strength, and flexibility are all needed to handle the massive weights that the jerk makes it possible to get overhead.

The receiving position for the jerk can be either a partial squat (push jerk) or a lunge position, with one foot extended in front of the body and one foot behind (split jerk). If the weight is received in a full standing position, with straight knees, the movement is called a push press. To be a jerk, the arms must be locked out while the hip is retreating. In competition, pressing the weight overhead is disallowed.

Teaching the jerk is fun and creative, and I have found that athletes love the challenge of lifting heavy weights overhead. The skill transfer exercises below are used to prepare the athlete for this challenge. This article will only cover skill transfer exercises for the push jerk (receiving the barbell in a partial squat, not a split). Next

month, we'll cover the proper footwork for receiving the barbell in the split position. In July, we'll cover the rest of the skill transfer exercises, culminating in the full split jerk. The reason for breaking down the movement and skills this way is to establish confidence in jumping the barbell through a range of motion and creating momentum and elevation on the barbell without having to worry about establishing a proper split landing.

Skill transfer exercises for learning the jerk

The following skill transfer exercises should be practiced first with a length of PVC or a wooden dowel. When the movements are consistently performed well, weight can be added slowly.

In competition, the jerk always follows a successful clean. In order to prepare the athlete for this progression, you can add a squat to each of these exercises. For example, instead of starting with the feet in the jumping position, begin with the feet in the landing position and perform a back squat. At the top of the squat, walk the feet into the jumping position and perform the behind the neck push press or push jerk.

Squat push press



Squat push jerk



Push press behind the neck

Taking the barbell from the squat racks, the lifter assumes the starting position with the bar on the back as in a high-bar back squat, using a clean grip. With the same down and up of the Burgener warm up, dip and then drive the bar upward from the shoulders, finishing the movement by pressing the barbell to arms length.

The push press is an upper-body strengthening exercise that we use to teach the initial phase of the jerk. The lifter learns timing of the dip and the drive with the barbell as well as finish drive with the arms.

Working from behind the neck is easier than from the front because the barbell can travel vertically without having to navigate the face. Still, it is essential that the torso remain completely vertical during the dip-drive so that barbell is propelled vertically. The margin for error decreases dramatically as the load increases. In the squat and deadlift, the torso angle shifts forward. In the push press, push jerk, and split jerk, the torso remains vertical without any forward inclination at all.



Push press



Push jerk behind the neck

Once the athlete is handling the push press behind the neck with success, the athlete may progress to the push jerk behind the neck. The starting position is the same as in the push press and in the initial dip and drive from the legs in the Burgener warm-up. The athlete drives the barbell up, extending the hips, knees, and ankles to create momentum, but instead of pressing the barbell to arm's length overhead, the athlete re-bends the legs (jumps and lands) and receives the barbell at arms length. In other words, once the barbell is elevated and weightless, the athlete flexes at the hip and knee and drives the body down under the bar instead of driving the bar up with the arms against the stability of the lower body as in the push press. The feet move from the jumping position to the landing position.

Whereas the push press behind the neck is an upper body strengthening exercise, the push jerk behind the neck is more of a leg exercise, one that is used to learn speed and drive under the barbell.



Push jerk



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