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JOURNAL ARTICLES

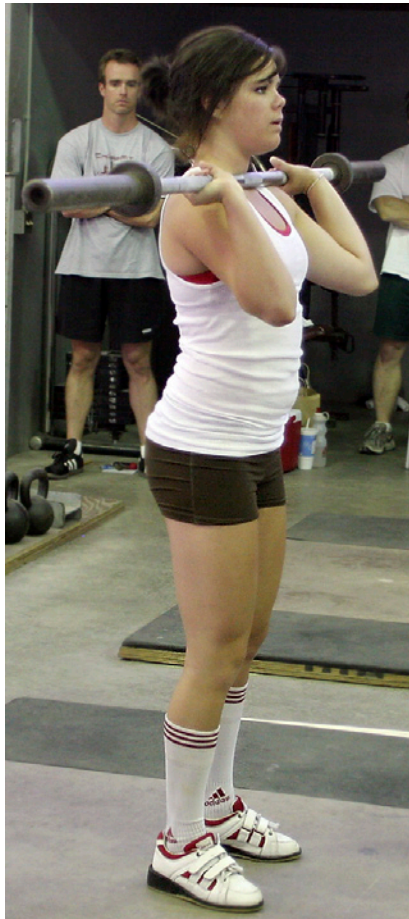
Teaching the Jerk

Part 3: Split Jerk Drills

Mike Burgener and Tony Budding

In our previous two articles in this series, we covered the two most important aspects of the split jerk separately. All the Olympic lifts consist of merely jumping and landing with the barbell in various positions. In May, we discussed the jump (dip-drive) for the jerk as performed with the barbell on the shoulders behind the neck, as that is the simplest version. In June, we covered the proper landing (receiving) position for the split jerk. In this article, the ninth in our series on teaching the Olympic lifts, we put them together with a progression that develops into a full clean and jerk.

With decent instruction, most people can, without too much difficulty, learn the proper landing position for the split jerk and learn to jump the dowel, PVC pipe, or light bar through a range of motion, receiving the bar overhead with the legs in a partial lunge. Most of these same people will find their mechanics deteriorating as they approach maximal loads (and many long before maximal). For this reason, we have developed a series of drills that can be used with



increasing loads while reinforcing or even improving the mechanics of the movement.

Behind-the-neck drills

The first two movements in the sequence were described in our May 2007 article. They are the behind-the-neck (BTN) push press and the BTN push jerk. Special care should be taken in the dip-drive to ensure that the body and bar travel only vertically, with no horizontal movement—i.e., without letting the bar drop toward the front in the dip. In this initial sequence, the movements should be practiced without the optional squat.

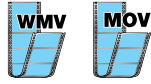
The third movement in the sequence is the BTN split jerk. Once the athlete is handling the push jerk behind the neck with success, the athlete may progress to the split jerk behind the neck. The starting position is the same as in the push jerk and in the initial dip and drive from the legs. The athlete drives the barbell up, extending the hips, knees, and ankles to create momentum, and instead of simply rebending the legs to land in a quarter squat as in a push jerk, the athlete

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jumps the legs into a quarter lunge, or split, position, receiving the barbell with arms fully extended overhead. (This position was explained in our June 2007 article.)

BTN Split Jerk



As stated before, working from behind the neck is an easier way for beginners to start than from the front because the barbell can travel vertically without having to negotiate 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 as the bar descends. In the push press, push jerk, and split jerk, the torso remains vertical without any forward inclination at all.

Combination jerk drills

The next step in the progression is to repeat the three movements in order, but starting with the barbell on the shoulders in front of the neck. Notice in the picture that the hands and arms are in a different position from that for the rack position in the front squat. The hands and

fingers should grip the barbell completely but loosely just outside the shoulders. The elbows should be below the shoulders but in front of the barbell, with the upper arm at about a 60-degree angle in front of the body. The barbell should be in full contact with the shoulders (though this may be difficult with light bars or PVC).

Push Press



Push Jerk



Split Jerk



Squat Jerk Sequence



The three movements are initiated with a complete inhalation. The athlete should consciously fill the belly with air, creating a pneumatic brace throughout the torso. Inhaling completely and holding before the movement begins also encourages consistency and “tightness”

in movement (whereas inhaling or exhaling during the movement leads to inconsistency and typically introduces some unwanted, and unsafe, laxity). The torso should remain perfectly vertical throughout the dip-drive. This is accomplished by keeping the chest up, flexing the hips (“butt back”), and pushing the knees forward a bit in the dip. The tendency to initiate the movement by sliding the hips back and dropping the chest should be avoided at all costs. Any forward inclination of the torso will throw the barbell forward, which greatly complicates the bar path and decreases the likelihood of successfully receiving the barbell overhead.



Push Jerk



Split Jerk

Teaching the Jerk: Split Jerk Drills (continued...)

Warm-up or workout sequence

In competition, the jerk always follows a successful clean. In order to prepare the athlete for this sequence, 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 squat (back squat for the three BTN variations, and front squat for the other three). At the top of the squat, remember to walk the feet back into the jumping position before the dip drive. You will probably also have to reset the grip and perhaps lower the elbows somewhat after the front squat to prepare to thrust the barbell overhead as you drive your body down into the split. Finally, you can end the sequence with a full clean and jerk (see our April 2007 article for an explanation of the clean).

These six exercises can be performed in sequence with PVC as a warm-up. Once there is proficiency in the movements, the sequence can be performed with the squats and cleans with gradually increasing loads as a workout, as follows:

1. Back squat and BTN push press
2. Back squat and BTN push jerk
3. Back squat and BTN split jerk
4. Front squat and push press
5. Front squat and push jerk
6. Front squat and split jerk
7. Clean and split jerk

In next month's article, we will cover further skill transfer and remedial exercises for the jerk.



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