

SQUAT BETTER TODAY

Your ego has cursed you. Break the spell in three steps.

BY MIKE WARKENTIN | FEBRUARY 2016

*“There is a compelling tendency among novices ...
to quickly move past the fundamentals.”*

—Greg Glassman, CrossFit Founder and CEO

Read that quote twice. Maybe three times.

Now admit that you—yes, you—are afflicted by the novice's curse.

Far more powerful than the Madden Curse combined with the Curse of the Hope Diamond, the novice's curse is utterly indiscriminate: It affects 99 percent of people who do anything.

Luke Skywalker succumbed when he brushed off the last of his training and went to fight Vader. Your partner bowed to the curse when he or she tried to assemble the new barbecue without reading the instructions. Your kids got a taste when they fired up “Guitar Hero III” and tried to play “Through the Fire and Flames” on expert mode before they mastered easy mode.

You're burdened by the curse when you squat.

I'd bet this is true no matter how long you've been squatting.

In fact, the longer you've been squatting, the more certain I am that you've neglected the fundamentals.

At a recent CrossFit Level 1 Certificate Course, I learned that I've lived under the novice's curse for some time. After sinking into the bottom of a squat first learned at a seminar in 2009, I was quickly reminded that a technically sound air squat is way more difficult than it seems.

Instead of drilling the air squat every day for the last seven years, I've viewed it only as “some shit I need to do before I load up the barbell and max out.” Similarly, I tried to snatch more than I could overhead squat, and I tried to walk on my hands before I could hold a handstand.

As I sat in the bottom and worked to hold the best squat I could, it became clear that I haven't struggled to achieve the position in years. Nevertheless, I hoped I was in the sort of glorious air squat that would coax a single tear from the eye and draw slow, deliberate clapping.

“Shift your weight back a little,” instructor Rory Zambard said. “Squeeze your butt.”

I shifted and turned on lazy hamstrings and glutes, and the squat became even more difficult—but it felt stronger and more



If you haven't reviewed the fundamentals and practiced air squats recently, it's high time to do so.

balanced. As I performed more reps with the right muscles engaged, I had a revelation: I miss PR back squats because I let the weight shift toward my forefoot, which is a real problem when you have a decent load on your back.

And there, of course, is the laser beam that shoots through 5,000 bad reps to connect a single good air squat at a Level 1 course and the PR back squat I keep missing.

If you recommit yourself to mastering the fundamentals, I'm certain you'll hit new PRs in the back, front and overhead squat.

So how do you squat better today? I'll lay it out in three simple steps:

1. Shake off the novice's curse by reading "[Virtuosity](#)" and "[Squat Clinic](#)" by Glassman.
2. Spend a full hour working on the air squat with a skilled coach or film yourself and ruthlessly identify each error. Fix as many as you can in 60 minutes—and you won't get all of them. Revisit this step regularly.
3. Try to perform every single warm-up or workout air squat with virtuosity.

Sure, drilling the air squat isn't as sexy as trying to hit a 300-lb. overhead squat, just as driving piles into the muck is boring compared to stacking more and more floors on a skyscraper. But one leads to the other, and it's foolish to think otherwise.

If you recommit yourself to mastering the fundamentals, I'm certain you'll hit new PRs in the back, front and overhead squat. Probably the clean and snatch, too. So get back to the basics and pursue perfection in your movement.

Or you can ignore all this nonsense, load up the bar, and get buried under the weight of a bunch of iron and the novice's curse. ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mike Warkentin is managing editor of the CrossFit Journal and founder of [CrossFit 204](#).



Try working with a skilled trainer who won't stop nagging you until the form is solid, then load up the barbell and chase some numbers.