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Burg's Eye View No. 1

Coach Mike Burgener breaks down the key points of Chad Vaughn's lifts at the CrossFit-USA Open.

By Mike Burgener

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Chad Vaughn opened the snatch competition at the CrossFit-USA Open with 132 kg. He made the weight easily, which isn't that surprising considering Vaughn is an Olympian who was lifting only days after finishing 20th in the 77-kg class at the World Weightlifting Championships in Antalya, Turkey.

Vaughn went on to put on a show at the Cheyenne Mountain Resort, making every lift on his way to a 313 total. In the first part of this new series, Coach Mike Burgener explains how Vaughn got the weight where it needed to be.

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Snatch—132 kg

The position from the ground to just above the knee is awesome! Take a look at Chad's feet: he is staying back. His knees have cleared out of the way, and the weight is on the full foot but back. The combined center of gravity (COG) between bar and body is evident here.



The bar continues to rise. The feet are still flat, with the weight back. Chad's knees are beginning to transition to the re-bending stage. Note how tight and focused Chad is here.



I love this picture because of the feet. Note that Chad is now on his way up. He is opening up the hips, the chest is

beginning to rise, and the knees are extending. He's getting the "umpf" on the bar. The one critical point I'll make with him is his face: it's moving toward the ceiling. I prefer some upward tilt but eyes focused straight (see inset, Page 6). The problem here is that less-experienced lifters who see this will attempt to emulate the face and will possibly swing the bar out! Newton: "For every action there is an opposing reaction!" Observe that Chad's feet are still flat. This is awesome! I teach athletes to keep the feet flat as long as one can.



The finish is awesome! The position of the head and face is not what I like (see above), but note that the bar is close to the body. Chad is beginning his descent under the bar.



Burg's ... (continued)

The elbows are high and outside while Chad is pulling his body down and around the bar. His body is in good position in relation to the bar. Note the tension in his forearms while pulling under. Also note that his feet are off the ground, which will increase his speed under the bar while pulling under.



The third pull is about to end here. The bar is turned over and the body is pressed under the bar with great tension, speed and *junkyard-dog aggressiveness!*



In this frame, note the drive of the arms upward, which in effect pushes the body down under the bar. Chad tightens up nicely here and is aggressive in his timing while receiving the bar.



Chad is well positioned and very tight while riding this weight down in the bottom.



Note that Chad's chest and feet are all coming up. He's driving through his heels and raising the chest to vertical to keep the bar in proper position overhead in his recovery.



Chad is in control of this lift while waiting for the down signal from the head referee.



Summary: This lift was outstanding! The only problem I can see, as stated above, is the face in the finish and drive up into the finish. I prefer to have the head tilted up slightly.

Clean—167 kg

Outstanding starting position for Chad: hips above the knees and shoulders ahead of the bar. The feet are flat but the weight is distributed more to the front initially at the start. Also note the nice strong/tight back.



Chad extends the legs while shifting the weight back toward his heels. The knees get out of the way, and Chad is in a perfect position to explode (triple extension: ankles, knees, hips). I call this my "power position" and really find it's the one position that must remain identical for each and every lift. At my gym we practice getting the bar from the floor into this position several times during a workout.



Burg's ... (continued)

Chad is beginning his extension. Note that he is still flat-footed, which allows more drive against the ground. One thing to note is that Chad is beginning an early arm bend. I always say, "When the arms bend, the power ends!" Of course, Chad is an Olympian and has proved himself on the platform, so I point this out for the beginners out there. This is not what you want during *your* pull.



Because of Chad's speed, we are missing a few frames before this picture, but it appears this is where he is beginning to pull himself down into the receiving position (front squat). Note he is on his toes, which is caused by a vicious junkyard-dog pull under.



Chad goes to the bar (meets it) at the level where the bar is during the pull. He does not go to the hole (bottom position) as we call it. Note that his elbows are parallel to the ground. He is receiving the bar high on the shoulders, where the torso can support the bar while riding it down into the full receiving position.



Chad continues to ride the bar down into the full position, staying tight and focused on the receiving position. Note how much lower he is in this frame vs. the previous frame. By comparing the two shots, one can discern how he meets the bar at the proper level, then rides it down.



Chad drives his chest up coming out of the hole of the receiving position or front squat. His elbows do not drop but drive up to keep that torso upright as much as he can.



Finished clean—outstanding lift!



Summary: The only criticism I have is the early arm bend in Frame 3.

Full Extension and Head Position

The exact finishing position is one of the most difficult to catch on film with good lifters because top athletes are only in the position for a split second. As soon as triple extension is reached, the athlete aggressively reverses direction to move under the bar with great speed.



Courtesy of Mike Burgener

Not finishing the second (upward) pull is very common in weightlifting, as is a slow third pull under the bar. If full extension is not reached and the pull under the bar is sluggish, it can be very difficult to make the lift.

Note Chad Vaughn's head position vs. that of Sage Burgener in the bottom picture. Vaughn's technique clearly works for him, but Coach Burgener recommends athletes only slightly tilt their heads upward while focusing the eyes straight ahead.

Picture these shots before your next lift, and imagine Coach B. is encouraging you:

"Finish the pull!"

—Mike Warkentin

Courtesy of Mike Burgener



Natalie Burgener demonstrates the elbows-down position before a jerk.

Jerk—160 kg

If you look at Chad's positioning of the bar on his shoulders for the jerk, one would find that very little adjustment is made with his grip and position of the bar before the dip. As a coach, I choose to teach this a bit differently. I like my hand positioning for the jerk to be approximately the same as one would use in a military press. Although Chad's position works for him, I feel that with the elbows down (as in the picture of Natalie Burgener, above) the drive of the arms is much stronger in moving the body under the bar. However, when one coaches an athlete of Chad's caliber, a good coach will not make any adjustments with the jerk unless there is a jerking problem.



Chad dips straight down. Note his feet being flat. Very solid position.



If I had a VScope on the end of Chad's bar, I would find that the dip was straight down and the drive, shown here, is back along that same line. Note the position of Chad's face/head, getting out of the way of the path of the bar.



Burg's ... (continued)

I see Chad's feet here being in a very good position, but I also feel Chad's upper body is a bit back at this point. I see this as causing a bit of a pelvic tilt when he finalizes the drive of the body under the bar.



The final step back of the feet to stabilize the body under the bar is a critical part of the recovery of the feet from the split position to the positioning of the feet on the same line, which will indicate the finish of the lift.



Being a bit forward on the receiving position causes a recovery that is forward. Observe the back foot pushing forward first in the recovery. This forward push at times and under heavy load can cause the torso to tilt forward, undoing the "stacking of the bones," as I call it. Chad, being a great athlete and a great weightlifter, makes this weight very nicely.



Strong support of the bar over head; i.e., stacking the bones.



Summary: A good lift! Well done, Chad!





About the Author

Coach Mike Burgener is the head coach of CrossFit's Olympic Weightlifting Certifications. *Mike's Gym* in Bonsall, Calif., is a USAW Regional Training Center, and Coach Burgener regularly works with top athletes and beginners there in the company of his unflappable dogs. Coach Burgener's son Casey is a top American lifter and national record holder, and his daughter-in-law Natalie, also a national record holder, competed in the 2008 Beijing Olympics, finishing 12th. Anyone who's worked with Coach Burgener will tell you that his enthusiasm and expertise are always worth a few more kilos on any lift.