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JOURNAL ARTICLES

The Dumbbell Snatch

Michael Rutherford



Up until now the focus of our dumbbell work has been primarily on the slow lifts. These are essential to building foundational strength and should always be in your training movement pool. As you have seen, for cost effectiveness the dumbbell has no peer as a strength and conditioning tool.

There is a point, though, where the training must move to the next level. That level is training for power. From my perspective there is no quality more coveted in athletics than power—the ability to move an object (or the body) through space in a short time.

I train power with dumbbells in a number of different ways, but my favorite is the dumbbell snatch. In this article I'll cover three simple yet productive variations: the muscle snatch, the hang power snatch, and the deck snatch.

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The Dumbbell Snatch (continued...)

The low-tech dumbbell snatch is much easier than a barbell snatch. In fact, the two movements are similar in only three ways:

1. The load starts on the deck or in a hang position.
2. The load travels close to the body from the start position to overhead in a single move.
3. The load finishes extended over the head with locked-out arms and active shoulders.

The barbell snatch requires a much greater degree of kinesthetic awareness. The barbell length and mass at either end moving at the speed of blur make it akin to steering a fire truck versus a Yugo.

The primary movers for the dumbbell snatch are the ankle, knee, hip, and trunk extensors (a.k.a. the “power zone”) and the shoulder flexors, scapular elevators, and shoulder stabilizers. However, the dumbbell snatch should not be implemented with the idea of targeting muscles but rather to focus on a specific performance-based goal—in this case, ground-based explosiveness of the ankle, knee, and hip.

Execution

I teach the muscle snatch first, with the objective of perfecting the path of the dumbbell. This is done first with the just the hand—no weight. Beyond a stable stance, eyes forward and slight pitch in the torso; the main thing I am looking for is the proper extension of the arm upward and in the finish position overhead. (For those of you who know the Burgener warm-up, this is essentially his “7-8-9.”) I use the muscle snatch for low ballistic loading for maturing athletes and as effective rotator cuff prehabilitation. Some of my older athletes never progress beyond the muscle snatch. Their stage of strength conditioning does not allow for safe advancement. I also have trained athletes with lower limb limitations or injuries with a seated muscle snatch. This is similar to an exercise some call the Cuban press.



<http://media.crossfit.com/cf-video/Snatch.mov>

The next progression is a power snatch from the hang position. While standing with the feet just outside shoulder width with the weight evenly balanced, set the back in an athletic position (lumbar extension). Think linebacker stance. The eyes focus forward. The dumbbell will hang between the legs now. The knees and hips bend slightly as if to rebound a basketball or spike a volleyball.



<http://media.crossfit.com/cf-video/PowerSnatch.mov>

The hang power snatch is initiated by a drawing in a quick breath and then extending the legs and hip with a quick snap, while pulling the shoulder, elbow, and then hand and dumbbell up and overhead, finishing with the weight extended above the head and landing with feet and knees in the power position.

Don't pussyfoot around. Get the thing overhead.

In the finishing position, the arm is fully extended, chest high, back flat, and eyes focused on the same point as at the beginning of the movement.

The most common error occurs when the path of

the dumbbell arcs away from the body. To correct this error, I generally walk in front of the athlete and position myself about 13 inches from the proper vertical path of the dumbbell. At this point I explain that the correct path of the dumbbell should not allow for me to be struck by his dumbbell and I would appreciate it greatly if he would lead the dumbbell up on the next pull with the elbow and keep the dumbbell close to the body. I don't usually get hit.

To recap, the key points are:

- Maintain an athletic starting posture, with the dumbbell between the legs
- Explosive snap the hips and knees upward.
- Lead the pull with the elbow to direct the dumbbell overhead while keeping it close to the body.
- Finish with the chest high and the eyes focused forward.

The Dumbbell Snatch (continued...)

The path back to the start should be the same in reverse. If the athlete looks tentative or nervous I will have them reach up with the opposite hand and assist or spot the weight back down to the starting position.

As soon as the athlete demonstrates proficiency with the hang snatch, the next step is to have him pull from the deck. This activates the posterior muscles more and allows for greater loads, when appropriate.

A nice quick drill would include a prescribed number of all three of these snatch variations. First a cluster of muscle snatches, then hang power snatches, followed by a number of deck snatches. Since dumbbells are easily interchanged, you can move from a light dumbbell to heavier one throughout the progression:

1. Muscle snatch x 3 right hand
2. Muscle snatch x 3 left hand
 - Increase weight-
3. Hang snatch x 3 right hand
4. Hang snatch x 3 left hand
 - Increase weight (optional)-
5. Deck snatch x 3 right hand
6. Deck snatch x 3 left hand

Think power, keep the torso tight, drive the weight up at the top, and don't ever let the dumbbell slow down!



Michael Rutherford (a.k.a. Coach Rut) is the owner of [CrossFit Kansas City/Boot Camp Fitness](#). He has over a quarter-century of fitness coaching experience with athletes of all ages. He has also worked in hospital wellness environments and rehabilitation clinics. Coach Rut holds academic degrees in biology, physical education, and exercise physiology and sports biomechanics. He is a USAW-certified Club Coach and is a CrossFit level 3 trainer. He is also the current national Masters Champion in weightlifting at 94 kg.