

the **CrossFit** JOURNAL ARTICLES

Pulling Positions for the Snatch

Mike Burgener, with Tony Budding

In January, we took you through a series of exercises designed to teach the high-hang power snatch (“high-hang” means starting the movement in a standing position with the barbell or dowel at hip height; “power” means the barbell is received in a partial squat). In February, we took you through a series of exercises designed to teach how to receive the snatch in the full squat position. The final movement in that progression was the high-hang squat snatch. Now we continue the lesson by learning the various positions the barbell travels when snatching from the floor.

The high-hang power snatch is a relatively simple movement that anyone can learn. The high-hang squat snatch is more complicated because receiving the bar overhead at the bottom of the squat requires a higher degree of flexibility, coordination, accuracy, agility, and balance, even at very light weight. The benefits of learning and training the movement are immense. In our experience, almost everyone who can do an overhead squat can learn to perform the high-hang squat snatch correctly with light weight.

In this article, we’ll introduce a series of exercises that



From January - the high hang position

develop the positioning pulls of weightlifting. In basic terms, this means moving the barbell from the floor to the bottom of the jumping position. In concept, it is very simple: Deadlift the barbell to mid thigh and then transition into the jumping position. But for some reason, most people have a difficult time with it.

The positioning pulls are unique to the barbell lifts. The main problem that needs to be resolved is that, in order for the bar to travel vertically, the knees have to get out of the way. In the starting position from the ground, the knees are over the bar. In the proper jumping position, the torso is vertical and the knees are below the bar. In the first pull, the legs extend, pushing the

knees back. In the transition, the knees rebend and get under the bar again. Cleaning or snatching dumbbells, medicine balls, ammo cans, and most other odd objects doesn’t raise the same issue with the knees.

The three pulls

There are three pulls in Olympic-style weightlifting. The first pull brings the barbell from the ground to over the knees (mid-thigh). This is very similar to a standard

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Pulling Positions for the Snatch (continued...)

deadlift. There is then a transition to the bottom of the jumping position. This transition is also called the scoop or double knee bend. Teaching the scoop is controversial, with many great coaches disagreeing about it. We believe that while practicing it slowly helps build the muscle memory and teach the proper positions, the scoop can't be consciously performed during a full clean or snatch.

After the transition, the torso is vertical, the arms are straight, and the knees are slightly bent. Ideally, the weight is on the full foot with most of the weight distributed toward the heels. This begins the second pull, which is an explosive extension/jump against the ground. This is the most important part of the lift, both

in terms of making the lift and maximizing adaptation. This violent ankle, knee, and hip extension generates momentum and elevation on the barbell, making it temporarily weightless so that the athlete can pull himself aggressively down against the bar into the receiving position. This is the third pull. The athlete does not merely drop under the bar. Frame by frame analysis of elite lifters shows downward movement of the hips and torso that is much faster than gravity. This speed would not be possible without downward force against the bar by the arms. The arms don't pull the bar up, they pull the body down during the third pull.

Step 1

Make sure that you are confident in your ability to perform the high-hang squat snatch as described in the last month's issue of the CrossFit Journal, at least with a dowel. We have not seen a high success rate of athletes developing a proper full (from the ground) squat snatch without first developing the high-hang squat snatch.

Once the high-hang squat snatch is solid, we can begin to work our way down. The key position is the bottom of the jumping position, which is also the "down" of the "down and up" part of the Burgener warm-up (see photo 1). The torso is vertical, the arms straight, the knees bent, and the heels down. You have to get to this position in every clean and snatch (as well as in the jerk, but with the hands up and the bar resting on the shoulders). From here, there is only one direction to go, and that is straight up. This is key for a successful lift. Beginners often make the mistake of not getting the bar and body into the proper position to be explosive vertically. Snatching from the high hang is much easier because the bar and torso are in the proper position from the beginning. (See high-hang snatch video.)



Online Video:
High Hang
Snatch

Pulling Positions for the Snatch (continued...)

Step 2

From the down position, take the barbell to mid-thigh by pushing the butt back and straightening the knees (see photo 2). It should be noted that the phrases “mid-thigh” and “top of knees” are approximate. Each athlete’s body is unique in its proportions. From the mid-thigh position we want to practice the transition or scoop. When cleaning and snatching, this is an automatic movement and we really don’t focus on it. We just *jump*, and the body does it naturally. For teaching the snatch and clean, we cover all the mechanics of the lifts and show the athletes what really happens. We want to practice going from mid-thigh to transition and then into the second pull (see transition video). We want to make sure the athlete has a handle on this and practice it several times before moving on to step 3. First we practice just moving back and forth between mid-thigh and the “down” position. Then we practice hang snatches

from the mid-thigh position (see hang snatch video). This practice works well to create a basic understanding of what must happen when one performs the snatch. It is essential that the knees rebend, the torso get vertical, and the arms stay straight before the explosive second pull begins.



Photo 2



Online Video:
Transition



Online Video:
Hang Snatch

Step 3

The next step is to move the bar (or dowel) below the knees. From the mid-thigh position, continue pushing the butt back to get it down almost to the level of the knees (keep the back arched!). As soon as the bar passes the knees, maintain the torso angle and bend the knees to lower the bar to mid-shin. The shoulders should remain in front of the bar (see photo 3). Getting the bar back to mid-thigh is what this drill is all about. The back angle must stay the same while the knees are pushed back and the bar, hips, and shoulders all raise at the same rate. You should practice going back and forth between mid-shin and mid-thigh (see shins-to-thighs video). When you’re comfortable with that, practice mid-shins to mid-thighs, transition, mid-thighs to mid-shins, back and forth, over and over again.



Photo 3



Online Video:
Shins-to-thighs

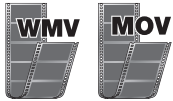
Pulling Positions for the Snatch (continued...)

Step 4

The final progression is practicing the full snatch (see full snatch and Caruso snatch videos). Note that in the starting position (photo 3), the lifter has a tight back, the hips are above the knees, the weight is on the full foot, and the shoulders are in front of the bar. In addition, the elbows are slightly rotated outward with the wrist in a neutral position. The bar is raised to mid-thigh (i.e., to the end of the first pull) by extending the legs only. One must understand that the back, the shoulders, the bar all rise at the same time, maintaining the angle of the back relative to the floor that it had in the starting

position. As soon as the legs are extended, the lifter thinks “Jump!” This should automatically trigger the transition, knee bend, or scoop while raising the torso to vertical. The arms must remain straight throughout these movements. The bar comes into the hips as the lifter explodes into full extension. Only after triple extension do the arms bend, pulling the athlete down into the receiving position.

Practicing these drills by the numbers will aid the lifter in the basic understanding of what is required for the snatch and clean as well as the jerk. We will cover the specific mechanics of the clean and the jerk in later articles. In general, we have found that the more the athletes understand all the basic mechanics of the lifts, the more successful they become.



Online Video:
Full Snatch



Online Video:
Caruso
Snatch

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Caruso snatch video courtesy of Ironmind and Randall J. Strossen.