

the **CrossFit** JOURNAL ARTICLES

From the Snatch to the Clean

Mike Burgener, with Tony Budding



Over the past few months, we've taken you through a series of exercises designed to teach you the full squat snatch. This month, we're introducing the clean. This ordering was intentional. Anyone who can perform the snatch properly can perform the clean properly within a few quick steps. The opposite is not true. There are many folks who can clean properly who never learned (or can't easily learn) the snatch.

Success in all the Olympic lifts is based primarily on a single simple concept: generate momentum and elevation on the barbell (or whatever object is being moved). This momentum is generated by a violent vertical extension of the legs and hips. The exercises covered in the previous months' articles detail the proper development of this extension.

The mechanics of the first and second pulls are identical for the snatch and the clean. There are two main differences between the two lifts: the width of the grip on the barbell and the receiving position of the barbell. The clean grip is noticeably narrower than the snatch (see *CrossFit Journal* issue 52), and the receiving position is the front rack position instead of overhead.

Many folks ask if there is a Burgener warm-up for the clean. Technically, there

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From the Snatch to the Clean (continued...)

is, but it is not necessary because the body very easily shifts the receiving position from overhead to the front rack. The rest of this article assumes that you have followed the sequences in the previous three articles

and can perform a proper (not necessarily perfect) full squat snatch with at least a wooden dowel or piece of PVC pipe.

Front Squats

After going through the Burgener warm-up, the first step in preparing to clean is to perform some front squats. The movement begins with the dowel resting on the shoulders in front of the neck, elbows up as high as possible, hands just outside the shoulders with palms up and fingertips holding the bar in place, and feet in the landing position (as described in issue 51). Take a deep breath and hold it throughout the movement. Your back should be set into position, with a good lumbar curve, abs tight, and weight firmly on the heels (see *CFJ* issue 4 for a thorough analysis of the squat). Descend into a full squat position until the hip joint is below the kneecap. Pushing into the ground through your heels. Finish by standing upright into the starting position and exhale before resetting your position for a further repetition.

Some athletes will not be able to execute the front rack position without a weighted bar. For them, turning the hands over (i.e., with the back of the hand up and fingers down) while keeping the elbows up is an acceptable alternative for working with a dowel, as it allows the athlete to maintain proper elbow height and body position throughout the movement and puts the bar on the shoulders in a way that closely resembles the normal rack. Once a weighted bar is introduced, the palms should face up normally, with the bar held securely in place on the shoulders by the raised-elbow position, with just the fingertips on the bar. Crossing the hands and holding the opposite shoulder is not an acceptable alternative, as it does nothing to prepare the body to receive the barbell in the front squat position during the clean.



Front rack



Front squat



Front rack alternative



Bad front alternative



MOV <http://media.crossfit.com/cf-video/Journal-FrontSquat.mov>



WMV <http://media.crossfit.com/cf-video/Journal-FrontSquat.mov>

Clean drops

The next step in the progression is to perform clean drops. The starting position is the same as for the front squat, except that the feet are in the jumping position instead of the landing position. With a tight core, quickly drop (not jump) directly into the bottom of the front squat. There is no dip-drive or heave in this movement. As you are dropping, your feet will come off the ground just enough to move from the jumping to the landing position, but the body does not ever rise past the starting point. Care should be taken to ensure proper footwork. Do not land with your feet wider than your proper front squat stance.

Training this movement has two significant benefits. It prepares the body to be tight when receiving the bar (add weight slowly!), and it drills proper footwork. In fact, you can return to this movement at any time in your training to correct footwork problems with the clean.



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



<http://media.crossfit.com/cf-video/JournalCleanDrops.wmv>

Hang squat cleans

You are now ready to perform a hang squat clean if you have trained the Burgener warm-up with the snatch. The simple instructions are to jump the barbell up from the hang position and then land in the bottom of the front squat. More thoroughly: starting in the high hang position, jump the barbell through the full range of motion and land in the full squat position with the bar racked properly on the shoulders with the elbows up. This incorporates the down and up with a full shrug and sufficient force to propel the barbell upward. Keep the bar close to the body by pulling the elbows high and outside, and then rapidly rotating them forward under the bar so you can receive it on the shoulders. The feet move quickly from the jumping position to the landing position, while the body moves rapidly from triple extension to the full squat position.

It is essential to keep the arms long (straight) throughout the pulls and the triple extension (the same as in the snatch) and to receive the bar in a full squat position. It is very tempting with light weight to pull the bar up with the arms and catch it high in a partial squat. This should be resisted aggressively. Ironically, it is often beneficial when working with the dowel or empty bar to think about keeping the bar low while you pull yourself under the bar into the bottom of

the front squat. We have seen too many athletes who train power cleans extensively in the beginning of their development unable to transition to squat cleans even as the weight gets heavier. With proper mechanics, a well trained-athlete can squat clean substantially more than they can power clean. Unfortunately, many athletes who train power cleans primarily or who pull early with their arms find they can power clean more than they can squat clean.

If they can perform a full front squat, the cause of this is only a mental block to receiving the weight in a full squat position, and the solution is only to perform lots of repetitions of squat cleans at lighter



Extension

Hang squat cleans (cont'd)

weight. It is far better to learn properly from the outset than to have to start over later.

Once the high-hang squat clean is proficient, you can move down to mid thighs and below the knees in the same sequence as described in last month's issue for the snatch. By the time you reach the end of that sequence, you will be performing a full squat clean. As with the snatch, we have not seen great success rushing to perform full cleans (starting at the ground) before the hang clean is proficient.



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



<http://media.crossfit.com/cf-video/Journal-HangSquatClean.wmv>



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



<http://media.crossfit.com/cf-video/JournalFullSquatClean.wmv>

These movements make an outstanding warm-up when performed with a dowel. Weight should be increased very slowly and only as long as the movements remain proper. It is a fool's game to race to max loads. Moderate loads can mask technical errors for a while, but the more you train with poor technique, the harder it will be to correct later. When it comes to training progressions for the Olympic lifts, the tortoise always beats the hare.



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