

the
CrossFit
JOURNAL ARTICLES

Assistance Sequence for the Snatch

Mike Burgener, with Tony Budding



Over the past twelve months, we've described a complete set of progressions and skill transfer exercises for teaching and developing the snatch and clean and jerk. They can be used in order to learn the movements, or they can be used at any point in an athlete's progress to refine a skill or strengthen a weakness. In this and the following months, we'll talk about specific issues lifters often face and how to use and combine some of the moves we've discussed to help resolve those issues.

This month, we describe a sequence that helps address one of the most vexing issues for many athletes: strength and stability in the receiving position of the full snatch (i.e., squat snatch). Most athletes—and CrossFitters especially—have greater trouble with receiving the barbell in the bottom of the overhead squat than they do with generating the necessary momentum and elevation on the barbell to get it up overhead. In other words, most CrossFitters miss max effort snatches not

1 of 3

Assistance Sequence for the Snatch (continued...)

because the bar didn't get high enough, but because they didn't get under the bar successfully. The following series of movements is extremely effective for developing the strength, stability, speed, and confidence to snatch heavy weights.

The sequence is muscle snatch + overhead squat + snatch balance + Sots press. All these movements have been described in detail in previous articles. The muscle snatch is an upper-body strengthening exercise that trains the athlete both to keep the barbell close to the body and to move aggressively under the bar and engage the upper body to speed the descent. The overhead squat is a full-body strengthening exercise with an emphasis on midline stability, and it trains the drive up out of the hole to complete the lift. The snatch balance develops speed and stability in the receiving position. And the Sots press is an upper-body strengthening and flexibility exercise that develops stability and comfort in the bottom position.

This sequence can be done as a warm-up with a dowel or PVC pipe. Weight should be added gradually. The most basic version of the sequence is to do one rep of each of the four exercises (as shown in the videos). After warming up, start with a weight at which you can comfortably do three sequences of one rep each. So, one sequence is:

1. Muscle snatch, 1 rep
2. Overhead squat, 1 rep
3. Snatch balance, 1 rep
4. Sots press, 1 rep

Repeat that sequence three times to make up one set. Repeat the entire set for three to five more sets, resting between sets. Add a little weight at each set and reduce the number of sequences within each set if necessary. This sequence can be done at the beginning of a training session as an extended warm-up, or at the end as skill development.

You can customize the rep scheme within each sequence to focus on particular weaknesses. If the athlete is plenty strong but is slow and/or shaky in the third pull, you can bump up the reps of the snatch balance to three to five. If the athlete has flexibility issues or is weak or unstable in the bottom position, increasing the reps on the Sots press will demand improvement (again, starting with light weights). If the athlete is quick but lacks overall strength, the reps of the overhead squat can be boosted. The sequence can also be done without the Sots press



Assistance
Sequence - 45 lbs



Assistance Sequence for the Snatch (continued...)

if the athlete's bottom position is stronger than his pulls (though this is rarely the case for CrossFitters, and it shouldn't be skipped just because you don't like it).

For example, there was a 77-kg-class male lifter at Mike's Gym recently who power snatches 90 kg but can only snatch 95. Why? Bottom weakness. No stability. And no strength in the top position. His pull was awesome, but he just did not know how to push up on the bar. So he did a muscle snatch + overhead squat + Sots press sequence, with a good 70 kg. By the time he left, he had snatched a new PR of 100. For him, it was all about learning how to how to push up on the bar.

In contrast, let's take a look at a lifter like my daughter Sage. She can muscle snatch OK—not great, but OK. But she can snatch balance 80 kg! (As a teenage female 63-kg lifter, no less!) It's not her overhead strength that's her limitation; it's her pull and her turnover at the top. For her I prescribe a sequence of muscle snatch + overhead squat + snatch balance. She doesn't need to do Sots presses as much. I want her to put that energy into improving her pulling strength. Use the exercises you can to improve the weaknesses you see.



Assistance
Sequence - 115 lbs



Mike Burgener, owner of [Mike's Gym](#) (a CrossFit affiliate and USAW Regional Training Center), is a USAW Senior International Coach, former junior World team (1996-2004) and senior World team coach (2005), and strength and conditioning coach at Rancho Buena Vista High School in Vista, Calif.

Tony Budding is the Media Guy for CrossFit, Inc., and a trainer at [CrossFit Santa Cruz](#).

