

the **CrossFit** JOURNAL ARTICLES

Learning the Olympic Lifts

The Grip

Mike Burgener with Tony Budding



Last month, we took a detailed look at the jumping and landing stances for the Olympic lifts. This month, we'll discuss proper hand placement on the bar for the snatch and the clean. First off, it must be understood that grip in both the snatch and clean is personal and based on several factors, including flexibility, strength, body size and shape, and what is generally comfortable to the athlete. While there may be a period of experimentation when an athlete tries out various grip widths for each lift, the athlete should settle on one consistent grip

width for each lift and approach the bar in an identical manner every single time.

Grip width

There are three main methods for determining the proper grip width for the snatch. All three usually end up giving the same result, and since the visual approach is the quickest and easiest, it is the one I most use.

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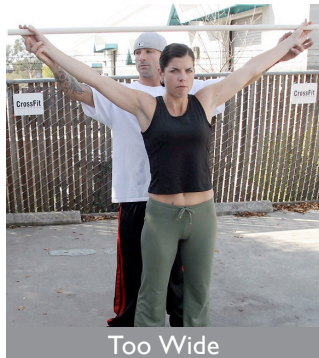
The Visual Method



The coach instructs the athlete to grip the bar with hand spacing that puts the bar approximately 8 to 12 inches from the top of the head when held directly overhead, in the frontal plane. I have found that this method is easier, quicker, and just as accurate as the following two methods, although it requires a bit more experience on the coach's part and sensitivity to individual variation. And if you're working with multiple athletes at a time, the visual method allows for much more effective group management.



Too Narrow



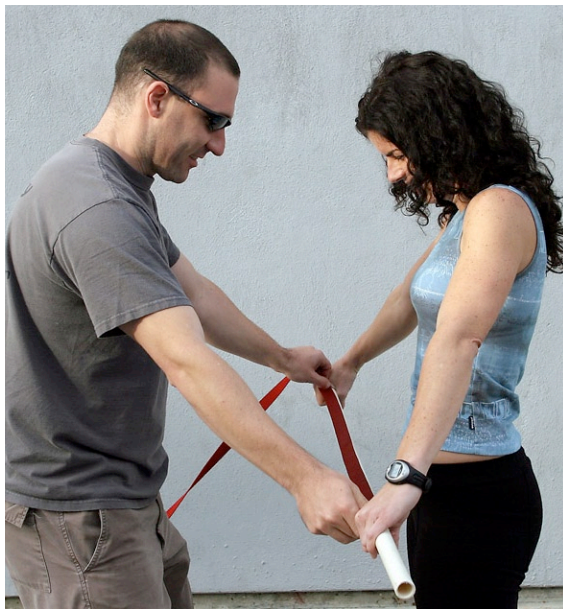
Too Wide

The PVC/scarecrow method - snatch grip



The athlete stands with her back toward the coach with her upper arms parallel to the ground and forearms perpendicular to the ground, with the hand pointing down (like a scarecrow). The coach stands behind the athlete with a length of PVC pipe (or wooden dowel) in his hands. The coach places his hands on the dowel just behind the athlete's, thus creating a measure of the width of the athlete's grip with his hands. The athlete then turns to face the coach and places her hands on the dowel just outside his. The width of this grip is normally satisfactory for performing the snatch.

The string method - snatch grip



The athlete stands with her back toward the coach with her right arm extended out to the side, parallel to the ground, with the hand in a fist. The coach uses a string or tape to measure from the edge of the left shoulder to the knuckle of the right fist. The coach then holds the string centered on the bar, and the athlete places her hands on the bar just outside the edges of the string. The width determined by the string is usually identical to that of the scarecrow method.

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These methods are designed to give starting points for determining the proper grip width for the snatch. Some athletes (particularly males) want to grab the bar wider because of limited shoulder flexibility. The advantages of going wider are a shorter receiving height and an easier time keeping the bar in or behind the frontal plane. The primary disadvantage—and it's a significant one—is the increased strain on the wrist, especially with maximal loads. Many accomplished lifters have suffered wrist injuries by working too wide too heavy. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that one of these three methods be followed for determining the grip width.

Determining the grip width for the clean is simpler. Of primary importance is that the hands fall outside the shoulders when the bar is received. The speed, force, and weight of the bar being received could crush a finger caught between the bar and the shoulder. At the same time, the hands shouldn't be too wide because it strains the elbows and weakens the shoulder drive for the jerk.

There are two main methods for determining the grip width for the clean:

The hip method - clean grip

The athlete stands, holding the bar with arms hanging straight. She grips the bar a thumb's length outside her hips. This width is generally acceptable for performing the clean and jerk.



The Grip (continued...)



The hook grip is performed by wrapping the thumb around the bar, then wrapping the fingers around the thumb. This is a very strong grip that prevents the bar from slipping out of the lifter's hands during the snatch and clean. The hook grip is used when pulling the barbell from the ground to the receiving position in the clean and the snatch. Most lifters, however, unhook their thumbs when securing the bar in the receiving position, to allow for a quicker turnover of the barbell. In the receiving position of the clean, the grip is often loosened completely, with the weight of the barbell supported completely by the shoulders and the fingertips used just to keep the bar in place. In that case, the athlete will regrip the bar before beginning the jerk.

Everyone should use the hook grip, even though most new lifters experience some discomfort with it (it usually goes away within two weeks). The grip gives the feel of strength, power, and security. In fact, I have found athletes driving down the highway practicing the hook grip on the steering wheel.

In the next journal we will discuss the Burgener warm-up, what it entails, and why we use the lifts we do during the warm-up.



The shoulder method - clean grip



The athlete racks the bar on her shoulders, and places her hands on the bar just outside the shoulders. Typically, this produces a grip width very similar to that produced by the hip method.

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