The Lateral Squat

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The lateral squat is an excellent warm-up exercise to loosen and at the same time strengthen the total musculature at the hip joint. When performed properly, the lateral squat stresses the adductors and the abductors of the hip joint, and therefore is beneficial in the vital area of injury prevention.

While the exercise places stress on all the smaller stabilizer muscles of the lower extremities, it is most effective in developing improved hip flexibility and strength. These are important components in the improvement of the vertical jump and running speed when they are used in conjunction with other speed-strength exercises. Lack of flexibility is a speed inhibitor for many athletes. This is another way to work on that specific area and change a weakness into a strength.

By the nature of the exercise, all movements should be slow and deliberate. When the weight is completely shifted to the bent knee side, the athlete should hold the position for three to four seconds. Sets of four repetitions (two times to each side) seem to work well. The weight must be kept light enough to maintain good balance and control throughout the entire exercise. The lateral squat is an assistance exercise that fits well into the total picture of hip strength and flexibility.

Figure 1.

Figure 2.
Technique Checklist for the Lateral Squat

Before You Begin
- A well-defined work area with a clean, dry surface, preferably a mat
- Evenly loaded barbell with collars (beginners should start using a long stick or broom handle until technique has improved)

The Start
- Barbell should be positioned on the back in a high back squat position
- Arms should be in a back squat position with hands gripping bar at slightly more than shoulder width (using a stick or an unloaded barbell, beginners should extend arms along and over the bar for greater control) (Photo 1)
- Feet slightly wider than shoulder width
- Back straight or slightly arched

The Action
- Shift weight to the left leg, bend at the knee and slowly lower the hips until the thigh is slightly below parallel to the floor (Photo 2)
- Left leg (from knee to ankle) is in a vertical position
- Left foot is flat on the floor with weight evenly distributed

Figure 3.

Figure 4.
Keep back straight while chest moves out over the bent left knee
Right leg is straight at the knee with the sole of the foot flat on the floor
Hold position until body is stabilized
While maintaining a low hip, high torso position, slowly shift weight
to the right leg by extending the left knee and flexing the right knee,
keeping the feet in place (Photos 3 and 4)
Move to a center position and stabilize before beginning next repetition
Repeat for the desired number of repetitions
To allow for a greater stretch in the hamstrings and gluteals, follow
the same techniques, except pull the toes up on the straight leg and place
only the heel on the floor (Photos 5 and 6)

Recovery
Center weight between legs and extend knees like the ascent portion of
the back squat; this completes one full set

Coaching Points
Try several different foot spacings to determine optimum placement
Front foot must be completely flat on the floor, knee over the ankle
Movements should be slow and controlled. Pause to stabilize in each position
Keep weight light enough to ensure best technique
Adjust foot placement as technique improves
A workout of two to four sets is recommended

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Figure 5.

Figure 6.