Teaching Technique #2:

Bent-over row

1. When instructing proper exercise technique for the bent-over row weight training exercise, list some of the common technique errors observed in the beginning lifter.

Huegli: a. Straight legs. The upper torso should be parallel to the ground, and the legs should be slightly bent, lessening the weight's load on the lower back.
b. Having a rounded lower back.
c. Lowering the weight down to the beginning position too fast.

Many times the lifter will have his head down, which causes the back not to be straight. Raising the head and focusing the eyes in the forward position will correct the back and head positioning.

Proper foot positioning and hand placement can be corrected by instruction from qualified personnel. This is very important at the beginning of the exercise technique instruction.

Not pulling the bar to the chest and extending the arms fully happens many times when a lifter becomes more concerned with weight than with proper technique.

This can be rectified by resting the forehead against a sturdy object (i.e., bench, padded wall) to better stabilize the lower back and allow for the correct exercise movement.

Jones: Safety considerations for the beginning lifter learning the bent-over row weight training exercise are: 1) to make sure the exercise is performed in a spacious area with room in front of the lifter. This is to ensure that if the lifter should lose his balance, he will be in an area with space; 2) all free weights are secured with collars; 3) as you perform the exercise, make sure that you have a partner watching you. A partner is there in the event of any problem with the exercise.

Kelso: Using the lumbar region of the back to assist in raising the resistance.
b. Pulling the bar to the abdominal region, rather than the chest.
c. Flexing the wrists during the movement.
d. Related to A above, not stabilizing the torso at or near a parallel position to the ground.

2. Are there any special safety and/or spotting considerations for the beginning lifter learning the bent-over row weight training exercise?

Huegli: The exercise can be performed by pulling a dumbbell with one arm, with the free arm acting as a support to take stress off the lower back. The same thing can be accomplished when using a barbell and placing the head on a padded bench to take stress off the lower back.

Jones: Some of the common technique errors observed in the beginning lifter are for the lifter to not have his head up, his eyes forward, and his feet shoulder width apart, not pulling the bar to the chest and extending the arms fully, and placing hands improperly on the bar.

Kelso: Yes. Because the torso should be stabilized at or near a parallel position to the ground to isolate the intended movement at the shoulder joint, a great amount of stress is placed on the lumbar spine.

3. Are there any prerequisite strength or skill requirements before the beginning lifter should include the bent-over row in his/her workout?

Huegli: We don't have a prerequisite requirement to training the bent-over rowing exercise; instead we incorporate, in the training routine, exercises that prepare the athlete to safely and effectively have success with the lift. Straight-leg dead lift, back extension, sit-ups and pre- and post-training stretching are a part of the athlete's regular workout, which serves as foundational training.
Kelso: Yes. A resistance should be utilized which is relative to the strength level of the trainee. The inability to perform the exercise correctly, even if a light resistance is used, may justify the use of other exercises designed to work the same musculatures (i.e. seated pulley rows, lat pulldowns, etc.). This may be the case if a trainee lacks relative strength in the lumbar region of the back and/or in the elbow flexors, both limiting factors in the proper execution of the exercise.

Jones: Before the beginning lifter should include the bent-over row in his workout, he should be able to perform three sets of six repetitions of lat pull-ups and three sets of 10 repetitions with 80 pounds of the lat pulldown. This strength requirement is necessary because the body position for the bent-over row exercise puts the body in a position that can involve the lower back, which is not what the exercise was designed for. Some strength development as a result of the lat pull-ups and lat pulldowns should allow for better isolation on the lats in the bent-over row exercise, provided proper technique is used.

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4. Are there any particular instructional methods you have found helpful when teaching the bent-over row to your athletes?

Hugeli: I instruct the lifter to have a slight bend in his legs and chest parallel to the ground. The athlete wants to start with his arms fully extended and begin the pull through the back, shoulders and then arms. Hold the weight at the chest for 1 to 2 counts and then slowly (3-4 count) lower the weight to the beginning position.

Jones: There are five steps in the instructional method that I have found helpful in teaching the bent-over row exercise. 1) To provide an analysis of how the exercise will benefit the body. 2) To demonstrate the proper techniques of the exercise. 3) To have the beginning lifter copy my movements as I demonstrate the exercise. 4) To have the exercise demonstrated by the beginning lifter using a broom handle as the bar. 5) To have the lifter begin performing the exercise with the bar only, using the progressive overload principle.

When the beginning lifter learns the exercise by following the five instructional steps, he should be able to grasp the complete understanding of the exercise. There is an opportunity for the lifter to see the proper technique and to copy the movements as the exercise is being performed. As the instructor, I have an opportunity to see the individual technique with the broom handle. Using progressive overload principles, the beginning lifter should get maximum benefit from the exercise.

Kelso: An emphasis on:
A) Stabilized torso.
B) Lowering the barbell/dumbbells to the fully stretched position.
C) Raising the elbows as high as possible during the positive phase of the exercise.

5. Do you use any audio-visual aids, or special equipment to assist in teaching your athletes how to perform the bent-over row?

Hugeli: No.

Kelso: A broomstick or similar light object to familiarize them with the correct movement.

Jones: The only special equipment I use is a push broom handle as the bar in the instructional phase of the exercise.

Bent-Over Row Coach’s Checklist

- Shoulder width is used, with knees slightly bent throughout the exercise.
- Optional width grip is used with palms toward athlete (pronated) and thumbs around bar.
- Athlete bends forward at the hips until the torso is 10-30 degrees above horizontal.
- Torso remains straight and rigid throughout the exercise.
- Head remains facing forward at all times.
- Athlete pulls bar in a slow, controlled manner until it touches the lower rib cage.
- Squeeze shoulder blades together.
- Pause momentarily.
- The legs and back remain stationary, allowing the back and arm muscles to do the work.
- Bar is lowered in a slow, controlled manner to the starting position.
- Without rounding the lower back, allow the bar to stretch or pull the upper back.
- Inhale as the bar is raised and exhale as it is lowered.