Teaching Techniques #7:

The dumbbell power clean

1. When instructing proper technique for the dumbbell power clean exercise, list some of the common technique errors observed in the beginning lifter.

Javorek: A. The athlete starts with the dumbbells too far forward from the toes.
B. Elbows bend too soon in the first phase of the pull.
C. The movement is jerky and not well coordinated during trunk extension.
D. After the second pull, the dumbbells are racked at the shoulder by a reverse curl with the elbows pointing down, rather than a strong pull and "whipping" of the elbows forward to rack.

Takano: A. The weight is "ripped" off the floor.
B. Rounding of the back.
C. Racking or catching the weight with the hips forward, causing compression of the vertebrae in the lower back.
D. Misalignment of the wrists and shoulders; wrist inflexibility.

Shewokis: A. Too wide a foot stance in the start and throughout the pull.
B. Loss of tightness in the trunk and lower back from start to pull.
C. Shoulders too far behind the weight in the start and during first pull.
D. Pulling prior to full extension.
E. Loss of synchronization of the movement.
F. Loss of grip due to poor grip strength or sweat on the palms.

The coach should caution the lifter against over-rotating the elbows because of the possibility of losing control of the dumbbells. It is important not to swing the dumbbells to rack. Often one side of the body is favored over the other, so the lifter should concentrate on keeping the movement on both sides of the body the same.

Shewokis: I instruct the lifter to perform exercises such as dumbbell power pulls to the shrug position, which teaches them the strong shrugging motion. They then progress to the power high pull. These exercises teach the athlete speed of movement in the proper pathway. With a strong shrug, the lifter is able to "whip" or "hook" the elbows through to rack. The lifter begins with a light weight and is taught technique in the whole.

2. Are there any particular instructional methods or teaching tips you have found helpful when teaching the dumbbell power clean to your athletes?

Takano: If the lifter performs a strong vertical pull, there should be no difficulty with racking the weight.
Coach’s Checklist

The Dumbbell Power Clean
(from the hang or power position)

Before You Begin
☐ Well-marked power clean area
☐ Dry surface, preferably with a weight mat area on which to store weights when not in use
☐ Clean area, no obstructions

The Start
☐ Shoulder-width stance, knees flexed, feet flat on the floor and toes pointed slightly outward
☐ Dumbbells remain close to the body (knees or thighs) in the hang or power position
☐ Overhand grip (pronated)
☐ Hands are positioned just outside the thighs with dumbbells touching thighs
   (distance between hands slightly wider than shoulder width)
☐ Arms straight with elbows pointed to the sides
☐ Back is straight or slightly arched and rigid
☐ Head facing straight forward
☐ Shoulder blades pulled together, and chest held up and high, trapezius muscles relaxed
☐ Shoulders over or slightly ahead of the dumbbells
☐ Inhale before initiation of movement upward to ensure a tight torso
   (do not exhale until after second pull)

The Pull Phase
☐ Smooth, slow, easy pull from the hang (knee position) to the power position
   (4 inches above knee)
☐ Dumbbells brush against the middle or top of the thighs
☐ Back is straight or slightly arched
☐ Arms are straight
☐ Head facing straight or neck slightly arched
☐ Feet are still flat
☐ Dumbbells are pulled explosively as legs completely extend in “jumping” action employing a shrug
☐ Shoulders stay over or in front of the dumbbells as long as possible
☐ Dumbbells are pulled close to body
☐ Continue upward pull by pulling with arms
☐ Keep elbows high, moving up and out, over the wrists
☐ Pull as high as possible

Rack and Recovery
☐ Quickly shift the feet slightly to each side
☐ Rotate elbows around the dumbbells
☐ Rack the dumbbells across the front of the shoulders
☐ Move elbows forward and keep them high
☐ Bend at the knees to absorb the weight of the dumbbells in the catch phase
☐ Exhale
☐ Stand up straight when lift is complete
☐ Dumbbells positioned on anterior deltoids
☐ Elbows up, torso straight, chest held high

Lowering the Dumbbells
☐ Lower the dumbbells under control, to the top of the thighs
☐ Bend at the knees and hips, squat down, bringing the dumbbells to rest on the floor or support bar
☐ Keep the back straight

This peer-reviewed checklist reflects accepted guidelines of the National Strength and Conditioning Association. Copyright 1989, all rights reserved.
part-whole method, similar to the standard power clean. Sometimes explaining to the athlete why they are doing a movement helps (i.e. what happens mechanically and how the special qualities developed translate to actual movement in competition). The lifter should be prepared with a good strength base first by performing exercises such as upright rows, bent rows and squats.

**Javorek:** First teach a technically correct shrug from the power position, then from the hang position. Combination exercises, in which the athlete performs a shrug, power shrug or pull, then a power high pull and then a power clean are useful. Dumbbell upright row is a good exercise to teach the “elbows up” technique and vertical pull. If the shrug is strong and the pull is vertical, the elbows will follow through to a proper position at the racking of the weights.

**Javorek:** Have the beginning lifter perform this exercise with one dumbbell at a time, alternating sides, progressing to both simultaneously. The dumbbell is placed outside of one foot and parallel to it. The palm faces inward and a light weight is used. Again, the technique points are similar to those used for the standard power clean (back flat, hips low, arms straight, head in a neutral position, shoulders over the weight).

**Takano:** For this exercise, the legs and hips must be in a lower position than in the standard power clean because of the height of the dumbbells at the floor position. There are two ways to approach the starting position:

1. Dumbbells placed to the side, parallel with the feet, with wrists in the same orientation.
2. Dumbbells placed to the front, perpendicular to the feet, with the wrists in the same position (this is difficult to maintain).

The technique is similar to the standard power clean.

**Takano:** This exercise lends the most benefit to athletes involved in sports requiring both hand-body coordination and balance, such as wrestling, gymnastics and diving. Dumbbell power cleans require much more balance from left to right side, with greater range-of-motion control emphasis. This exercise is not recommended for athletes performing one-arm-dominant sports such as throwers in track and field, baseball, volleyball and basketball players and football quarterbacks, because of the dominance of one side over the other. The injury potential is high with an increase in weight during which the quality of work on both sides is not the same. If this exercise is used over long periods of time, imbalances in the shoulder and back areas may occur, which is harmful for the one-arm-dominant sports. The development of the rhomboids, teres major, teres minor and trapezius is not as great as with the standard power clean. Supporting the dumbbells, once racked, may be difficult because of the need for torque in the shoulder and wrist areas. This exercise may be dangerous because it is more conducive to swinging of the weight rather than pulling, which translates into a reverse curl rack. This type of rack causes the weight to swing back, with the possibility of losing the dumbbells behind the lifter. The standard clean is more conducive to pulling and is more easily supported at the rack position. Dumbbell power cleans are useful for conditioning the beginner and increasing grip strength in the weak hand, but is not a good substitute for the standard power clean.

**Shewokis:** The lifter should begin with a shoulder-width or narrower stance with feet flat on the ground. The knees should be in alignment with the toes, with dumbbells parallel to the feet. Arms remain straight and to the side with the back arched and trunk tight. The grip is overhand, palms facing inward. The technique is similar to the standard power clean. It may be helpful to have dumbbells with rotating sleeves. Make sure the athlete understands what could go wrong and how to correct errors.

**Shewokis:** The lifter should begin with a shoulder-width or narrower stance with feet flat on the ground. The knees should be in alignment with the toes, with dumbbells parallel to the feet. Arms remain straight and to the side with the back arched and trunk tight. The grip is overhand, palms facing inward. The technique is similar to the standard power clean. It may be helpful to have dumbbells with rotating sleeves. Make sure the athlete understands what could go wrong and how to correct errors.

**Javorek:** For all-sports conditioning, the dumbbell power clean is a useful exercise for the development of balance and control of weight on both sides of the body. It develops muscle reflex action and affects the neuromuscular pathways on both left and right sides of the body. This exercise also develops good grip strength. The differences are seen in the hand position (if the dumbbells are oriented parallel to the feet) and the lower starting position.

**Javorek:** For all-sports conditioning, the dumbbell power clean is a useful exercise for the development of balance and control of weight on both sides of the body. It develops muscle reflex action and affects the neuromuscular pathways on both left and right sides of the body. This exercise also develops good grip strength. The differences are seen in the hand position (if the dumbbells are oriented parallel to the feet) and the lower starting position.

**Shewokis:** 1. Good assisting exercise to develop conditioning for the standard power clean.
2. Greater lack of control with the dumbbell power clean.
3. Higher injury potential with the dumbbell power clean.
4. Improved weak-hand grip strength.