Teaching the Power Clean and the Hang Power Clean

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The logical method of teaching the power clean is starting with the easiest part of the movement first, then gradually adding the other steps until the whole movement is mastered. If players are taught according to the following steps, they will achieve a good understanding of the lift, and with minor adjustments, most will then be able to master the proper technique of the power clean. Before any of this can happen though, the coach must develop the expertise necessary to teach this movement. The coach must picture the entire movement in his mind. Films of world class weightlifters are available for repeated viewing by coaches and athletes. Learning by seeing is often the best way. It is also very helpful to use as demonstrators those athletes who master technique quickly. This helps to breed a "learn from each other" atmosphere that is very important with a large team.

Finally, scheduled workouts must include times to stress technique. Early in the program, every day should concentrate on technique work. As technique is learned, the time spent in that area can be reduced to once a week and then to once a month. Of course, the coach will always work with players on technique, but it will occur during, not in place of, their workouts.

Each of the following exercises should be learned thoroughly and in the order presented. A mistake or improper movement in one exercise will result in an overcompensation in the next movement and thus, another improper movement. Each step can be used as an exercise in your strength program. This provides at least seven exercises to start with (2 to 3 per workout). In the initial learning stages, all of these seven exercises should be used at least once a week. As the players master technique and start handling heavier weights, it would be better to limit them to three "main" exercises a week. Add a couple of different secondary movements each week.

Eight Steps to Becoming Technically Proficient in the Power Clean

1. Shrug and On Toes—Start from the power position (#5), shrug as high as possible while extending legs and raising on toes (#4). It is easiest to start the bar from the blocks in this movement. You must start from the proper power position. This entails the following:
   a) Back arched.
   b) Shoulders over the bar.
   c) Wrists curled inwards.
   d) Head in a natural alignment with the spine.
   e) Bar touching (just slightly) the thighs just above the knees.
   f) Weight is on the balls of the feet.
   g) Feet are spaced shoulder width or slightly narrower.
   This position must be learned correctly before any of the other exercises should be tried. Note the following important points:
   a) The shrug should be directed straight up and not in a circular motion.
   b) Do not let the bar swing away from the athlete. It should always stay close to the athlete.
   c) Balance is important. There should be no "walking" with the bar.

2. Power Pull—The same movement depicted by the previous exercise is used. However, we attempt to accelerate the bar as much as possible in this movement, thus creating a tremendous amount of true power (Power = Force x velocity). It is helpful if at the very start of the movement the athlete "rocks" so that the bar swings over so slightly towards the lifter as his hips "rock" backwards. This forces the shoulders even farther over the bar resulting in a good "power" position. Now the lifter drives in and up with his hips as his upper torso straightens forcefully. At the same time he extends his legs and raises up high on his toes. If the athlete pulls correctly then you may allow him to bend his arms at the top of the pull to allow the momentum of the bar to carry it to its peak. If the athlete pulls excessively with his arms and shoulders (tries to "muscle" the weight up), make him keep his arms straight throughout the complete lift. (This will force him to pull with his back and legs the correct way.)

Editor's Note: Jeff is currently the 4th ranked weightlifter in the U.S. via a 307 snatch and a 370 lb. clean and jerk. Johnson hopes to become one of only seven lifters in U.S. weightlifting history to clean & jerk over 400 lbs in the 181 lb. class.

52 NSCA Journal August-September 1982
Important points:

a) All of the points noted in exercise 1 should be observed here too.
b) This is a “jumping” movement very similar to a vertical jump.
c) If the bar does not “pop” with a high velocity, then either the lifter is handling too much weight, or he is not concentrating on speed.
d) Always keep the bar close to the thigh (especially during the “rock”).
e) Note pictures #3 & #4.

3. **The Hang Power Clean**—Once the power pull is mastered we move to the hang power clean. Do the power pull following the above instructions and important points, but at the peak of the power pull, slide the feet apart slightly, drop under the bar while planting the feet, and catch the bar squarely across the deltoids and clavicle with the elbows high. Follow pictures #3 - #6.

Important points:

a) Once the power pull is completed, you should feel as though you are pulling yourself under the bar. It is the momentum that the bar has from the “power pull” phase that keeps it rising.
b) Catch the bar at the peak of its flight. (Do not let the bar crash.)
c) The athlete should feel as though he is jumping or hopping when executing this exercise. The feet should slide to the side about six inches each.
d) Because of shoulder and wrist inflexibility, some players might have to let the bar roll back on the fingertips when catching the bar in order to provide for a solid rack across the shoulders.
e) The “rocking” movement described in the power pull segment is very important in learning the feel of driving the hips in and up. However, this is a slight movement and should not be exaggerated, or an unwanted “swinging” of the bar could result.

We now have covered the hang power clean in three simple steps. Practice these steps separately and together until your players become reasonably proficient at them. Then, and only then, should you proceed to the following steps.

4. **The Clean Dead Lift to the Knees**—The bar is brought from the floor to the knees, held for a few seconds, and returned back to the floor. The shoulders cover the bar always, the back is arched or flat, the wrists are curled inwards, and the lats are contracted to help keep the bar close to the body. The bar should move slightly towards the lifter as it goes from the floor to the knees. The bar is raised as a result of the straightening of the legs as the angle of the back in relation to the floor remains constant (pictures #1 & #2).

(Continued, page 54)
Teaching the Power Clean and the Hang Power Clean

(From page 53)

Important points:

a) The feet should be flat on the floor, set at about shoulder width or slightly narrower. (About the same width as one would use if he were about to do a vertical jump.)
b) In this movement one should feel as though he is pushing the ground or floor down.
c) Stress position (back arched, wrists curled in, head in line with the spine, shoulders over the bar, etc.).

5. The Clean Dead Lift to the Knees Plus Shift—Follow the previous movement, but after pausing at the knees for a few seconds, keep the bar moving up by straightening the back and “scooping” the knees under the bar. You should now have attained the starting power pull or hang power clean position known as the “power position” (picture #3). Pause at the power position, then repeat (pictures #1 - #3).

Important points:

a) You must bring the bar towards you a few inches during the floor to the knees phase so that when you scoop your knees under the bar, your shoulders will still be over the bar.
b) Proper position is a must. Follow the previously stated rules.

6. Stage Clean Pulls—Simply add a power pull to the previous exercise, i.e., pull to the knees, pause, scoop, pause, power pull, repeat.

Important points:

a) Follow all the important points covered for each segment of this exercise.

7. Clean Pulls—Shorten the pauses in the stage clean pulls gradually until there are no pauses at all. One should feel control off of the floor and to the knees, then a shift or scoop, and spring almost exactly like one feels when he is jumping. This “double knee bend,” “scoop,” “shift,” or whatever you call it, is a very important concept because of its similarity to the vertical jump. By using very heavy resistance training with this movement, one can develop an almost unbelievable amount of true power! Power that will enable an offensive line to demonstrate tremendous explosion and drive, a running back to explode into defensive players, and, quite simply, power that will make anyone a better football player (pictures #1 - #4).

Important points:

a) The bar should brush the thighs as the scoop is executed. The proper shift or scoop is imperative.
b) Make sure the pull from the floor is not executed hurriedly as this will cause the athlete to shift improperly.
c) Follow all previous points that relate to the separate segments of the clean pull.

8. The Power Clean—Same as the clean pull except the lifter catches the bar in the same manner as the hang power clean. If you have followed each step in order, you should have little difficulty in executing a proper power clean. There are many points I could list for the power clean, but they have all been covered in the previous steps. If some of your athletes still have trouble with the power clean, send them back to the step or steps that will help correct their errors (#1 - #6).

Good luck with your programs, and remember: technique first, then heavy weights!

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