Teaching Techniques #5:

The military press

1. When instructing proper exercise technique for the military press weight training exercise, list some of the common technique errors observed in the beginning lifter.

Barnes: 1. Hands either too narrow or too wide.

2. Failure to lower the bar under control.

3. Excessive arching of the lower back. The upper torso should stay vertical.

4. Failure to keep the feet flat on the floor when performing the seated military press.

5. Failure to keep the bar in the proper groove while lowering it. The bar should rest across the upper chest and the anterior deltoids.

6. Failure to drive the bar upward in an arc, keeping the bar close to the face, so that completion of the rep is above the top of the head.

7. Failure to keep the elbows slightly in front of or directly underneath the bar.

8. Failure to keep the entire body tight as the lift is performed.

9. A common error in performing the standing military press is to explode the bar up with a thrust from the legs. The lift should be performed with the shoulders and arms.

Armitage-Johnson: Common technical errors include:

1. The acceleration in lowering the bar is too great and uncontrolled.

2. The grip is either too narrow or too wide.

3. Uneven lowering and/or raising of the bar.

4. Inhaling during extension.

5. Excessive arching of the back.

6. Forward lean of the torso.

7. Lack of full range of motion.

8. Hyperextension of the elbow joint.

Jones: In the military press, some common technique errors observed are improperly placing the hands on the bar, not performing the exercise
through the full range of movement, bending the torso backward and overextending the elbow.

Maximum leverage is important to the military press. Beginning lifters will place their hands unevenly or too wide to gain the maximum benefit from the exercise.

Full range of movement means to bring the bar down to the chest and to extend the elbows to a straight position. If the elbow is extended only to the straight position, this prevents overextending the elbow.

With proper technique the beginning lifter will be able to limit the bend of the torso.

2. Are there any special safety and/or spotting considerations for the beginning lifter learning the military press weight training exercise?

Armitage-Johnson: For the beginning and advanced athlete the spotter(s) should always be used to ensure the safety of the lifter. A reverse grip or underhand grip lift-off from and return to the standards are the safest grips used by the spotter. The lifting environment should be conducive to effective communication between the lifter and spotter, as is true in all spotting situations, without having to yell or repeat pertinent information. Collars should be used to ensure the lack of plate movement. A belt may also be used during this exercise. The spotter should be in a stable position in order to assist the lifter with the greatest efficiency and to avoid injury to the lifter.

![Coach’s Checklist](image)

The Start

- Bar loaded evenly with collars
- Athlete is seated, legs to the side, feet flat on the floor
- Even grip, slightly wider than shoulders
- Palms facing away, (pronated) thumbs around bar
- Starting position, bar resting on upper chest and anterior deltoids
- Wrist are held firmly in a slightly extended position
- Elbows are under the bar
- Head is facing straight forward

The Ascent

- Bar is pushed upward, passing close to the face
- Tilt head back slightly to allow bar to pass unimpeded
- Upward force provided by shoulders and arms
- Do not lean back during the exercise, keep torso straight
- Feet are motionless
- Use a smooth motion, do not “jam” or accelerate the bar at the top of the motion
- In the top position, arms are fully extended and bar is directly above the top of the head
- Pause at the top position momentarily

The Descent

- Lower the bar under control to the starting position
- Do not bounce the bar on the upper chest
- Inhale at the top of the motion, hold your breath as the bar is lowered, and exhale while pressing the bar to the starting position

*Checklist reflects athlete in seated position; exercise can also be performed standing.
Jones: There are five special safety and spotting considerations for the beginning lifter learning the military press weight training exercise.

1. On a variable resistance machine, the military press is taught first from the standing position.

2. Beginning lifters using free weights will perform the exercise from the seated position with the lifter back to back to a partner.

3. Spotters on each side of the lifter, must pay close attention to the action of the lift.

4. All free weights must be secured with collars.

5. Wear a weightlifting belt.

Teaching the military press on a variable resistance machine allows for maximum safety with the use of minimum resistance. The standing position is used because of the design of the equipment.

The seated position for the free weights and the partner’s back to the lifter’s back provides more isolation of the shoulder muscles and less backward movement of the torso.

Barnes: 1. Beginner must use light weights until the technique skills of the lift have been sufficiently mastered.

2. Safety check bar and bench before beginning lift.

3. Use collars to prevent any shifting of the weights.

4. Everyone who lifts is required to be dressed properly (shirt, shoes and socks).

5. Use lifting chalk on the hands and bar in order to get a better grip.

6. Designate an appropriate number of spotters, alert and in place.

7. Spotters should be aware of the following:
   a. Number of repetitions to be performed.
   b. Type of verbal and visual commands to be used.
   c. Type of lift-off to be used.
   d. Spotting the lift. (The use of both hands, not just the fingers touching lightly against the bar.)
   e. Do not stand on equipment to spot. (This will not provide a solid base.)
   f. Re-racking of the bar. Spotter should guide the bar back on the rack and lifter should keep hands firmly on the bar until it is in place.
   g. Spotter should not rest hands on the uprights during the lift.
   h. There should be three spotters: one behind the lifter and one on each side.

8. Give adequate instruction and supervision. Athletes should be made aware that the most dangerous lifts in the weightroom are those performed over the throat and facial areas.

9. Execute a proper warm-up and stretching routine.

3. Are there any prerequisite strength or skill requirements before beginning lifters should include the military press in their workouts?

Jones: In using machines for the military press exercise, there is no prerequisite strength or skill requirement for beginning lifter to include the exercise in his/her workout. The lifter must be able to perform three sets of 12 repetitions with good technique and a comfortable weight on the machine before he/she moves to free weights.

Barnes: 1. Athletes should have a proper flexibility program. (Emphasis on shoulder area, triceps, forearm and wrists.)

2. Athletes should work assistance exercises such as:
   a. Tricep extensions
   b. Front, lateral and rear deltoid raises
   c. Dumbbell flies/presses (flat bench and incline)
   d. Barbell curls and wrist curls

3. Athletes can begin the military press in their workout immediately as long as the emphasis is on proper technique through a full range of motion rather than on the amount of weight lifted.

Armitage-Johnson: All activities (strength training, conditioning and actual sporting activities) require progressive introduction and continuation. Activities should be simple progressing to the more complex. For the beginner in the military press exercise, the emphasis should be on the technique of movement and a full range of motion, with a weight that is easily handled for three to five sets of 10 to 12 repetitions. When the weight is handled easily with proper technique, the intensity may increase.

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4. Are there any particular instructional methods you have found helpful when teaching the military press to your athletes?

Barnes: 1. Teaching of skills should be the “whole-part-whole” teaching method. The steps are as follows:
   a. Show the whole movement at normal speed. This should include each detail from addressing the bar to re-racking the bar.
   b. Show the parts explaining each detail step by step.
   c. Show the whole movement again.
   d. Demonstrate the parts again with less explanation.
   e. Show the whole movement again.
   f. The athlete does the movement part by part, using the empty bar or light weight.
   g. The athlete does the whole movement slowly.
   h. The athlete does the parts more quickly, step by step.
   i. The whole movement is done at normal speed.

2. Have pictures of each step posted in your weightroom.

3. Use older, more experienced lifters as teaching models.

4. Develop appropriate terminology so that saying a key word will trigger the proper response by the athlete.

Armitage-Johnson: When instructing any type of movement activity it is important to have a demonstration of the whole movement, then break it down into segments. After the segments of the movement have been explained, demonstrated and attempted by the lifter, the whole movement is shown again. For the military press it is helpful to tell the athlete to lower the bar in control and anticipate pressing the bar in a quick manner off the chest before the pressing segment takes place. The use of sequential photographs is also helpful for the athlete to see and feel the movement in its parts and as a whole. If the coach has access to a video recorder and monitor in the weightroom office, this is an excellent tool for instantaneous athlete-coach evaluation and correction (feedback) of the activity. The exercise is videotaped and evaluated, and the athlete performs the activity again after having viewed the tape.

Jones: When teaching the military press, these eight steps should be followed:

1. Provide an analysis of how the exercise will benefit the body.

2. Demonstrate the proper techniques of the exercise.

3. Have the beginning lifter copy the coach’s movements during demonstration.

4. Have the beginning lifter use a broom handle as the bar.

5. Have the lifter perform the exercise on the variable resistance machine, using progressive overload principles until the minimum strength level has been met for free weights.

6. For free weights, demonstrate the exercise from the seated position, with a partner’s back as back support.

7. Have the lifter demonstrate the same technique as demonstrated by the instructor, using a broom handle.

8. Have the lifter perform the exercise with the bar only, using progressive overload principles.

These instructional steps are important to the teaching of the military press, which is a key exercise in shoulder development.

5. Do you use any audiovisual aids or special equipment to assist in teaching your athletes how to perform the military press?

Armitage-Johnson: 1. Sequential photographs and posters.

2. Videotapes on strength exercise technique.

3. Videotapes of the athlete’s one-on-one evaluation viewed immediately following the exercise; athlete performance of the exercise following the evaluation.

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

Barnes: 1. Use of videotape showing...
proper technique.

2. Use of slide film showing technique step by step.

3. Use of posters describing technique step by step as well as the particular muscle groups exercised by the lift.

Editor's Note: In "Teaching Techniques #3, The Bench Press" (NSCA Journal 11(3):44) a typographical error appears in Dr. Tom Baechle's response to question 1. In discussing common technique errors, Dr. Baechle's fifth answer should read "The bar's path from the contact point to full arm extension should follow a 'J' type of movement pattern from the chest to the top position." We regret any confusion this error may have caused.

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