

VARIATIONS OF THE OLYMPIC LIFTS AND HOW THEY CAN BENEFIT YOU



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Variations of the Olympic Lifts and how they can benefit you and your sport

Regardless of your sport or chosen endeavour the power snatch from the hang is guaranteed to benefit your performance. I'm a firm believer in the benefits of the Olympic lifts despite some recent criticisms they have received. It seems that for some strength coaches they are the way to go and that for others they are irrelevant and a waste of time. I think for a number of reasons they are hugely beneficial, whether for the weekend warrior, part-timer, novice or elite athlete the Olympic Lifts and their variations are hugely important and to not use them is missing out.

5 reasons why the Olympic Lifts and their variations are so beneficial:

- They're performed standing (on your own two feet)
- They're whole body compound movements
- They replicate movement patterns crucial to movement, performance and sport
- They have high levels of motor-unit recruitment
- They increase range of movement and improve posture

1. Standing on your own two feet.

This is important for a number of reasons. The first of which is that a lot of sports actually require you to be standing. Cycling and rowing come to mind as sports where you get to sit down (Olympic lifting is beneficial for these sports as well-discussed later) but apart from that in most others you have to support your own bodyweight on your own two feet. Training while standing develops proprioception and spatial awareness it is also beneficial for teaching the body to support and stabilise itself. In sports where you stand force is applied to the floor, carried through the lower limbs, up through the body and transferred often through the upper limbs.

2. Whole body compound movements.

That Olympic lifts are whole body compound movements is important for a number of reasons. It is hugely important for athletes who have team training, skills practice, speed work and conditioning and have limited time for strength training as they (Olympic lifts and variations) are what can be considered 'bang for buck' exercises. 'Bang for Buck' exercises refer to exercises that give you more and deliver. By deliver I mean a lot of people spend a heap of their time in the gym performing a couple of exercise for each body part without ever achieving much. Olympic Lifts and their variations are exercises where performing just one exercise can give you a lot. For example performing a snatch develops leg, hip, back and shoulder strength just from

pulling it from the floor, it also develops core and torso stability and strength throughout the movement. During the catch and recovery phases the ability to absorb a load is trained so too are the stabilising muscles around the spine and shoulder joint, the legs, hips and back are also trained during these phases.

3. Replicate movement patterns vital to movement, performance and sport

The Olympic lifts replicate natural movement patterns; everything from and including running, jumping, throwing, punching and tackling can benefit from Olympic lifting. The main pattern that is trained in Olympic lifting and replicated in other sports is the phenomenon of 'triple extension'. The idea that when performing lower body movements like running, jumping and hopping; the ankle, knee and hip extend simultaneously is known as 'triple extension'. As well as triple extension there is also the translation of forces into the floor, through the body and limbs (see standing on your own two feet). A strong thoracic is extremely important in this translation of force through the torso and the limbs, just think of the importance of maintaining posture whilst running (more below) and the thoracic is extensively developed in the Olympic Lifts.

The ability to absorb a load is required for most sports: think of catching, being tackled, being hit. Eccentric deceleration is vital for both absorbing a load and for tapping into the elastic potential of a muscle. The ability to absorb a load and of the body to eccentrically decelerate forces are trained in the catch and receiving positions of the Olympic Lifts and their power variations.

4. High Levels of Motor-Recruitment

Speed is a key requirement for most sports, in fact most of the time you can never be quick enough. Neuromuscular recruitment, the ability to recruit and contract as many motor units as possible is crucial for speed and in the development of speed. The Olympic lifts are fantastic speed developers, just think about it: a snatch for example is where a weight is lifted from the ground to an overhead position this occurs in less than a second! Training fast will make you fast and Olympic Lifting makes you fast.

5. Increase Range of Movement and Improve Posture

Most of us should know of the benefits of optimal range of movement and the importance of posture and how these relate to athletic performance. When range of movement is limited and posture is poor muscles aren't able to fire correctly performance is limited and the chance of injury is greater. The Olympic lifts and their variations have the

ability to both increase range of movement and improve posture. Range of movement is improved in key areas across the body. The hips range of movement is greatly improved, picture the bottom position of the clean or the snatch. Stability and range is greatly developed across the shoulder joint, and the thoracic spine is greatly strengthened. In fact all the 'postural' muscles, muscles that support the spine and the pelvis are developed with the Olympic Lifts.

One of the cons of performing the Olympic Lifts can be the learning curve taken to learn them. This can be an issue particularly if your weights session is meant to fit into your week of training which may include team practices and game day. This is where some of the variations of the Olympic Lifts are useful as the learning curve is shorter than the full variations.

The receiving or catch position can be the more difficult part to learn, therefore the power variations where the bar is only caught or received in a partial squat position can be hugely beneficial. Using various start heights or 'hang' positions can also be extremely useful as the learning curve can be shorter and these joint angles are shared with positions in many sporting movements.

The Power Snatch from the Hang

The power snatch from the hang is brilliant exercise for a host of athletes and sport. The power snatch from the hang is ideal for anybody who needs to develop power through the lower limbs runners, jumpers, footballers, rugby players. It is also brilliant for those who need to improve jumping and overhead positions tennis players (serving and overhead shots), volley ballers, throwers. The hang position can be from the hip, mid thigh or just above the knee. The benefits as well as those listed above include:

- The learning curve is quite short as the complicated and controlled pull from the floor and the deep receiving position do not feature in this lift.
- The lift and jump phases work 'triple extension'.
- There is a translation of force into the ground, through the torso, across the shoulder and through the upper limbs
- The catch position develops a strong thoracic and mobile whilst strong and stable shoulders

The Power Clean

The power clean is a great exercise and there are many reasons why athletes from a wide range of sports utilise it. Sports ranging from rowing (even though rowers are seated a power clean is virtually a pull similar to that in rowing), to boxing, running, skiing, skating, rugby, football, judo, you name it and the power clean will have been used to train athletes in virtually every sport. The power clean has a shorter learning curve than the full or squat clean as the deep receiving position isn't used. The power clean is a clean received in a partial or semi squat position. Some more benefits pertaining to the power clean specifically:

- The learning curve is quite short as the deep catch position isn't used.
- 'Triple extension' is developed.
- Acceleration is developed between the controlled first pull, scoop, second pull and jump.
- Power and explosiveness are improved
- Pulling from the floor develops optimal posture through the upper body.

The Power Jerk

The power jerk is a brilliant exercise for all athletes and sportspeople who have to develop power through the ground and release it through their hands or upper limbs. Again athletes such as boxers, throwers, tennis players can all benefit from the Power Jerk. The benefits include:

- A shorter learning curve than in the full split jerk.
- 'Triple extension' is developed.
- Translation of power into the ground, through the body and out of the upper limbs.
- Power, explosiveness and ultimately hand speed are developed.

There you have it. You now have 5 reasons why should be performing some form of the Olympic Lifts or there variations regardless of your sport or chosen activity. You also have three lifts as well as where to implement them, how to perform them and why you should use them.



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Performance Training Institute Pty Ltd PO Box 881, Cronulla NSW 2230
P 02 9544 5577 F 02 9544 5588 info@performancetraininginstitute.com.au