

Teaching Powerlifting Skills

Basic Skills

Proper form is critical to receive maximum benefit from each primary and secondary exercise and to improve efficiency of lifts. Good form and technique are essential for preventing injuries. Because of particular body type or physical limitations, form may vary to a degree between athletes.

Along with having an arsenal of training knowledge, a Special Olympics Powerlifting coach needs to have a good mix of verbal, visual and tactile communications tools in their tool kit to be successful.

Squat

This is probably the most difficult of the three power-lifts for Special Olympics athletes to master. However, with patience and repetition, most athletes can perform this lift. This exercise contributes to the overall strength of the athlete more than any other exercise. Even if the athlete is not going to compete in the lift, the squat should be included in training because of its many benefits.

It is often beneficial to have the athlete develop a base level of muscle tone through the use of easier-to-learn exercises such as dumbbell squats, goblet squats or bench squats prior to beginning competition squats with a bar. When the athlete has developed this base, it is important to work on the form with no weight before actually squatting with the Olympic bar and plates, no matter how light. Repetition is the key here!



Find the proper stance for the athlete through trying both the narrow and wide stances. Because of the relative inflexibility at the calf and Achilles tendon, many athletes will not be able to squat with any degree of control with less than a shoulder-width stance. Use a wider stance with toes out, buttocks and knees back to allow the lower leg to be as vertical with the ground as possible, chest high, back straight, and chin up. This is easier for the athlete to learn and is more mechanically efficient.

As a way to teach the squat, instruct the athletes to start with hands straight ahead to improve balance. Stand in front of the athlete and have them go into a full squat position and then return. When the athlete has mastered this squat alternative change to the athlete squatting with the bar and add weights as they are ready.

The powerlifting athlete should train for the squat the same way the athlete would compete in a squat competition. The signal “squat” at the beginning of the lift and “rack” at the completion of the lift allow the athlete to become completely familiar with the signals of the movement.



The following describes a competition format for the squat; athletes should be trained accordingly.

1. The lifter shall face the front of the platform. The bar shall be held horizontally across the shoulders, hands and fingers gripping the bar. After removing the bar from the racks, (the lifter may be aided in removal of the bar from the racks by the spotter / loaders) the lifter must move backwards to establish the starting position.



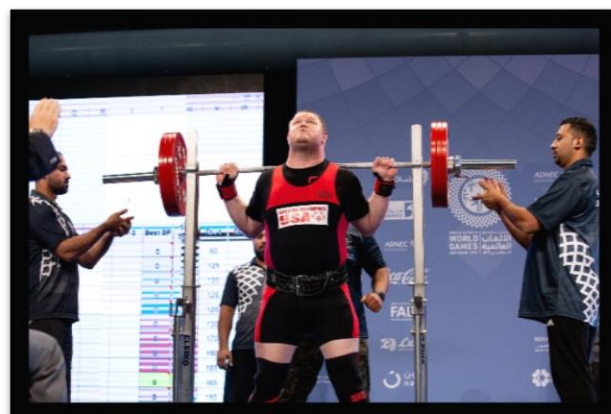
2. When the lifter is motionless, erect with knees locked, and the bar properly positioned, the Chief Referee will give the signal to begin the lift. The signal shall consist of a downward movement of the arm and the audible command "Squat".



3. Upon receiving the Chief Referee's signal the lifter must bend the knees and lower the body until the top surface of the legs at the hip joint is lower than the top of the knees. Only one decent attempt is allowed. The attempt is deemed to have commenced when the lifter's knees have unlocked.

4. The lifter must recover at will to an upright position with the knees locked. Double bouncing at the bottom of the squat attempt or any downward movement is not permitted.

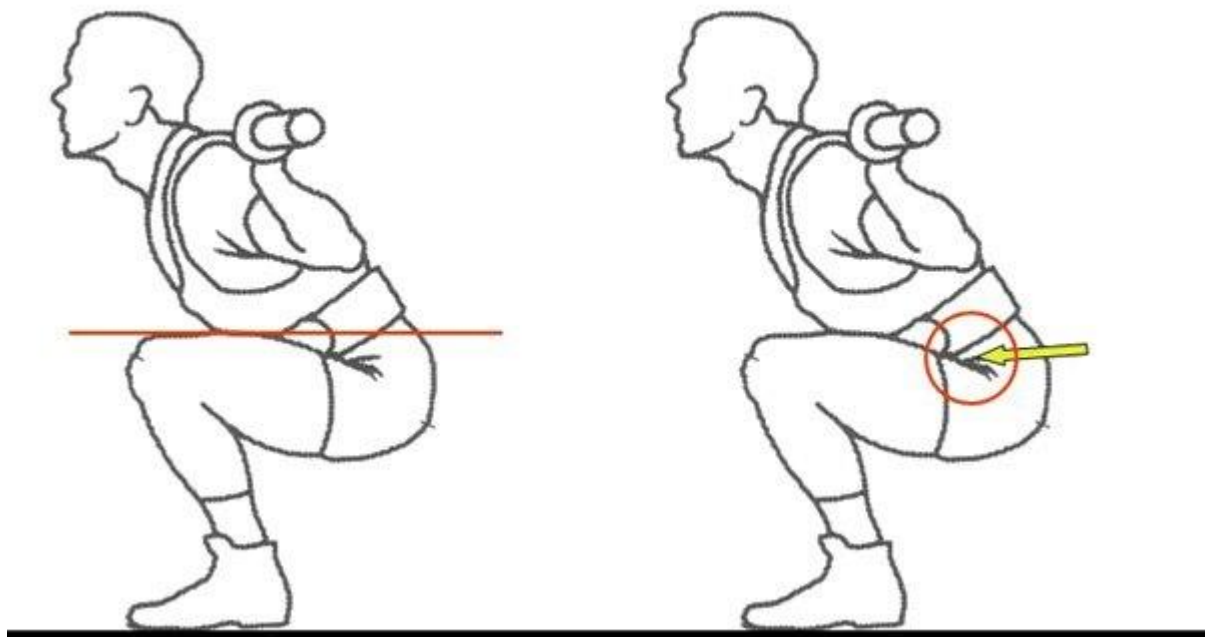
5. When the lifter is motionless (in the apparent final position) the Chief Referee will give the signal to rack the bar.



The signal to rack the bar will consist of a backward motion of the arm and the audible command "Rack."

- The lifter must then return the bar to the racks. For reasons of safety the lifter may request the aid of the spotter/loaders in returning the bar to, and replacing it in the racks. The lifter must stay with the bar during this process.

The diagrams below indicate the legal bar position and required depth in the squat:



Coaching Tips for the Squat

- Demonstrate the squat to the athlete then have the athlete attempt the lift
- The coach's use of touch control and holding the athlete by the belt and shoulder can be effective in getting him or her into proper position and form. This should only be done in the early stages of learning the lift. If the athlete becomes dependent on a touch control or assistance, this will affect his or her performance in competition where touch and assistance are not allowed.
- Although not necessary, an athlete may wear a belt and knee sleeves while squatting. The spotter should stand behind the athlete.
- No assistance should be given to the athlete by the spotter unless it is for the purpose of teaching the technique or helping an athlete who cannot complete the lift. Always encourage your athlete to complete the lift.
- If needed, assist athlete with setup under the bar (place hands and feet) and with replacement of bar. This is best done standing behind the lifter.
- Use simple visual, tactile and verbal cues;
 - "Chest up"
 - "Elbows forward"
 - "Down, down, down"
 - "Up"
 - "Hold it"
- You may need to use hands to the chin, shoulders, belt to help athlete obtain and maintain correct positioning during the lift.
- Don't add too many cues at a time
- Provide critique and praise



A. Facing the Bar



B. Getting Under the Bar



C. In Position



D. Squat: Slightly Below Parallel Position



E. Fully Erect Position



F. Return to Rack

