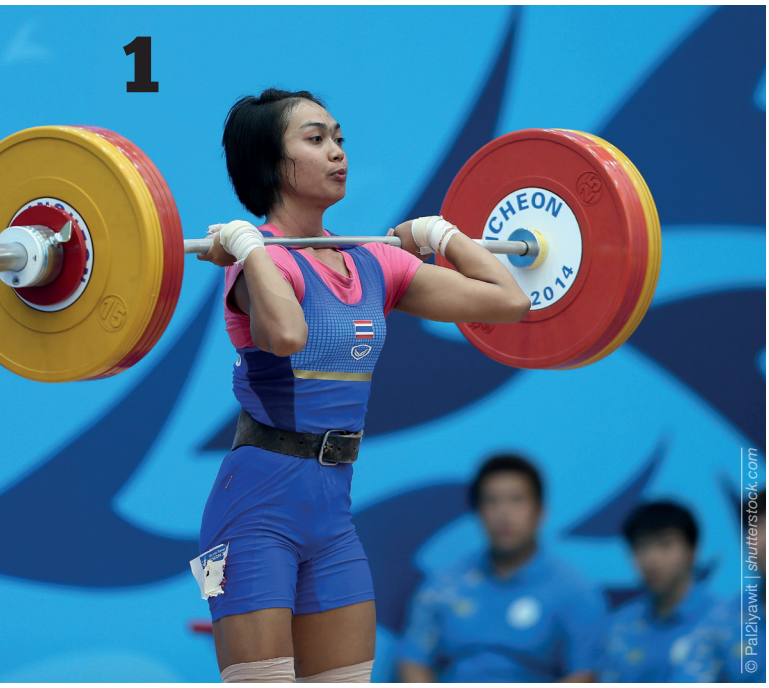
THE JERK

Complete your Olympic lift with this powerful finishing step



BY LIZZIE HAVERS

The Snatch, the Clean and the Jerk together form the sport of Olympic lifting, which is the only lifting sport in the Olympic games to date. Last month, we looked at the Clean whereby the bar is lifted from the ground to shoulder height in one movement, but the lift is not complete until the athlete jerks the bar overhead so now, we'll look at the Jerk.

A prerequisite for a decent jerk is good strength and shoulder mobility for pressing overhead. The dynamic nature of these movements require a high level of muscular and neurological activity and as such can be very tiring, so care and attention to technique is paramount.

Practicing with an empty bar until proficient is imperative to drill technique. Also, limit the number of repetitions with and without loading and take longer rest periods, allowing the body to adapt without fatigue of the mind and body.

THE SPLIT JERK

1. **Start position:**
The Jerk starts in the front rack position with the shoulders pushed forward to create a shelf for the bar to sit on. The bar sits as deep in the palms as possible, allowing the elbows to point down and out while still being in front of the bar.

The positioning of the feet are slightly narrower than the landing position from the clean; or the same as the clean pull position. Your weight should be balanced in the heels and the body standing tall. When viewed from the side, the shoulders, hips, and ankles should be in alignment.

2. **The Dip and Drive:**
A good dip and drive will create enough upward momentum of the bar for the lifter to punch the weight up whilst jumping under the bar; the jerk then is not a strict press but an aggressive jump through and under the bar.

The dip is initiated with a deep breath, abdominal bracing and a bend at the knees, allowing the hips and shoulders to travel downwards in a straight vertical line. The knees travel outwards, not forwards or inwards, to keep the weight distributed over the heels – similar to a tiny, shallow squat. The spine should remain in alignment throughout the dip phase to avoid injury.

Dip depth is shallow to produce the most up force, and finding the right position should be practiced before loading up the bar. Once your depth has been set, you will dip smoothly to this position and then drive back aggressively, pushing with the legs to full extension like you are about to jump. It is this aggressive upward movement that creates the momentum on the bar to allow you to jump underneath. As the bar starts to rise, you are pulling your chin back to allow the bar to pass while

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continuing to drive with the arms to full overhead lock out.

3. The Split Jerk receive position:
If the dip and drive gets the bar moving overhead, what do the legs and feet do next? There are numerous ways to catch a jerk, but the classic lift sees a split jerk employed as the most powerful receive position for a bar with heavy weights. As the drive phase reaches full extension, you aim to push the hips and chest forward while driving the bar up with the arms to lock out.

The upward momentum allows the front foot to reach forward, landing flat, while the back foot slides back to balance you on the ball of the foot with the knees bent, in a similar stance to a lunge. As the feet land the knees stay soft and the legs are able to absorb the downward settling of the bar in the receive position via the musculature of the legs and hips. The lifter stays in this position until the body and bar are stabilised overhead.

4. Recovery Phase:
Once stable and balanced recovery begins, the lifter moves the front foot back first, closing the distance by one third to their centre; the remaining gap to standing tall is covered by the back foot moving forward. The lift is complete with the bar locked out overhead and the lifter standing tall and proud with feet together.

The lifts are great fun to learn but due to their technicality they are not easy to master, requiring great flexibility, mobility and strength. If you are keen to learn or teach the Olympic lifts, do get some dedicated training yourself first.

#JERKIT

As a reader of Personal Trainer, I would like to offer five lucky readers the chance to improve their Jerk with online feedback. Simply tag #Jerkit with a video of you cleaning to my Facebook Page, the Wandering Weightlifter, which offers coaching, education and programming in weightlifting sports. If you would like to get in touch or find out about my workshops please email wanderingweightlifter@gmail.com

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