



BWL Education

Tidy Up Your Lifting by Cleaning Less

Excuse me, Clean less?

First of all, let us clarify. When we say Clean less, we don't mean Clean less weight! We are talking about performing Cleans less frequently.

In our newly revised and updated Coaching courses, we cover training frequency, and more specifically, lift frequency. In the courses we provide programming guidelines. One of the recommendations is that the Clean is performed less frequently than the Snatch or Jerk.

So, how frequently should we lift then?

Like many questions that are posed in the sport of weightlifting, this one doesn't have a straightforward answer. We have to consider the many variables that may impact a training programme. These will include:

- The athlete's stage of development: more experienced, advanced athletes will generally train more frequently than their beginner and novice counterparts.
- The athlete's goals: what is the athlete looking to develop? Is there a specific lift that requires more attention?
- The athlete's recovery ability: we know that recovery is an integral part of the training process. An athlete's ability to recover will be dependant on many things such as their age, training history, lifestyle and stress levels.

So, with all this to consider, how can we provide really prescriptive training programmes? The answer is we can't. However, what we can do is develop logical training principles that help guide our programming.

So, why would we consider training the Clean less frequently?

In some respects, it would make sense to give the Snatch, Clean and Jerk an equal share of the attention. After all, they each need to be performed three times in competition.

In this article, we are not trying to provide information that supports a one-size-fits-all approach. We have already said that we want to focus on principles rather than prescription.

That being said, here are some potential reasons that we may want to consider training the Clean less frequently than the other competition lifts.

Cleans are more fatiguing: It makes sense that Cleans would be more fatiguing than Snatches. After all, they are heavier, they take more effort. An exercise that is more fatiguing will require more recovery. So, you may be thinking, generally speaking, Cleans and Jerks use the same weight. So why wouldn't we Clean and Jerk with the same frequency?

Cleans are performed over a larger range of motion than Jerks: If we compare the two exercises, a simple case can be made for the Clean being more fatiguing. It requires a much larger range of motion; the barbell travels a greater distance and the lift utilises more time under tension.

Those eagle eyed, critical thinkers out there may then say, "but the Snatch requires a greater range of motion and the bar moves further?"

Whilst this is true, we need to consider our original point and remember that Cleans will generally be significantly heavier than Snatches. This still means that, despite the range of motion and barbell trajectory differences, the fatigue effects of a Clean will be higher.

Cleans are less technical: If we continue with our comparison between the Snatch and Clean, we may note that whilst the Clean is heavier, the Snatch (precisely because of its larger range of motion and longer barbell trajectory) is more technical. For this reason, we may want to perform Snatches more frequently. And, in theory, we are able to do this because of the lower levels of fatigue caused by the Snatch.

Ok, but what if Cleans aren't the issue? What if I can always stand my Cleans up. It's just the Jerks that are the problem.

This is a good point. And again, we need to reiterate that every situation needs to be considered on a case by case basis. Maybe your Jerk does need some technical work. Maybe Cleans aren't the issue.

However, here's some food for thought: what if the issues that present in the Jerk are actually due to excessive fatigue that is caused by the Clean? Or more specifically, is how you are recovering from the Clean, giving you enough energy for the Jerk?

This may be an argument for performing Cleans and Jerks separately in training (at least some of the time), in order for each lift to be given the appropriate amount of attention without undue fatigue.

In training the Clean and Jerk separately, you may be able to more objectively say if you do have a clear weakness in either lift.

Remember, just because you are standing your Cleans up, doesn't mean they are optimal!

Summary

As always, individual factors should be taken into consideration. If an athlete has significant technical issues on the Clean, it may require more frequent training. However, athletes and coaches should weigh up the pros and cons of increasing training frequency against the fatiguing effects of the exercise.

To combat this, coaches may decide to perform Cleans at lower intensities. Coaches and athletes will then need to consider whether training the Clean at a lower intensity to focus on technical development will offer a stimulating enough workload (the same equivalent loads may be sufficient for the Snatch and Jerk). Remember that the Clean, more than its competition lift counterparts, relies on strength. And strength is affected by fatigue.