

The jerk is a total-body lift that helps athletes develop tremendous power. Here Ian Wilson is shown jerking a personal record of 423 pounds to win the 207-pound bodyweight division at the 2012 Senior Nationals.

## *A Closer Look at* Overhead Lifting

The value of jerks and push presses for athletes

BY **KIM GOSS, MS**

**B**FS has always promoted the power clean as a core exercise for athletes, and the message has gotten across – the lift is now an integral part of the conditioning programs of the majority of high school and college strength programs. But it hasn't been easy, as the lift has had its share of critics, from those who promote single-set bodybuilding programs to some of the newer functional training gurus who believe that standing on a large rubber ball is the best way to develop physical superiority. Now we can move on to promoting other lifts, such as the jerk.

Overhead lifting has always been a part of bodybuilding and strength

training. In fact, many elite weightlifters of the past also competed in bodybuilding: Legendary Olympic weightlifting champion Tommy Kono competed in the amateur Mr. Universe; John Grimek was a Mr. America and also an Olympian in weightlifting; Mr. Olympia Sergio “The Myth” Oliva began as a competitive weightlifter for Cuba. But those days are over.

Today, it would be highly unlikely for a weightlifter to compete at a high level in bodybuilding because the level of competition is so much greater. Arnold Schwarzenegger was a seven-time Mr. Olympia, losing the title only once, in 1969 to Oliva. The caliber of bodybuilders now, however, would

make it difficult for Schwarzenegger to even qualify to compete as a professional – yes, he was a bodybuilder ahead of his time, but there is a new standard today. At 6-foot-2 Schwarzenegger competed at 235 pounds bodyweight; at 5-foot-11, eight-time Mr. Olympia Ronnie Coleman reportedly competed at 305 pounds. The game has changed.

One reason the jerk has been overlooked by so many strength coaches is that overhead work as a whole has been downplayed in favor of the bench press. When the Olympic press was eliminated from competition after the 1972 Olympics, many bodybuilders and strength athletes lost interest in the sport of weightlifting.



In the BFS program the bench press retains its value as a core lift. Further, Charles Poliquin, one of the most accomplished strength coaches in the world, says that prone pressing exercises such as the barbell bench press should amount to about 20 percent of your total pressing movements. However, the exercise that we'd like to see become more popular in athlete programs is the jerk, a lift of power.

### The Power Factor

BFS CEO/Founder Dr. Greg Shepard talks about the idea of a power clean being a jump – likewise, the jerk combines a powerful leg drive with dynamic extension of the shoulders, upper back muscles and triceps. As a bonus, you get a rapid eccentric contraction of the legs during the split – the type of muscular contraction that occurs in a sudden change of direction, such as when a halfback makes a cut or

when a basketball player fakes to drive to the basket.

Now let's look at some research from Dr. John Garhammer, Ph.D., a respected sports scientist who did pioneering work in the biomechanics of Olympic-style weightlifting. In his peer-reviewed study of Olympic lifting exercises published in 1980 in *Medicine and Science in Sports and Exercise*, Garhammer looked at power output, which is a measurement of

the amount of work done in a specific period of time – in other words, it measures the most *effective* force for dynamic sports. What Garhammer found was that the power output for the jerk drive was higher than for the snatch pull and the clean pull in all nine

pounds. At the University of Maryland Cameron competed in a mock sprint against Renaldo Nehemiah, a wide receiver for the 1982 Super Bowl champions, the San Francisco 49ers, and the first to run the 100-meter hurdles under 13 seconds. Nehemiah won eas-

Many lifters perform jerks by taking the bar off squat racks (either in front of the neck or behind) to help improve the jerk, because cleaning the weight creates fatigue that can affect how much they can lift. The problem with this method is that after they clean

## *Let's be perfectly clear – the best exercise for improving technique in the jerk is the jerk!*

bodyweight classes tested, and in several weight classes the forces exceeded those achieved in the second pull of the snatch and clean.

If you watch elite weightlifters on



The receiving position of the push jerk is with the hips behind the bar, rather than directly underneath the hips as occurs in the receiving position of the jerk.

YouTube, you'll find that while the power clean is fast when the bar passes the knees, the jerk is performed so quickly that it can be described as "dip, drive and *blink* – the bar is locked overhead!" The result of this type of power training is that weightlifters have developed the ability to overcome inertia. Although it's expected that weightlifters can jump high, which is true, it also means they have what coaches often refer to as "first step" quickness.

Take the case of Mark Cameron, who is the lightest (at 240 pounds) American to clean and jerk 500

ily, of course, but for the first 10 yards Cameron was ahead.

Let's be perfectly clear – the best exercise for improving technique in the jerk is the jerk! Of course squats will give you the power to drive heavy weights overhead, but most of the assistance exercises that athletes use to improve the jerk actually make it worse. For example, exercises such as push presses (i.e., no rebending of the knees or splitting of the legs) adversely affect technique in the jerk because it uses a different recruitment pattern of the upper body muscles. The push jerk (in which there is a rebending of the knees but no split) is better. However, this lift causes the weight to be thrown forward, with the hips behind the bar rather than directly underneath the hips as occurs in the receiving position of the jerk.

In December 2010, Ian Wilson became the first 16-year-old in the country to clean and jerk 400 pounds, when he did 401 pounds at a bodyweight of just 204 pounds. Senior American records and medals in world competition are certain to follow.

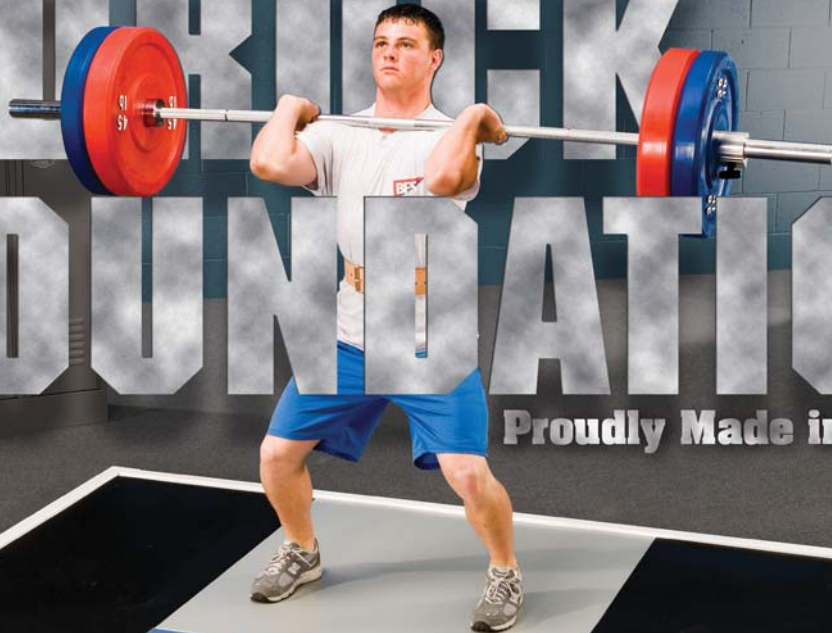
the weight, their balance usually shifts forward and they have to adjust; this balance issue does not occur with jerks from the rack. Also, if you just add jerks after performing a clean, you save a lot of time because you only have to perform one exercise.

Specific directions for performing the jerk will have to be left for a future article, but I hope I've piqued your interest in learning more about this dynamic exercise. **BFS**



# BEDROCK FOUNDATION

Proudly Made in the USA



Dimensions - 6ft. x 8ft. x 2in.  
Custom Logo \$299

## ELITE POWER CLEAN PLATFORM DELIVERS THE STABILITY AND DURABILITY TO PUSH TO YOUR MAX!

- ▶ Customizable Logos and Paint - Call for details and pricing
- ▶ Features ProtectAll™ long-lasting vinyl surface
- ▶ No warping. No wood. Solid rubber. Non-slip.
- ▶ Our most popular power clean platform

STARTING AT JUST  
**\$895**

## VARSITY POWER CLEAN PLATFORM

- ▶ An affordable platform for years of reliable use

1 1/2 inches of solid rubber  
12-year warranty  
Dimensions - 6ft. x 8ft. x 2in.



GREAT VALUE  
**\$625**

## POWER CLEAN MAT

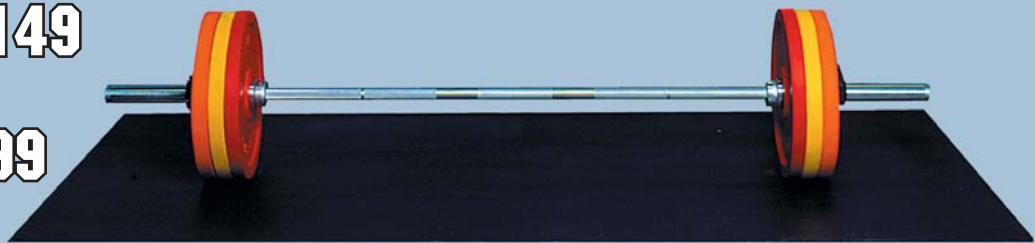
- ▶ 4'x8'x3/4" Solid Mat

**\$149**

## POWER CLEAN MAT

- ▶ 4'x8'x1/2" Solid Mat

**\$99**



BIGGER FASTER STRONGER



DEDICATED TO HELPING ATHLETES SUCCEED SINCE 1976

**EXPLOSIVE! • 1-800-628-9737**

online at [www.biggerfasterstronger.com](http://www.biggerfasterstronger.com) • email us at [info@bfsmail.com](mailto:info@bfsmail.com)

843 West 2400 South, Salt Lake City, UT 84119 • Fax (801) 975-1159

