

SQUAT CORRECTLY

By Dr. Greg Shepard
Part 1 of a Series



Coach Shepard, pictured on the left, believes the Squat is the King of all the lifts and the most difficult to coach correctly.

The squat is the king of all the exercises for an athlete. If an athlete were to do nothing but squats, he would have a good program; not great but good. Leave them out, minimize them or do them incorrectly and it doesn't matter what else is done, what machines are used or what system is used: *You simply will not have a good program!* Squats are the basis and foundation of great speed with great size. A 6-4 athlete who weighs 265 and who has good athletic ability can run a 4.6 forty if an excellent squat program is used. If machines or something else is done, this same athlete would be lucky to run a 5.0 forty. I cannot over-emphasize the importance of squatting and squatting correctly for an athlete. Squats are absolutely critical.

Because of the overwhelming importance of squats for an athlete, a series of articles will be written in the next issues of the BFS journal. The next part will appear in January's issue. I want this series of articles to be of very special help to the coach. Its very purpose is to help the athlete get better and become great. It will not be written or geared for the competitive powerlifter. Sometimes we forget the whole purpose of weight training for an athlete. The purpose is not to win a powerlifting meet but to *win* the game, match or contest by becoming bigger, faster, stronger and knocking the stuffing out of your opponent.

One of the biggest problems I've encountered at schools throughout the nation is the depth of squats. A high school coach might say "Oh, We've got three kids that squat 500 pounds". Then when observing these athletes squat, they'll be a foot above parallel or they'll be squatting from a Power rack from pins. Again, they might be way above parallel. It is absolutely imperative to understand the importance of depth on squats. First of all, *all* standards are based on a parallel or slightly below parallel depth. The All-American Standard of BFS is 500 pounds. It takes a special athlete and a special understanding of how to do squats to reach that level. Secondly, above parallel squats will only strengthen the quadriceps, the muscles in the front part of the upper leg. Not until the thighs are parallel or slightly below parallel will the hamstrings be positively effected. As this depth is attained, the hamstrings and the quadriceps will be strengthened in a coordinated manner. It is also critical to understand that running speed improvement of an athlete is directly correlated with hamstring development. To improve speed the hamstrings have got to be made stronger.

It is hard for an experienced lifter to know when he is at the right depth. It is nearly impossible for an inexperienced lifter. For this reason, the spotters on each side of the bar must take an active role in helping the lifter. The spotters can't have their hands on their hips thinking about their girlfriend. They must have their hands ready and squat down with the lifter. When they do this, they can see their lifting partner's depth. Not only should each spotter tell their lifting partner about his depth but they should also shout vigorous encouragement and instructions. When a lifter hears things like "Looking good, a little lower, head up, keep a good back or c'mon two more reps", it makes all the difference in the world.

In conclusion, an athlete must include squats as a major part of his strength program. Squats must be done with free weights and without the hindrance of squatting from pins. Great care must be taken to squat down to the proper depth. This will insure that standards reached and attained are meaningful and that the hamstring-quadricep muscles will be developed in a coordinated manner for running speed improvement. Coaches should stress that spotters take an active role in helping lifting partners understand their squat depth and also help them with technique and motivation during each set. Squatting correctly can make a huge difference in your total strength program. Look for the next article in January's issue.