

OLYMPIC LIFTING FOR ATHLETES?

By Ollie Whaley, C.S.C.S.

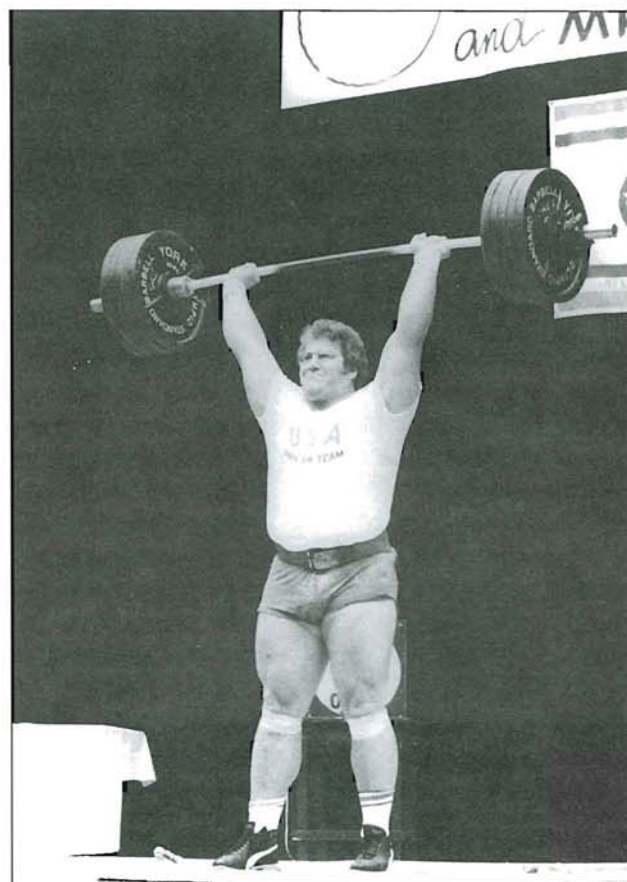
Part One In A Series

Editor's Note: Ollie Whaley coaches football and weightlifting at Monument Valley High School in Utah. He is an excellent Olympic lifter and a Master Upper Limit teacher and coach. We are fortunate to present this series of articles by Coach Whaley.

"Our goal is to develop athletes, not weightlifters." As many times as I have heard that statement, it has never made sense to me. If weightlifters are not athletes, who is? Perhaps some of the confusion stems from the fact that many do not understand the difference between weightlifting, powerlifting, and bodybuilding. Briefly, bodybuilding is based on size, symmetry, definition and overall appearance. Strength is not a high priority or measure of success. Powerlifting consists of three lifts, the Squat, Bench Press, and the Deadlift. This is a great test of strength but speed of movement is not a factor. Weightlifting, also known as Olympic style lifting, consists of the Snatch, and the Clean and Jerk and requires quickness and speed of movement as well as strength. Weightlifters are generally recognized as the most powerful athletes in the world. There are many advantages to introducing your athletes to the sport of weightlifting. Let us examine several.

1. Weightlifting Personifies Power.

Power, speed of movement against resistance or explosiveness as it is often called, is an essential ingredient in most scholastic sports. Make no mistake, the great strength developed by heavy Squats, Benches, and Deadlifts is a definite advantage in most sports. But to stop there is to fall short of one's potential. As the basic strength levels increase, weightlifting and its related movements can facilitate the development of power, the combination of speed and strength. The value of this concept should be self-evident to coaches. This quality of power is inherent in the execution of the Snatch and the Clean and Jerk. Weightlifting goes beyond the realm of pure strength requiring the athlete to move heavy weights as quickly as possible. Moving a heavy weight from the floor overhead in one motion, as in the Snatch, cannot be done slowly. The Clean and Jerk, done in two motions with the bar being brought from the floor to the chest then thrust overhead, not only builds power but also anaerobic endurance similar to that needed in other power sports.



Ken Patera with 501 Clean and Jerk.

Bruce Klemens photo.

2. Weightlifting Enhances Athleticism.

Because it requires timing and a well coordinated total body effort, weightlifting can assist in maximizing athletic ability. Weightlifting consists of multi-joint movements performed to produce a total summation of power through a complete extension of the body. A quick analysis of the Snatch, for example, shows (not in this order) plantar flexion, knee extension, hip rotation in conjunction with elbow extension and hip and knee flexion, followed by complete re-extension of the legs and hips. This is all accomplished with blinding speed. Add to this brief description an analysis of the various muscle groups and types of contractions involved, and one begins to appreciate what is meant by a multi-joint, total body exercise. The Clean and Jerk is even more demanding. Biomechanical analysis shows these same movements occurring in many other sports such as blocking and tackling, rebounding, jumping, and throwing for example. This makes practicing the lifts very effective in terms of biomechanical and neuromuscular specificity. Because only a barbell and

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sufficient space is needed, this type of training is very efficient in terms of time and space as well. It would take at least a dozen machines or single-joint exercises with free weights to work the same amount of muscle one does snatching. Even then the effectiveness would not be duplicated as the coordination, balance, and explosive total body extension would be lacking. Soviet researchers have reported that free-standing exercises, movements done standing unsupported on the floor, are most beneficial for athletes as they develop the body into a balanced and proportional unit. Again the advantages are self-evident.

3. Weightlifting Enhances Flexibility.

Because of the wide range of motion required of virtually all major joints, flexibility is essential in proper execution of the lifts. Not only must athletes work on flexibility in conjunction with lifting, performing the lifts themselves requires ankles, knees, hips, and shoulders to move through a wide range of resistance. Remember it was weightlifters, not bodybuilders or powerlifters, who were found to be second only to the gymnasts in flexibility in the study done at the '68 Olympic Games.

4. Weightlifting Enhances Competitiveness and Self-Motivation

Weightlifting competition can add a new dimension to athletes training for team sports. On the competition platform it is the athlete alone with the bar. He/she alone can make a successful attempt. Realizing this, when athletes know they have the opportunity to compete in the lifts as well as their scholastic sports, great training intensity can be generated. Many coaches caution that weightlifting competition interferes with participation in other sports. My own experience as both a coach and an athlete doesn't support that. Assuming that the sports skills and strategies are also given adequate attention, there is no reason why an athlete cannot train in such a way that they can excel in both. Weightlifting and sports compliment each other. The speed, endurance, and skills gained in sports make a better lifter. The increased power developed lifting will only enhance other sports' skills. Doing both provides more exposure to competitive situations and can contribute to confidence under pressure. One of the more profound lessons I have learned from Greg Shepard is the concept that "Confidence is the memory of past successes". Each time that athlete, alone on the platform with the bar, completes a successful attempt, a more confident person emerges.

In the second part of this series we will discuss how to implement weightlifting exercises into the BFS program.

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