

SPLIT SNATCH

Perfect For
Football

A Moderately Outrageous Opinion by Don C. Reed

As every advanced Olympic weightlifter knows, splitting is not the most effective way to snatch. The weight must be pulled very high: roughly to the base of the pectorals before the lifter jumps under, planting the feet front and back. A squat stylist can jump under the bar with far less top pull. With maximum poundages, those extra few inches can be a very long way indeed, which is why the lift is essentially extinct in top-flight competition.

HOWEVER. The split snatch itself is: A. probably the single most beautiful event in our sport, B. might become part of a national resurgence in Olympic lifting. As W.C. Fields probably never said, but should have, "Allow me to elucidate..."

First, aesthetically, split snatching looks incredibly athletic. If you have any kind of a good build, nothing makes you look more chiseled and muscular than ripping under a substantial poundage in a good low split.

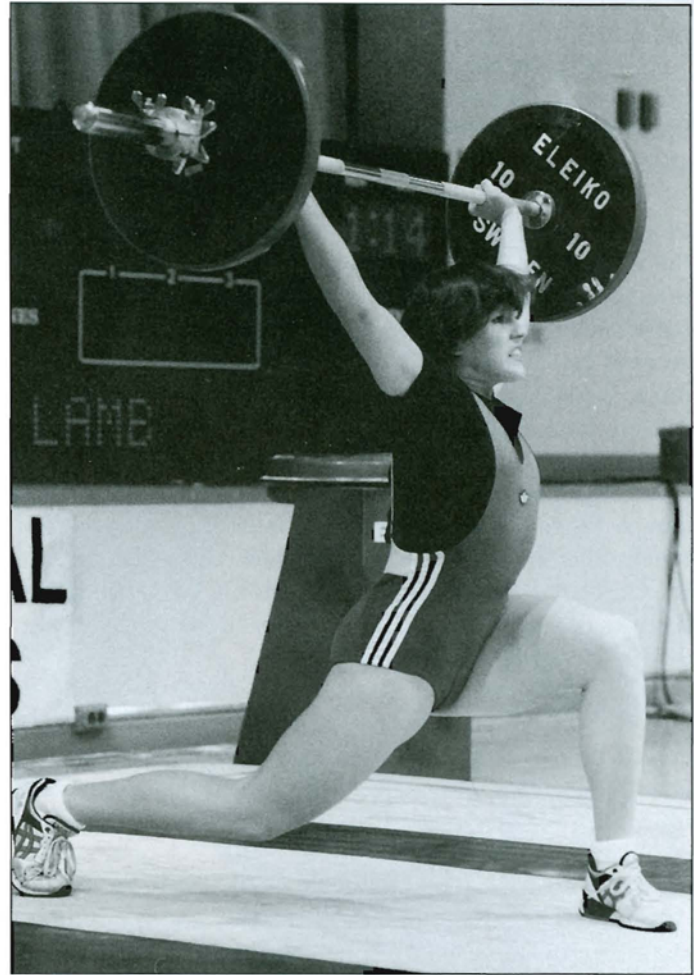
A great splitter makes you remember why you love to watch weightlifting. It is ironic that this simplest of Olympic lifts to learn (if you can breathe and remain vertical you can probably split snatch) is also the most spectacularly athletic lift in our arsenal.

In 1968-9, a little-known lifter named Kenny Moore was working out at the York Barbell Club. Kenny was never a great lifter, but he was a darn good one, and on one day, he touched greatness. Kenny was a stocky guy with short arms, a crewcut and a perpetual grin, and just tons of top pull. He used to do Power Cleans from boxes with 352 as a middleweight, which is a lot of Trap strength in anybody's book. The soft-voiced southern lifter switched back and forth between Squatting and Splitting, and his best snatch with either was 259. He could zip 264 overhead in the Squat, but it would always roar over backwards, again and again, occasionally taking Kenny along with it.

But on this particular day, Moore was doing Split Snatches in the York Barbell Club gym. It was a quiet Summer afternoon during the week and there were only a couple of us there. Kenny was starting his pull pretty slow from the floor and when the bar got knee-high it almost seemed to stop as the lifter re-positioned himself for maximal exertion – and then the second pull kicked in. With spinal erectors, trapezius and delts exploding in near instantaneous synchronization, the bar disappeared until Kenny was underneath it.

He did 260 so smooth and quiet it did not dawn on me for a minute. "Hey, that's a record for you, isn't it?"

"Yeah. Help me get 275," he grinned, and we peeled off some plates and slid on some more, and it all clanked



*Olympic Lifter Faith Lamb Performing Split Snatch
Photo by Bruce Klemens*

together till we tightened the collars. It looked intimidatingly massive, lying there in the dents of the splintered wood platform, but Kenny didn't waste any time, just chalked up and stalked it.

He crouched and set his hook grip, locking fingers around the backs of his thumbs, adjusted his balance once to each side, breathed out and in – and ripped it.

In slow motion it could have been seen how the violent upward tugging changed from pull into a push as the lifter tugged the bar up and then pushed himself under. He was low in the Split, his left heel and hip almost touching, but his right leg was taut, and the knee well clear of the platform. The bar seemed to freeze as his triceps locked it overhead, and then he was recovering, gracefully, poised and standing, and this big old country smile on his face.

I have seen hundreds of thousands of lifts in my time. I saw Bob Bednarski jerk 500 from the racks at ten o'clock at night, saw Vasili Alexeev Clean and Jerk that same historic quarter-ton officially, saw Ivanchenko and Kolotov both on the same World Championship day – but clear in my mind, 22 years after it happened, I can

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still remember the athletic beauty of Kenny Moore and the 275.

Like the fencer's lunge, or the boxer's knockout punch, or the baseball pitcher's speedburner fastball, the Split Snatch is the totality of the athlete: everything he or she can provide.

I have seen films of the great world and Olympic champion Wlademar Baszanowski doing the Split Snatch (he went back and forth between the Squat and Split all through his career), and it was like a combination of ballet and truck-crashing. His fingertips fluttered as he secured his wide, wide grip. His crew cut head nodded once, twice, and then slender arms tightened, as he rocked, back, forth, back, forth – thighs and shoulders ridged as he rose, slowly for the first two inches, then faster and faster like a Power snatch, whip! His right hip almost touched the back of his left heel; perhaps it did touch, and then he was shifting bodyweight back, and the chiseled serratus musculature on his sides stood out, definition like claw marks and every lifter was thinking, dang! Why can't I look like that?

Explosive speed? Tests were done at the 1936 Olympics, trying to figure who was the fastest moving athlete at the games. The boxer's punch was tested, as was the sprinter's lunge – and the fastest person was a lifter, Stan Stanczyk – and the fastest movement was the two-hands split snatch.

First, what are the two things lifting needs most?

Cash and competitors, right? Money and more lifters are the main ingredients our beloved sport is short on.

Now. What sport has an overwhelming abundance of greenstuff?

What sport also has a virtually unlimited supply of strong young athletes, already established love of weight training?

Hint #1: The sport involves an oval-shaped leather object, which large people strenuously carry back and forth across a hundred yard lawn.

Hint #2: The general public regards this sport as slightly more important than air.

Therefore, why don't we hook up with football coaches, and encourage them to encourage their athletes to participate in our Olympic contests.

The Split Snatch is perfect for football players, because it works the football muscle groups, is a fantastic developer of explosiveness, and is a fun way to increase strength fitness.

Football coaches love strength fitness, and are always looking for a way to increase their athlete's power and explosiveness during their off season.

All modern-minded coaches have their athletes practice Power Cleans, and Bench Presses, and some form of Squatting: so the strength is definitely there.

Take Percy Potential. Percy is a linebacker, and needs a lot of quick reacting power, and explosive drive. He has

already been lifting weights for football, and has good overall body awareness, coordination and strength. How long would it take to teach the basic moves of a Split Snatch?

Maybe ten minutes.

Okay Joe, put your hands wide on the bar, and pull it up overhead without Splitting.

Good. Now try it with your feet jumping back and forth.

There. See how easy?

Naturally, to achieve excellence in anything requires years of practice, but the Split Snatch is such a natural move that anyone of athletic coordination can figure the basics in one or two training sessions.

So now look what we have. We already know Percy can Power clean, and since he has strong shoulders from Bench Pressing, the jerk is readily teachable. If we want to get fancy, we can have Percy do a front Squat after he does a Power Clean, and gradually convert that to a Squat Clean. Do that for a couple weeks and you have an effective enough Clean to get the athlete started.

We just created an Olympic lifter.

Everybody wins. Percy gets what he wants: a way to make the weight training he needs be more enjoyable and result-producing; the coaches get what they want, i.e. for Percy to show up in September jam-packed with explosive power; and Olympic lifting gets somebody who can both be a good lifter, expanding our numbers; and maybe bring some bucks along, as that super-rich sport takes a closer look at Olympic lifting as the perfect endeavor for their off-season studs.

Imagine what would happen if high school football teams competed in Olympic lifting in their off-season. The best ones already train with weights year-round anyway, right?

And what if we could entice some professional football players to compete in Olympic lifting. Think what the media would do with such an event! What if two professional football teams sent their best lifters and challenged each other to a weightlifting contest: If each team sent nine men, they would probably do well on a national basis right now.

Once we get some of these athletic titans interested in Olympic lifting, money will follow them; it would be good for lifting, and good for the football people as well.

And with a lot of people practicing Split Snatches, some would get very good at it; and if you have never seen a really terrific Splitter in action, well, I hope you get the chance one day.

Split snatching is fun, fast, and it might entice the football folks... What do you think?

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