

The Power Clean

Can A Transfer Of Explosive Power Take Place Between The Weight Room And Athletics?

By Dr. Greg Shepard

We love the Power Clean. We always have but we are always open to other ideas. However, at this point, we don't believe it is possible to reach one's athletic potential without doing the Power Clean or similar type movement. We believe those athletes who have attained an elite status of physical development in the areas of size, speed and explosive power and who for some reason were to stop doing power movement exercises and do some other type of training, these athletes would rapidly get slower, weaker and less explosive. Furthermore, we do not believe it is possible to throw the Shot Put 65 feet or throw the Discus 200 feet without making the Power Clean or similar type movement a top priority exercise.

Now, having made that strong statement, there is one absolute qualification. It is technique. If the Power Clean is not done with flawless technique, then the lift can be both dangerous and non-productive. To us, by far the most critical factor in flawless technique is the "jump phase" of the Power Clean. This is executed in stunning fashion by Stefan on the front cover. He is literally attempting to jump through the roof. We are simply using the overload principle. We

get into a jumping position and then jump with a maximum explosive effort. Many people concentrate on the "rack or catching phase" of the lift. We don't care about that as much. For us, the absolute vital coaching point is to concentrate on jumping straight up with perfect form.

Much has been said about how complex the Power Clean is to teach. At BFS clinics it is extremely quick and easy to teach

because we have the proper equipment. (Light Bumper and Training Plates and our Alumalite Bar) This means we can teach a 7th grade girl to do a Power Clean safely with great technique in minutes. We have also developed the right buzz words for quick, effective coaching. After teaching the Clean at a BFS Clinic, it takes us, on average, less than three minutes to have kids do a very respectable Power Snatch as far as form and technique. These are young athletes who are total novices. It's really fun to do what most feel is too complex to attempt and to do it well. Some people might get really nervous about lifting at the junior high level. Please don't. It isn't the lifting that will cause problems but not having great equipment and technique. We have trained several thousand junior high age kids on the BFS program at our Upper Limit facility in Salt Lake City and did not encounter any problems whatsoever. Also, as you peruse the articles in this journal, you will discover some amazing athletes who started at age 12 or even earlier. They are the ones who are out in front.

SOME HISTORY

As a college football player in the early 1960's, I did Cleans, Snatches and Jerks. I lifted in

Olympic style weightlifting meets in Austria but I did it solely to become a better football player. A nice side benefit was that it was fun and I liked competition. There were no strength coaches at this time and strength training in any form was not generally done. I'm sure in the early 1960's that literally only a handful of football players nationwide did a "quick" lift. (Clean, Snatch or similar type movement)

At the University of Oregon in 1967 while finishing up a Master's Degree in exercise physiology, I also trained the football team. We did Power Cleans. I had an All-American defensive back, Jim "Yazoo" Smith who snapped up 275 pounds on his Power Clean. Even by 1994 stan-



Stefan Fernholm 6 - 1 1/2 at BFS Clinics Would Stand Flat Footed, Bend Down, Without a Step, Jump Up and Put His Ear On The Backboard.

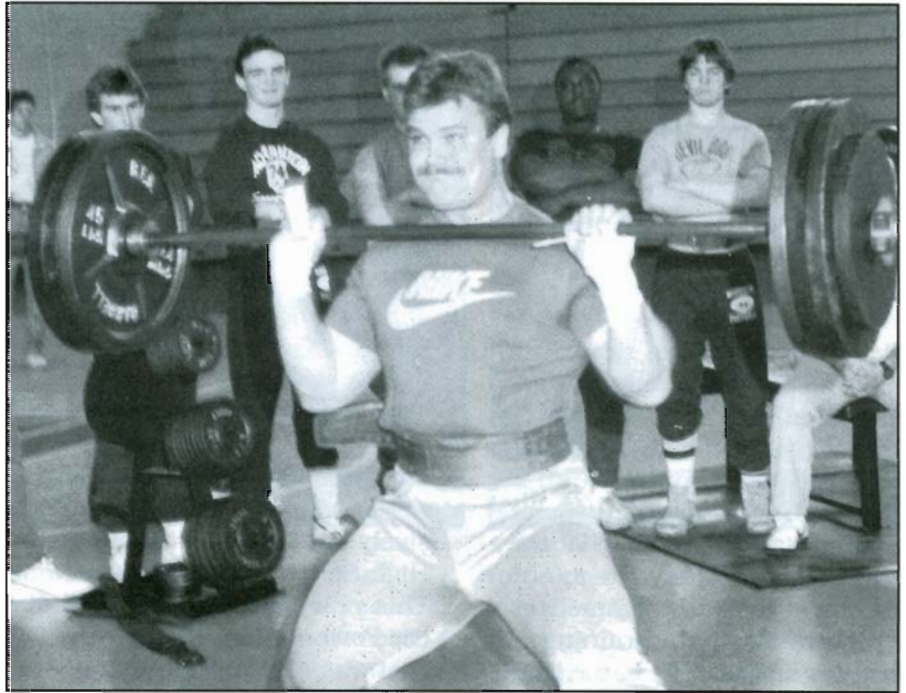


dards this would be an excellent achievement. An interesting side note is the assistant coaches I worked with on the field, John Robinson, Bruce Snyder and George Siefert. We may have been the only college in America to do Power Cleans with a football team.

In the late 1960's, I trained in Los Angeles during the summers and coached football and other sports at Sehome High School in Bellingham, Washington during the school year. In L.A. I was around throwers in track. I was amazed. About 30 guys weighed in at about 275 and most of them could run a 4.6 forty. What were these guys doing? Were they just genetically gifted above every pro-football player or were they doing something that could be duplicated? I chose to think the secret of reaching one's athletic potential, was by doing Power Cleans and Parallel Squats combined with flexibility, speed, jumping and agility drills.

I wasn't the only one. We had Russian coaches sneak around to see what we were doing. We were stronger and were beating them in the Discus and Shot. They took these secrets back to the Soviet Union and through them to the Eastern Europeans. Soon we had our hands full at the Olympic Games in the 1970's. It doesn't take long. We could no longer dominate in these two throwing events. In the meantime, our college and pro football teams were screwing around with Nautilus machines and principles. The throwers looked at them and just shook their heads.

Anyway, I took this secret back to Sehome High School and the results were amazing. That next track season I had 11 guys who threw the Discus from between 140 to 180 feet. If you couldn't throw 155 feet, you had to throw on the JV team. In football we played Snohomish High



Ex-NCAA Record Holder and an NCAA Champion in Discus, Stefan Would Always Power Clean At Least 400 lbs. At BFS Clinics (Photo Circa 1985) His Top Power Clean Was 473 lbs.

School for the mythical big school state championship and held them to minus 77 yards. I believe we were the only football team, high school or college, doing Cleans in the state in 1970. Incidentally, we had 50 players who ran the forty from 4.5 to 5.0 seconds.

The next year I went to Brigham Young University to get a Doctorate in Physical Education and Exercise Physiology and also to be the strength coach. My first experience was fantastic. I saw this football player working hard with a bunch of body building exercises. I asked him what he was doing. "I'm working out for football," he replied sweating profusely.

"How'd you do last year?"

"Okay, All-Conference Honorable Mention on the defensive line but next season they're switching me to offense."

"How big and fast are you?"

"Almost 6-4 235 and I run a 5.15 forty."

I looked at him dead serious

and asked, "Do you want to be an All-American and get drafted high by the pros?"

"Well sure," he stammered, "who the heck are you?"

"I'm the weight training coach for football. Put down those wimpy little weights and come over here." Notice I didn't say strength coach. That term was never used in 1971. Anyway, I was confident. Man, I had the secret and no competition. To my knowledge, Georgia was the only other college with a weight coach and I was pretty sure they didn't Clean or train like throwers.

Five months later, this same athlete by the name of Paul Howard now weighed 275 pounds and ran a 4.8 forty. That was the fastest time of any lineman that year. Paul Power Cleaned 300 pounds, became an All-American and enjoyed a 12 year career with the Denver Broncos.

The following year Boyd Epley was hired as the Nebraska strength coach and now there was competition. Boyd had roots



in track as a pole vaulter. Not only that, he was a genius at organization and had great vision. He organized the NSCA and many of his assistants went on to become college and pro strength coaches. What has always astounded me is the length of time it has taken people to catch on. It wasn't until last year that all Division I football schools had full time strength coaches. Incidentally, in the 1980's the NSCA organized clinics to Russia and the East European countries, like Bulgaria, to find out the real secret. Want to know what they found out? You have to combine the quick lifts with plyometrics, speed and flexibility training. Amazing! It was the same thing our American throwers had been doing in the 1960's and still do today.

My heart has always been into coaching high school football. So after two years at BYU, I looked around for the worst football program around. The joy of turning a program was deep in my blood. I found the required school in Idaho and after three highly successful seasons went to another similar situation in Salt Lake City. I was named football coach of the year in my first season. In every situation we used free weights. Our big lifts were the Parallel Squat and the Power Clean. We also had the state Shot Put champ.

Coaches began asking how in the world could a program turn around so fast. Thus, the Bigger Faster Stronger program began as a business in 1977. Since then we have done over 500 full day clinics with over 130 high schools going on to win their state championship. This year the number 1, 5, 9 and 12 teams in America called to thank BFS.

In 1981 I began another pioneering effort with the Utah Jazz. At that time and for several years I was the only strength coach in

the NBA. Now there are 18 full time NBA strength coaches and 5 consultant coaches. The average annual salary is over \$50,000. The Jazz have led the NBA the last 8 out of 9 years as the team with the fewest games missed by players due to injuries. Our best Power Clean was 300 pounds achieved by Blue Edwards who is now a star for the Milwaukee Bucks.

Slowly, each year more and more high schools, universities and pros would catch on to the secret. Each year I am progressively impressed with our BFS High School All-American teams. This year we had 22 football players Power Clean 300 or better!

I was also pleasantly surprised at the response when I decided to talk to each PAC-10 strength coach for this journal. Everyone does the Power Clean or a variation and thinks it is a top three or better lift to do.

Throwers still do extraordinary feats. Stefan at his peak was 6-1 1/2 and 270 pounds while running a 4.25 forty with a 40 inch no-step vertical jump. Another one of his Swedish teammates, Soren Tallhem, a shot put champion, high jumped 7 feet at a bodyweight of 250 pounds. Are they genetic wonders? My sincere feeling is that every Division I University has 10 football players at the same genetic level. They just need to train like Stefan and Soren consistently for a few years. That means doing Power Cleans with flawless technique.

I am convinced the Power Clean can help an athlete achieve a fluid athletic build. This is quite different than a bodybuilder's physique. A big football lineman who concentrates only on benches, squats and body building exercises with an upper-body/lowerbody workout mentality can make a noticeable improvement in his athletic build if correct- form Power Cleans are

done and made a number one priority. I also believe this same lineman would improve his playing ability and decrease his chance for injury on the field.

The big majority of strength coaches feel the Power Clean is a superior lift. This is evidenced certainly by this journal. A select few strength coaches are still not convinced and would like to see research verifying the efficacy of the Power Clean. I submit that reliable research will be difficult to obtain (A future article will be written on this difficulty). Anyway, I feel the onus is not on the pro Power Clean people. If you don't think the Power Clean is good, prove it.

The BFS program has changed very little the last 25 years. We do the Power Clean, Snatch and Jerk Press each once per week. The key is not so much what to do anymore but knowing how to get your technique flawless. This issue will concentrate on the pros and cons of the Power Clean and also give the reader an idea as to the extent of its use throughout the nation. Our next few issues will go into the greatest depth possible on each phase of the Power Clean so that if you do this lift, your technique will be flawless.

Now, there are still some great strength coaches who don't do the Power Clean for various reasons. It is important for me to listen carefully to their reasoning. This forces me to evaluate much more closely what I'm doing with my athletes and to analyze their objections. Through this analysis process, I should become a better coach and produce a better BFS Journal. For this reason Matt Brzycki from Princeton University graciously consented to present another perspective for not doing Power Cleans. I urge you to read his article on page 11 carefully and objectively.....□