

Do Olympic Lifts Have a Place in YOUR Training?!

***Yes I'm talking to you endurance athletes.**

The Olympic lifts are a highly debated topic in the field of strength & conditioning and performance training. Coaches thoughts are all over the board about what lifts are best, if they should be implemented, and on and on. I'm not here to end the debate, I'm simply here to help inform you the reader, if Olympic lifts may be right for you in your situation (whether that be a power athlete/sprinter or an endurance athlete).

For those that aren't aware, the Olympic lifts include the snatch and clean & jerk (the two competitive movements that are done at the Olympics...ironic, I know.); they also usually include other various hybrid Olympic lifts such as high pulls, push-presses, etc. I'm not here to exhaust a list of exercise choices, but rather inform you about the place they may fit into your training.

Even if you have never done the Olympic lifts or don't think that they are for you, don't stop reading yet. Surprisingly, I think most people have a place for some variation of Olympic lifting in their program, the question is not if, but rather where...

The Power/Sprinter/Throwing Athlete:

This will be the least debated side of the coin. If you talk to *most* college and professional strength coaches, they will tell you that their "power/sprinting/throwing" athletes all need to have the Olympic lifts included to help develop "power." In throwers, jumpers, and sprinters, olympic lifts are often staples in their training programs. It stands to reason that since those athletes must do things very "fast" and very "explosively" that their training should mimic that. The bigger, stronger, and more explosive the athlete, the better the athlete will be. As a result, the Olympic lifts (or some variation) aren't usually far behind. Very often in fact, they are included as the foundation of training for all of those "power/sprinter/throwing" athletes.

Provided that your coach(es) or trainer knows how to teach the Olympic lifts or their variations properly I think that all "power/sprinting/throwing" athletes should have some variation of the Olympic lifts in their training. Especially, if you are a high school athlete or high school coach, it pays to spend the time teaching your athletes how to properly execute the lifts so that when/if they head off to college to compete in sports, that they are prepared for the challenges in the weight room. Having said that; if your athlete(s) has a reason why you feel they should not do an Olympic lift or a variation, there are lots of other substitute lifts available that can develop similar qualities without risking the health or safety of the athlete.

*Check one for the power athletes in track and field, now on to the endurance athlete...

The Endurance Athlete:

In my last article I talked about how cross-training can be very good for all athletes. If you haven't read that article yet , "Should the Endurance Athlete Not Run?",

now would be a great time to do so. The principle concept of that article is that doing the opposite of what you normally do can be very good for both your mind and body. If you already strength train on a regular basis, my hats off to you for being ahead of the game. However, you can help take that training to the next level by implementing a sound training program by doing the most effective training possible. In that list of training options, I would like to propose the idea of using Olympic lifting variations. I repeat, I would like to propose the idea of using the Olympic lifts and it's variations for endurance athletes. They are short, fast, and "new" to most of you out there, which means that there is a huge upside to doing them.

Now, before people start trying to track me down and pummel me with Goo packets, hear me all the way out. We train/have trained endurance athletes. As a matter of fact, we just recently had one of our female runners finish very strong in the NYC half-marathon. Just the week before she also competed in another half marathon in Florida where she ran a 1:25:10, at a marathon pace.

When I mentioned that there is a huge upside to doing them, it comes from fact that it is working energy systems and muscles that you often don't use on a regular basis. While this may seem counter-intuitive, if you simply look at as a single tool/element in your training, and not your whole program you will understand. Since runners typically are very aerobically efficient (as the sport demands) and type I fiber dominant, that means that often times they leave that small percentage of type IIX and IIA as untapped potential. Think of it as a form of crosstraining. You don't need to do it all of the time. But it should be included to help develop and stimulate those other muscles you have, the ones that help give you kick in the finish and help drive you up hills!

Before this turns into another article about why you should cross train though, simply consider that using Olympic lifting movements (or hybrids of them) in your "strength training" workouts may help get you that much needed training effect that you are probably missing. And no you don't need to use barbells and you don't have to worry about moving tons of weight; grab a dumbbell and try doing 3 sets of 5 reps of a chosen movement. One simple movement we often start people with is the single arm dumbbell snatch. Executed properly (and with a healthy shoulder) this movement not only with help train "power," but it is great for some additional core work, coordination, and can be used as a great conditioning lift/tool in the right situation.

So how does all of this fit into your training? I'm not exactly sure; you see, without knowing each individual's situation it's hard to put parameters on every facet and element that we try to influence. However, the one thing you should take away from this article is that you may already be cross training and not even know it! If you're in the gym lifting weights regularly (2-4x/week) you are already light years ahead of many competitors. Second, if you are doing any of the exercises that we mention in our articles you are even further along. Third, if you have a place that you can implement some of the training mentioned in this article, you will be even further along.

It should be mentioned that we work all of our athletes toward learning the Olympic lifts and finding the proper time, place, and variation in their program to suit their desired needs. That means that not all athletes will use a barbell; very often we will use dumbbells or kettle bells as an effective alternative. We don't always use the snatch or clean and jerk; while our athletes work towards those lifts, typically they are doing

some variation of the lift with more of an emphasis on proper movement than on lifting the most weight. Often times these lifts alone serve as a form of cross training for our athletes—that means that for some athletes they do these lifts rarely. We don't train any Olympic lifters, so none of our athletes are going to directly use these lifts as their benchmark for training. What they are going to do is use these lifts as a way to help improve themselves physically so that they can perform better in their chosen sport.

If you are interested in viewing the SA DB snatch, please head on over to the blog where you view a brief video of the lift: www.shelbytrained.com

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