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BarBend's Complete Guide To:

**THE BEST**  
**ACCESSORY**  
**EXERCISES**  
**FOR**  
**WEIGHTLIFTERS**

## FOREWORD

The sport of Olympic weightlifting requires power, strength, explosiveness, mobility, and a high degree of kinesthetic awareness. General athleticism is often seen in elite weightlifters, who possess many physical attributes that can translate to other aspects of fitness and performance.

The training regimens of weightlifters reflect the needs of their sport. However, solely snatching, cleaning, jerking, squatting, and pulling throughout training likely won't develop a lifter to their full potential. Adding in accessory training can improve coordination and strength while reducing the chances of injury and stalled progress.

Accessory training is the term given to the set of exercises that come after the main lifts and strength work in a training session, often chosen based upon the specific needs and developmental phases of an athlete. The following exercises are among the best to structure into monthly/weekly training cycles to fully maximize performance and minimize injury.

*Note: The lists below are assuming you have completed the staples of any weightlifting program:*

- ➔ Snatches and snatch variations
- ➔ Cleans and clean variations
- ➔ Jerk and jerk variations
- ➔ Squatting (back, front, and overhead)
- ➔ Pulling (snatch and clean pulls/deadlifts and their variations)

### **Weightlifting Specific:**

- ➔ **Muscle Snatches and Cleans:** The muscle variations are perfect for preliminary work sets and reinforcing technique. By negating the ability to “reflex” under the barbell after the second pull, you will develop the motor mechanics of standing up VERTICALLY through the bar to finish the pull with the leg drive, and seamlessly progress into the high pull.
- ➔ **Sotts Press:** The Sotts Press is a challenging exercise that will develop position strength, sound mobility, and overhead mechanics necessary for receiving a load overhead in the catch phase of the snatch. Using it as a warm-up exercise or accessory lift is often seen in sound training regimens.

- ➔ **Behind the Neck Snatch Grip Push Press:** This pressing variation will produce strength and shoulder stability to prepare athletes for heavier loads overhead while snatching. By developing a stronger shoulder support system, as well as strength in the triceps, athletes will not only be stronger, but feel more confident when dropping under the bar.
- ➔ **Behind the Neck Jerk:** Pressing from the behind the neck is an exercise that can be used to teach lifters the proper overhead catch position. Seeing that the barbell is placed on the back instead of the front rack, lifters tend to dip and drive vertically, developing a better motor patterning feedback system. Pairing these in complexes, in which athletes go from a behind the neck to a standard jerk, are great variations to tie the two together.
- ➔ **Snatch Balance:** This exercise is used to develop speed under the barbell in the catch of the snatch. Many athletes lack the speed, confidence, and footwork to safely pull themselves into the catch in a supported position. This exercise can help lifters who collapse in the bottom of the snatch, or have issues with getting under the bar following the second pull and hip drive of the snatch.
- ➔ **Jump Squats:** Increasing the power output in the lower extremities has been shown to increase force production (strength) and jump performance, and it can correlate directly to explosiveness in both the pulls and recovery of the main weightlifting lifts. Additionally, jump training helps fully develop the tendons, ligament, and stretch reflexes within the body to be more elastic and injury resilient.

### **Mobility/Correctives:**

- ➔ **90/90 Hip Mobility:** These drills are great for teaching active mobility and control of the hip movements, primarily internal/external rotation, circumduction, and flexion/extension of the hip. Through incorporating PAILS and RAILS, a system created by Dr. Andreo Espinal of Functional Range Conditioning, you can learn to establish greater force and control throughout the full range of motion, minimizing injury and poor movement mechanics, ultimately allowing for optimal performance.
- ➔ **Diaphragm Breathing:** Teaching athletes how to correctly breathe through the diaphragm and brace correctly will not only increase core stability (man-made Valsalva Maneuver), it will correctly allow the spine and other joints in the body to stabilize and resist destructive forces during squats, deadlifts, overheads, running, and all human movements.

- ➔ **Scapular Circles:** The scapulae move can protract, retract, depress, elevate, and move in a continuous sliding motion, allowing for stable movement of the arms and limbs during human movement. Establishing motor control and awareness of those movements will help athletes perform stronger, become more mobile, and once again, resist injury.
- ➔ **Good Old-Fashioned Static Stretching:** Standing the test of time, static stretching is still seen today in many elite recovery programs. Although this is not the sole way any athlete should be training to develop optimal range of motion and control, it can be an effective component to developing mobility, restoring full range of motion, and decreasing joint and muscle stiffness.

### **Plyometrics Training:**

- ➔ **Depth Drops:** Full extension is key to moving stronger, faster, and more explosively. Depth drops are a foundational exercise that can be used to help athletes establish control in the bottom of the squat after reaching extension. More importantly, athletes should need to be able to withstand downward forces and absorb, react, and return force in the opposite direction, and this lift will help set that up.
- ➔ **Depth Jumps:** In this next progression of the depth drop, an athlete would drop, absorb, and explosively change directions into a vertical jump. Learning how to absorb and overcome forces will help athletes become more explosive.
- ➔ **Hurdle Hops (Lateral or Forward):** This is another great progression of jump training. Repeated jumps over obstacles, without pausing between, will develop explosiveness of an athlete.
- ➔ **Split Stance Squat Jumps:** Similar to the other variations, the split stance allows coaches and athletes to unilaterally train each leg, correcting movement imbalances that would otherwise go unseen in most double legged variations. The importance of training unilaterally is to make sure no movement/muscular imbalances are occurring the could hinder performance and cause injury.

### **Lower Body Accessory:**

- ➔ **Reverse Lunges:** Unilateral leg training will increase athleticism in most sports and reduce the prevalence of injury due to imbalances in musculature. This lunge variation will develop strength and stability for lifters, and

can be used on end of training sessions for muscular hypertrophy.

- ➔ **Cossack Squats:** Done with or without weight, this exercise is the complete package for lower body strength, mobility, and stability. When done correctly, you will develop strength in the hips and quads like a single leg squat, increase mobility in the hips and ankles, and create greater injury resilience to lateral forces in the knee joints. Many lifters fail to perform these correctly, often neglecting hip and ankle mobility.
- ➔ **RDLs:** Many leg exercises are quadriceps dominant, giving most of the emphasis to the front portion of the legs. Romanian Deadlifts — or RDLs — are a hip dominant movement that engage the glutes and hamstrings and brings balance to the legs. RDLs can also work as a stretch for the hamstrings during the eccentric phase, downward motion, of the exercise.

### Upper Body Accessory:

- ➔ **Snatch and Clean Grip High Pulls:** This is a strengthening exercise to enhance your final pull and strength under the barbell. Finishing the pull vertical in the snatch and clean by keeping the bar close as possible to your torso on the ascent will allow you to improve your catching in the squat and overall lift mechanics.
- ➔ **Pendlay Rows:** Strengthening the back and hips will allow greater potential for muscular development, injury prevention, and athleticism. By performing the rows from the floor, you are developing greater positional and concentric pulling strength. Additionally, lowering the load under constant tension will increase eccentric muscle activation and tissue damage, key for muscular hypertrophy.
- ➔ **Strict Wide-Grip Pull Ups/Lat Pulldowns:** Increasing lat size and strength will help athletes create better tension during nearly every movement. Weaknesses in lat strength can be seen by slouching in pulls, rounded backs in deadlifts, and poor bar path mechanics in the squat, all of which will most likely result in poor performance and injury.
- ➔ **Push Press:** Increasing the drive strength and power of the push press will result in stronger jerks and overhead strength. Push pressing is a staple pressing movement that can increase the shoulder, back, and hip power, not to mention add quality muscle to the shoulders, triceps, abs, and hips.
- ➔ **Strict Dips:** Bodyweight training is great for developing functional muscle and strength. The dip can be used to develop tricep, lockout, and pressing strength, often a limitation in in most overhead positions. Additionally, this multi-joint exercise will stimulate muscular hypertrophy when done under

loads.

- ➔ **Strict Handstand Push Ups:** Gymnastic movements have been used by elite athletes to develop GPP (General Physical Preparedness). Often considered one of the hardest bodyweight exercises for upper body strength, lifters can gain muscle and lockout strength by doing strict versions. In addition, the ability to press one's bodyweight in the hand stand push allow athletes to develop greater motor control of the shoulder capsule during movement.

## Core Training:

- ➔ **Good Mornings:** Due to their bar placement, good mornings are generally considered a core exercise. The lower back is an areas of the body that gains strength through movement of other muscles. This exercise is to build stability in the lower back during spinal loading (bar on the back) and increase glute/hamstring strength.
- ➔ **Weighted Back Extensions and GHDs:** Muscular development and endurance will lead to improved lower back health and functionality, and it has direct carry over to all other movements.
- ➔ **Weighted Side Bends:** The ability to resist lateral flexion through strengthening the obliques (both internal and external) will allow for greater core stability and resistance to unwanted rotational/spiral forces on the spine during lifts. Many lifters have hip and core instability during deadlifts, squats, and overhead positioning, and simple weighted side bends can help athletes establish greater stability and control.
- ➔ **Weighted Planks:** Connecting the core requires maximal neuromuscular recruitment, mental focus, and isometric strength. The ability to harness the core strength is reinforced using planks, weighted variations, and progressively weighted carries, strength training, and movement based planks. Increased core strength is at the foundational layer for all other human performance progressions.
- ➔ **Pallof Holds and Presses:** These can be performed kneeling, standing, from various angles, adding pressing movements, with bands, cables, manual resistance, and more. This is an amazing exercise to create force and establish correct breathing and stability under load. Developing correct postural positions during movement, athletes can be better resilient to leakage of core stability during lifts.
- ➔ **Weighted Sit Ups:** Developing the rectus abdominis is better for more than cosmetic reasons. More muscle mass in the entire core region (erector spinae, obliques, transverse abdominis, rectus abdominis, etc.) will allow for

greater neural patterning, stability, and resistance to unwanted rotational and spinal frontal and lateral flexion/extension, all of which can diminish force output, increase injury, and create poor movement patterns and compensations.

## **PREPARE YOURSELF FOR OPTIMAL PERFORMANCE**

These exercises can be introduced into a training program quite easily, with the emphasis being on solid technique, muscular development, and proper movement mechanics. All of the accessory lifts are to assist in the overall development of an athlete, NOT to derail or compete with time and energy spent performing the main event and strength lifts.

A coach should have a full understanding of the reasoning behind the selection and implementation of any exercise programmed within a formal Olympic weightlifting training and/or optimal fitness and athletics training plan. Only then can they maximize athlete results and help protect them from overuse and neglectful injuries.

## CONCLUSION

Accessory lifts are important for all lifters above the intermediate level. They allow us to focus on weak areas and improve specific parts of the lift itself.

They are also useful for helping the athlete balance out any muscular imbalances and for generally improving the strength of tendons and smaller muscle groups.

That's why accessory lifts should always be added to every lifting program and they should be done after the main lifts for two to three sets, sometimes until failure depending on the exercise.

Make sure to include only the lifts that you think will help you develop but leave enough room and energy for your main lifts.

As a general rule try to put in 80% of your energy in your main lifts and 20% in accessory lifts.

And always keep improving!



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