

This article is just a brief what, where and how introduction to the world of equipped lifting.

Introduction:

The **Unequipped** or RAW (as it is also known) allow only minimal supportive equipment. I.e. Belt and Wrist wraps only.

Equipped refers to the additional supportive equipment that is allowed to perform each of the powerlifts when competing in the Equipped classification. The equipment is only allowed to be of Single ply Polyester construction. There are many other materials and plies in production but only the single ply polyester equipment is allowed (see rule book).

Squat: Belt, wrist wraps, Knee wraps and single ply Squat suit or power suit as it is also known.

Bench: Belt, Wrist wraps, Single Ply Bench Shirt

Deadlift: Belt, wrist wraps, Single Ply Deadlift/squat suit.

It is not compulsory to wear all, or indeed any, of this additional equipment during an equipped competition and in fact many don't. The key is picking and choosing what works for you. In some cases having to put all the equipment on is a hindrance as it takes a lot of energy to get into and adjust correctly.

Isn't it cheating? This is the question I get most in the gym. No, you can only compete against other equipped lifters. I often draw parallels with Pole-vault vs. high jump and people sort of work it out from there.

Why do you use equipment?

Contrary to popular belief it is not just to lift bigger weights however this is by far this most obvious effect. The equipment is really useful for protecting areas prone to injury. Shoulders, Knee's and hips. The equipment is also incredibly technical and offers a whole new dimension to lifting weights. Perfecting the kit is an additional challenge in the quest for glory. Not only do you have to get bigger, faster and stronger to beat your opposition you also have to become a technician in the art of the equipment.

Some purest will argue it should be a show of strength that wins the competition and equipment could allow for the weaker man to win because he has mastered his equipment better than the stronger guy. Equipped lifters will argue it is the most complete lifter that wins an equipped competition. **The winner, after all, is the one that could accomplish what no other could.**

Be under no illusion though, equipped lifters are strong! Many of the equipped world record holders could and would still hold their own in an unequipped competition and recent trends in power lifting are showing this to be the case. That said some of our best unequipped lifters with some time in Kit could probably do the same to equipped lifters. The point is the two are not for comparison and never have been which is why there are separate competitions for the classifications.

Training

Many equipped lifters train raw like everyone else. This is how they build their strength, there is simply no substitute. The equipment however must be learnt and so this is incorporated into training. Some have dedicated sessions for this while some will cycle their training between raw and equipped. This is to learn the equipment and how to control it to maximise efficiency. Also overload training is used to help the body and the central nervous system (CNS) adjust to the increased weights being lifted. Overload training has many methods from increased weights in partial rep ranges to negative sets or use of bands and chains. All overload training comes with a warning over and above the obvious safety issues concerning lifting in general but rather to the effect on the nervous system. Do not over train and burn out!

Overload training can take a toll on your CNS and cause 'burn out' you know when this is happening because all of sudden one week easy weights become difficult or even impossible to lift. You have not got weaker, but rather you have 'burnt out' so deload or rest weeks need to be incorporated to allow the CNS to recover as well as the muscles and joints. A deload week is where you train with much lighter weights e.g. 50% and perform low repetitions also. Sometimes it is good to perhaps just train an exercise you have never trained before to keep things interesting but also you will not go very heavy. E.g. on deload week maybe switch to front squats or dumbbell bench press to mix things up a bit while you're resting.

The equipment

Squat Suit

The squat suit is of similar design as that of a leotard but made from single ply polyester material. Where the leotard is designed to be non-supportive the squat suit is designed to provide hip and torso support during the squat lift.

The additional support coupled with the correct technique can mean massive weights can be moved. A lifter, depending on experience and technique can expect to lift anywhere from 20kg (novice) to 100kg (expert) more than their unequipped squat.

There are two types of design to suit lifting style; Wide and Narrow/Standard stance. Narrow/Standard stance will suit most and is for anybody with a narrow to medium wide stance (just outside shoulders). The wide stance would suit what are termed SUMO squatters with a very wide stance.

The squat suit does not require the use of Knee wraps but knee wraps would be recommended. If the hips are being supported to handle the bigger weights then so should the knees.

There is a large selection of knee wraps available with differing lengths and attributes. A maximum of 2m length knee wraps are allowed for BDFPA. Some knee wraps are very stretchy and offer a bouncy effect while some are stiff and operate more like a cast on the knee. You would have to experiment which you prefer. They are certainly not very comfortable but are very good at stabilising the knee joint.

Bench Shirt

The Bench Shirt, well there is nothing quite like a bench shirt. The shirt is designed to protect the shoulders and pectorals and offers the most support when the bar is nearer the chest. The triceps however need to be strong as they will do most of the work during an equipped bench press.

A lifter with the correct technique and training of their triceps could expect to lift anywhere from 5kg (novice) to 40kg (expert) more than their unequipped bench press. I have heard cases usually with the heavy weights where they're shifting over 70kg more than their unequipped. These are normally lifters considered as good benchers anyway.

The sizing of shirts varies between manufacturer and some base it off your shoulder measurement while some off the chest size. They all offer a sizing chart and recommend sizes according to experience. Competition fit is usually the tightest. As a first timer you would choose the biggest option for your size while you are learning.

The shirts can be very difficult to get on and is normally a two person job. A little tip is to use carrier bags as sleeves to allow the polyester to slide over your skin. Once on pull the bags out and viola.

The Bench shirt is possibly the most dangerous of all the equipment. It's great that it supports your shoulders/pecs and some even use it when injured for this reason. However like the squat suit, it takes a great deal of control to guide the bar through the lift. If you lose control the bar can suddenly dump either over your face or onto your belly. **ALWAYS use 2 side spotters and centre spotter while learning.**

The use of 'boards' are great to assist in learning of the shirt and developing the required triceps strength. Using standard 1.25" boards/planks of wood you can get a training partner to place them on your chest to train partial range of motion. Starting with 3 or 4 boards stacked together you can progress each week by removing a board until you are able to control the weight down to your chest. As the shirt tightens up nearer the chest the more control is required to keep the bar on the correct path.

Deadlift Suit

The deadlift suit, very much like the squat suit, offers hip and torso support during the lift.

This is latest addition to the range of equipment available for use. Some lifters still do not rate these as the support offers has a much smaller effect on the amount of weight you actually lift. In some cases people find them a hindrance because it alters their starting position too much to be effective.

The designs of these suits are improving and some lifters have started reporting gains of 5kg-20kg from these suits compared to their unequipped deadlift. They would seem better suited to lifters that struggle from the floor but have a good lock out.

Note: you may find your squat suit works quite well as a deadlift suit because their design is very much the same. So before you buy one, try deadlifting in your squat suit for a taste of what it's like. I have heard that some lifters prefer to wear the squat suit back to front when using it for deadlift and that the Inzer Max DL deadlift suit is just their Inzer Hardcore squat suit back to front. I have owned both and can say that rumour seems highly likely but not confirmed. I still use my own Titan Squat for deadlifting and find it to be quite effective.

Is it Dangerous?

As with all lifting, it will be dangerous if the proper technique is not used. Equipped lifting requires a greater degree of control than un-equipped. You need to take your time 'learning the kit' it will want to move in a certain pattern. You must harness and control it. If you lose control the kit can throw you out and cause you to dump the bar. It certainly is not just a case of sticking it on and getting a new Pb. (Remember the pole vault analogy, if a record breaking high jumper picked up a pole for the first time he would probably more likely fall over than set a new pole-vault record on his first attempt) It will take a few sessions before you can control it to the correctly to even pass as a legal lift. A typical training cycle using equipment is 6-12 weeks maybe even longer when learning.

What and where to buy

There are several brands and within those brands are various models. The most important thing to note is that it is of Single Ply construction and polyester material as per the rule book. The easiest guide for this is to look for the IPF approved equipment.

The major Brands are in no particular order are METAL, TITAN and INZER. You can buy brand new from these manufacturers or from UK stockist. The manufacturers do offer custom kit for your body measurements but the standard sizes will normally do (at least until you want to start breaking records maybe).

These suits/shirts can be prohibitively expensive (£150+ brand new) so it would be better to shop around for second hand equipment. You can get some good deals online via eBay or from the U.S on Powerliftingwatch.com many sellers will ship to the UK and accept payment via Paypal. Purchasing second hand has obvious risks as always however services such as Paypal will help to protect you. The greatest peace of mind is that you are normally buying from a lifter just like you who did the same thing themselves and we tend to look out for each other even from different countries. Most equipment is roughly half the retail price when purchased second hand. You can often get the best deal privately from the states due to exchange rate and because it's a private sale no duty normally has to be paid and so you can get the equipment for £20-30 pounds cheaper again vs. UK second hand prices. Once you have tried some equipment and it is too big/small or not suitable you can usually sell it on again for almost for what you paid for it depending on condition as the kit is pretty durable.

Competing in equipped lifting obviously incurs more cost than unequipped lifting but it is still one of the most affordable sports/hobbies around especially when compared to a set of golf clubs, a road bike or even a good set of football boots and your favourite premiership team's replica shirt. It can still be an affordable sport with the added bonus of being able to sell your kit to other lifters and recover much of your costs.

Conclusion

So there you have it, a brief insight into the world of equipped power lifting. The BDFPA have some of the best equipped lifters in the whole of WDFPA with world record holders in multiple weight categories. We lead the way in this side of the sport but the wolf that climbs the hill is hungrier than the wolf at the top. If we hope to maintain our position as the leading force in equipped lifting we need more lifters to take up equipped lifting and keep pushing the boundaries of what is possible.

Have you got what it takes?

Useful links

<http://www.inzernet.com/>

<http://www.gometal.com/>

<http://www.titansupport.com/>

<http://www.pullum-sports.co.uk/>

<https://www.strengthshop.co.uk/>

<http://www.powerliftingwatch.com/classified-ads>

<http://www.liftinglarge.com/>

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