

Masterclass One

Welcome to the first in a series of articles specifically written for novice and developing power lifters. The aim of this series is to deliver advice and information as a starting point for new lifters, who are trying to find their feet in the sport.

It is recommended that before you make any major alterations to your technique or start lifting heavy weights competitively you should consult an experienced coach or senior power lifter for more specific advice.

Squat Depth

Is the first of the three core lifts in a powerlifting competition is commonly referred to as the 'deep knee bend squat'. The idea is to squat down to a sufficient depth that satisfies three independent referees. The depth is judged by the top surface of the leg at the join of the hip being lower than the top of the knee.

The most common mistake in squatting is not attaining appropriate depth (past critical point). Many excuses are offered for this ranging from knee trouble, back trouble, through to safety. The fact is stopping half way through a full squat is more dangerous than attaining full depth.

If you do not feel confident squatting to full depth with the weight you are using, it is too heavy! You should take some weight off, attain full depth and then start to build the weight back up gradually. Your overall strength will improve, along with the size of your legs in time.

Hands & Feet

Many people struggle to make depth even with lower poundage's, and these people may find their feet are in the wrong position. You should start with your feet just shoulder width apart and work outwards to find your optimum position.

Most people will find their position just a little further than shoulder width, but it is not uncommon for people to squat with narrow or indeed very wide stance. You need to experiment and find the most effective position for you.

Your feet should be pointing slightly outward, so when your knees bend they follow the line of your big toes. You should experiment with small variations of this to find your most efficient and comfortable line.

The positioning of your hands will also affect your ability to squat, and you should start around the where the markings are. If you're a particularly big guy, you may find this uncomfortable and want to move your hands outwards.

If you're a little guy, you will want to move them inwards as you will not feel stable enough in the wide position. Normally the closer your hands are to your shoulders, the tighter your back will become when squatting. This is obviously a good thing, especially when handling heavy weights.

Position & Signals

You need to make sure that the squat racks are not too high for you, and take into account any dip in the bar. This is especially important when heavy weights are being used. You should aim not to have the bar positioned on your shoulders more than 3cm below the top of your anterior deltoids.

It is important that you get a clean take out of the rack, in order to fix your start position properly. You should not move too far back out of the racks, and normally two steps are enough to get sufficient clearance. More movement than this is a waste of strength and energy.

You should aim to keep your hips fixed firmly in one place, and should not move them out of line laterally for any reason. Once you've settled into your start position, it is essential you keep your hips in line whilst making the lift.

Any lateral movement will affect your ability to control the weight on your shoulders and make you feel unstable. Fixing your hip position before you move downwards with the weight, you will also help your feet, knees and shoulders hold their position.

In competition you will be given a 'Squat' signal by the centre referee once you have attained a settled, fixed and motionless position. Once you have completed the lift and reached your original position you will be given the signal to 'rack' the bar.

Remember, don't try and change everything at once.

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Special thanks to BDFPA Chief Technical Officer Andy Davies and International Referee Mike Leadbetter for consulting on the Masterclass Articles. Lifters can find a list of causes for failure of lifts in the BDFPA handbook. (Pages 69 -72)