

# RESURRECTING THE SPLIT LIFTS



**AN UNCOMMON APPROACH TO  
ATHLETIC EXCELLENCE**

JOHN M. CISSIK, MS, CSCS

**Most of you have been exposed to the Olympic-style lifts and include them in your training because of their proven effectiveness in building strength and speed. Two standbys are the snatch and clean performed in a squat style. However, there's another way to perform these lifts, a variation that can result in better transfer to sport skills, making you a more dominant competitor.**

## SPLIT STYLE

### OLD NEWS

If you look at the dynamics of most sports, you'll note that the foot position is rarely one foot next to the other, as in the squat and squat-style Olympic lifts. Because specificity of training is such an important training concept, you should consider the less common style of executing a clean, jerk, and snatch—the split style.

The split style of performing the Olympic lifts results in your moving one foot forward and the other foot backward in a dynamic, explosive fashion during these exercises. Because such lifts are rarely seen in competition today, they're rarely introduced into strength and conditioning programs. This is a shame because these lifts have great value to most athletes when performed properly.



### SPLITTING CHARACTER

The split lifts have a number of potential advantages in a conditioning program:

- > They introduce variety into training.
- > They expand your movement and fitness base.
- > They increase explosiveness.
- > They provide sport-specific preparation for throwing, jumping, etc.

They are easier to master than the traditional style of lifts.

You might be reluctant to learn this new style because you might lose strength and condition if you're unable to move a lot of weight. However, besides the above-mentioned advantages, you should also consider the long term. If you consistently do the same sort of exercises and routine, you'll most likely get bored and the monotony of training will in and of itself decrease your progress. Also, your body will have less of a

stimulus to respond to since it's used to the same old movement patterns. So while you may temporarily take a step back in learning a new skill, you're giving your body a new set of stimuli to adjust to. And these adjustments will translate to new levels of strength and speed. According to Kurz, the richer your treasury of skills, the faster you can master new ones and the more effective you'll be in applying them on the field, mat, platform, or wherever you compete.<sup>3</sup> So the minor setback that you might experience is most definitely worth it in the long run, unless PRs don't mean that much to you.

### SPLIT APPLICATIONS

The split lifts can serve as general preparation exercises for most sports. One of the purposes of general physical preparation exercises is fostering abilities insufficiently developed by the selected sport—i.e., attaining all-around development. If

you were to focus only on sporting skills you'd develop weak links in areas that aren't addressed by the sport. According to Tudor Bompa, PhD, going beyond just the sport skills is a basic prerequisite to reach highly specialized physical preparation and technical mastery.<sup>1</sup> Split lifts for all-around development are a good choice for sports like football, basketball, and volleyball because the lifts require using both legs to generate force from the ground, similar to the sport itself.

Throwing sports are also done with the legs generating force against the ground and often require one leg leading in front of the other. In track and field throwing events, athletes use one side of the body to "block" in order to accelerate the instrument. For example, in the shot put, the left leg (for a right-handed thrower) has a bracing and levering function.<sup>5, 7</sup> This leg, as well as the entire left side of the body, must remain fixed at the joints and not give into the pressure of the right leg at the hip or knee joints.<sup>8</sup> In the discus, the left side of the body forms a lever that counteracts the pressure of the right side.<sup>2</sup> During



the release of the javelin, the left side of the body must be in a fixed position.<sup>6</sup> According to Schmolinsky, after the third turn of the hammer, the right leg turns against the resistance of the fixed left side of the body.<sup>8</sup> In other words, right-handed throwers require strong left legs because it's necessary to brace that side of the body.

Similar positions are seen in jumping events. In sprinting events, one of the major components of speed is increased stride length. But you then require lots of strength and power to make the longer stride work. Since a split lift also requires "stride," you can see where doing a split lift has application.

Although the split lifts are no longer used in competition, they still have a great deal of value for a strength and conditioning program, either for variety or for event-specific preparation. These lifts are easy to learn and to incorporate into a conditioning program, either through substitution or through a concentrated emphasis. So give them a shot and enjoy learning a new skill while reaping the benefits.

*John M. Cissik, MS, CSCS, is the director of wellness services at Texas Woman's University. He owns and operates Fitness and Conditioning Enterprises, which provides speed and agility instruction primarily for children and teens. He is the National Strength and Conditioning Association's state director for Texas. His work has been published in many magazines and journals and he has authored two books: An Introduction to Olympic-Style Weightlifting (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1998) and The Basics of Strength Training (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2001).*

#### REFERENCES

- Bompa, T.O. *Theory and Methodology of Training*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt, 1983.  
 Capps, S. Developing discus technique. *Track Coach* 151:4814-4816, 2000.  
 Kurz, T. *Science of Sports Training*. Island Pond, VT: Stadion, 1991.  
 O'Shea, P., and R. Elam. The shot put—mechanics, techniques, strength and conditioning programs. *NSCA Journal* 6(5):4-5, 74-76, 78-79, 1984.  
 Paish, W. Modern, yet not so modern, approach to javelin technique. *Track Coach* 152:4855-4856, 2000.  
 Pyka, I., and B. Ortando. Rotational shot put. *NSCA Journal* 13(1):6-9, 83-88, 1991.  
 Schmolinsky, G. *Track and Field: The East German Textbook of Athletics*. Toronto: Sports Books, 1996.

## SPLIT TECHNIQUE

*Three principle variations of the split lifts will be presented. Most important are the split clean and the split snatch, since in general the clean and the snatch are major, fundamental exercises. However, I also want to discuss the split squat to demonstrate how this traditional exercise can be performed split-style.*

### Split Snatch

There are several points of performance that you need to observe in sequence to become proficient and successful at this lift.

With the barbell on the ground, take a wide overhand grip on the bar, maybe even out to the



collars if you have very long arms.

Your feet should be hip-width apart and flat on the ground.

Pull the barbell against your shins.

Pull your shoulders back and raise your chest.

Squat down and look straight ahead.

This starting position will have your shoulders slightly in front of the bar, your back flat, your feet

flat on the floor, and your hips lower than your shoulders.

Lift the barbell slowly off the floor by extending your knees and hips at the same time.

Keep your shoulders in front of the bar and keep your back flat and arms straight.

Keep the bar close to your body.

As the bar passes your knees, pull it in toward your body while still keeping your shoulders in front of the bar.

When the bar reaches a point just below your hips, thrust your hips forward forcefully; your shoulders will move behind the bar; rise up on your toes and shrug your shoulders high.

When the bar reaches chest height, drop under it by splitting your feet.

Both feet should move at the same time.

The front foot should move forward and should land flat on the ground.

The front knee and hip should be flexed; the front thigh should be at least parallel to the floor.

The back foot should move straight back; the ball of the back foot should be in contact with the ground and the back leg slightly bent.

The action of splitting your feet will cause you to drop under the barbell; when your feet contact the ground, the bar should be received at arms' length overhead with your arms locked.

Receive the bar at a point in a straight line over your hips; your arms should be next to your ears.

From the split position, move the front foot back half the distance. Then move the back foot forward until it's next to the lead foot. This is important because just taking a big step forward with the back foot (i.e., with no initial front foot movement) will shift the bar forward, making control difficult.



## Split Clean

With the bar on the ground, take an overhand grip with your hands only shoulder-width apart. Your feet should be hip-width apart and flat on the ground. Pull the barbell against your shins.



Pull your shoulders back, elevate your chest, and flatten your back.

Squat down and look straight ahead.

Your shoulders should be in front of the bar, your hips lower than your shoulders.

Lift the barbell slowly off the floor by extending your knees and hips at the same time.

Keep your shoulders in front of the bar and keep your back flat and arms straight.

Keep the bar close to your body.

As the bar reaches chest height, drop under it by splitting your feet.

Both feet should move at the same time.

The front foot should move forward and should land flat on the ground.

The front knee and hip should be flexed; the front thigh should be at least parallel to the floor.

The back foot should move straight back; the ball of the back foot should be in contact with the ground and the back leg slightly bent.

As you complete the split, your elbows should move up and around the barbell.

The bar will be racked on the front of your shoulders and across your chest.

From the split position, move the front foot back half the distance. Then move the back foot forward until it's next to the lead foot. This is important because just taking a big step forward with the back foot will shift the bar forward, making it difficult to keep it racked across your chest and shoulders.

## Split Squat

Position the bar on your back in the same way as you would for any other squat.

Once you clear the rack, pull your shoulders back and raise your chest.

Take a step forward with the right leg.

Your front foot should be flat on the ground and the front knee should have a slight bend to it.

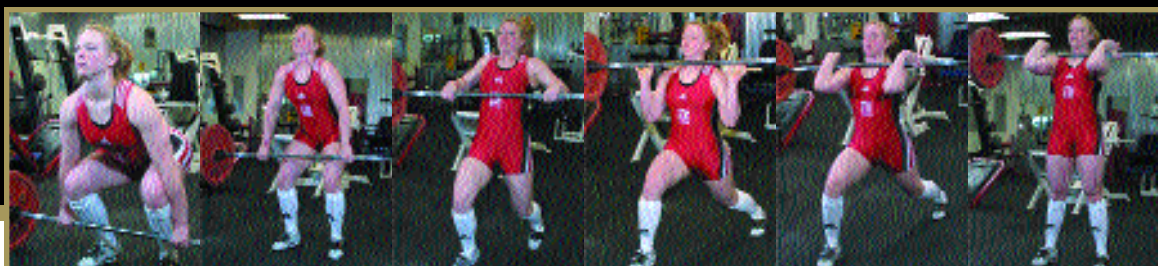
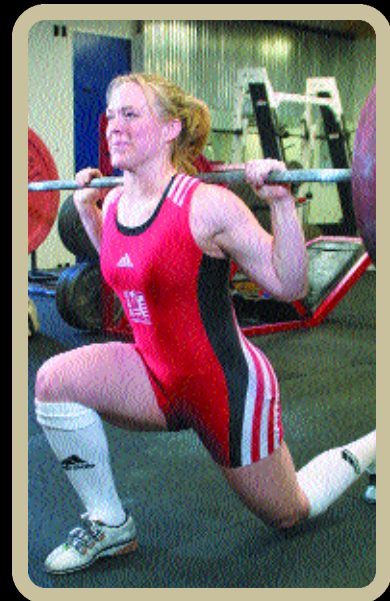
Take a big step back with the left leg.

The ball of the left foot should be on the ground

and there should be a slight bend in the back knee. Lower yourself by bending the front knee and hip.

Raise yourself back to the starting position and repeat until you have completed the desired number of reps.

SWITCH LEGS



## THE SPLIT PROGRAM

Learning proper technique is only part of the success equation. The other part is proper programming. You can follow a general preparation program for variety and a sport-specific program.



### General Preparation Program

One way to use these lifts when adding variety in a program is simply to substitute them for the power and squat variations every second workout or so. However, if you want to focus on these lifts, then they're best used in a three- to four-week cycle during the off-season.

#### Off-Season, Split Lift Emphasis

Day	Exercise	Sets x Reps	Intensity <small>(percent of 1-RM)</small>
<b>1</b>	Split Snatch	3x3	70-80%
	Clean Pulls	3x6	75%
	Back Squat	3x8-12	75-85%
	Incline Press	3x8	65%
	Seated Row	3x8	65%
<b>2</b>	Split Clean	3x3	70-80%
	Overhead Squat	3x6-8	65%
	DB Bench Press	3x8	65%
	Pull-Ups	3xMax	
	Military Press	3x8	65%
<b>3</b>	Split Jerk	3x3	70-80%
	Snatch Pull	3x6	75%
	Front Squat	3x6	70%
	Romanian Deadlift	3x8	65%
	DB Incline Press	3x8	65%
	DB Row	3x8	65%
<b>4</b>	Incline Press	3x4	80%
	Barbell Row	3x4	80%
	Military Press	3x4	80%

## SPORT SPECIFIC PROGRAM

You can use the split lifts in sport-specific training for track and field events, baseball, tennis, soccer, and football, both pre-season and in-season.

### Pre-Season Mesocycle, Shot Put

Day	Exercise	Sets x Reps	Intensity <small>(percent of 1-RM)</small>
<b>1</b>	Snatch Pull	3x4-6	90%
	Split Squat	3x4	80%
	Incline Press	3x4	80%
	Barbell Row	3x4	80%
	Military Press	3x4	80%
<b>2</b>	Split Snatch, start from hang (bar below the knees)	3x2-3	80-85%
	Split Clean	3x3	80-85%
	Split Jerk	3x3	80-85%
	Clean Pull from hang (bar above the knees)	3x4-6	80-90%
	Vertical Jump (with bar on shoulder)	3x5	40%
	<b>3</b> Off		
<b>4</b>	Split Snatch	3x1-3	80-90%
	Overhead Squat	3x1-3	80-90%
	Snatch Pull from hang	3x4-6	80-85%
	Front Squat 3x675%		
	DB Romanian Deadlift	3x6	75%
	Lunge (bar on front of shoulders)	3x6	75%
<b>5</b>	Split Clean from hang	3x1-3	80-90%
	Clean Pulls	3x4-6	85-95%
	DB Bench Press	3x6	75%
	Dip	3x6	75%
	Standing DB Shoulder Press	3x6	75%
	Pull Up	3x6	75%
<b>6</b>	Incline Press	3x4	80%
	Barbell Row	3x4	80%
	Military Press	3x4	80%