Teaching The Double Knee Bend Technique

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A quick look through any recent NSCA Journal will show that the clean, the snatch and related movements such as the power clean, the power snatch and pulls from various heights etc. are being widely used in many strength and conditioning programs. For the past several years, the NSCA has devoted significant amounts of time at their national conference to the instruction of proper performance of these lifts (8). Despite the fact that many strength and conditioning coaches hold the Olympic-style lifts in high esteem, there is a difference of opinion concerning the use of the double knee bend technique (DKB). It has been my personal experience that many coaches who expound the values of the quick lifts do not effectively teach the DKB. Even the literature gives some evidence of disagreement on the value of teaching the DKB to non-weight lifting athletes, as well as the ability of coaches to teach it effectively (9).

I would like to defend the DKB as both teachable and valuable for any athlete using the Olympic-style lifts. The intricacies of the DKB and analysis of its technique have been explored in numerous articles and training manuals (3, 4, 7). The DKB has benefits that make it a worthwhile to teach to non-weight lifting athletes.

Why Teach The Double Knee Bend Technique?

Only proper execution of the DKB allows the athlete utilization of elastic energy in the quadriceps group. Proper use of the DKB adds a true plyometric effect to the pulling movement (1) which enhances the effectiveness of the exercise. The quick pulling movements are generally included in athletic programs to increase explosiveness, however, this will only occur if maximum technique is utilized.

Proper use of the DKB reduces stress on the lumbar spine (2). Without the DKB, athletes tend to raise their hips faster, making the pull a torso extension rather than the maximum summation of vertical force. This places greater stress on the lumbar spine and requires the athlete to devote more time to recovery between training bouts, necessary to prevent the increased of overuse injury. Less stress equals an increased potential training frequency.

The DKB allows athletes to lift heavier weights, which can have a positive effect on training motivation. The DKB is not difficult to teach. The athletes at Monument Valley High School are generally required to master equally complex skills for their various sports. Once learned, the DKB will serve the athlete throughout their training lifetime. The small investment of time it takes to teach this skill is well worth the effort.

An Assistive Exercise For Teaching The DKB

The following exercise has been used to teach the DKB with a great deal of success. We have named it the scoop deadlift and it effectively teaches the athlete to bring the hips forward and the knees under the bar.

The athlete is taught the proper starting position as outlined in previously cited literature, bar over the balls of the feet, back flat, shoulders over the bar and head held as an extension of the spine. The pull from the floor is also a standard technique, emphasizing maintenance of back angle, hips low, arms straight and body weight toward the heels (3, 4, 7). This movement is very similar to other types of deadlifts used as Olympic-style pulling assistance exercises, but there is one important difference (5): the finish of the movement is what makes the scoop deadlift unique and effective. Instead of standing erect and locking out the lift, the athlete pulls the bar to mid-thigh, rotating the hips toward the bar and the body weight toward the front of the feet; shoulders are over the bar with the arms straight and the legs are still flexed. The athlete holds this position for one count, then returns the bar to the platform to reset and continue (photos 3, 6). This teaches the athlete to pull naturally from the floor into the power position that is the start of the top pull. The top pull is taught from the top down as described in the literature (3, 4, 7).

The scoop deadlift is used with both the clean and the snatch grips. We generally use a program of two weeks for 3 to 5 sets of 3 to 8 reps, depending on progression in the training cycle. We have had great success using the scoop deadlift in teaching beginners the DKB technique. For more experienced lifters it becomes an effective basic strength exercise when performed with heavier loads.
References