

## Developing Competency as a Coach

### Overview

It is to be expected that new coaches will struggle to be effective both in teaching Weightlifting skills and dealing with the range of issues that athletes present. Coaching is a complex role, and it takes months of practice to develop a basic level of competency and then many more years to acquire expertise. A person learns to coach as a result of real-life experiences with athletes, working day by day to find answers to the many problems that present. Knowledge is accumulated slowly over time by regularly performing coaching tasks and by thoughtful reflection on the outcomes of coaching efforts. The skills of the coach improve with practice that, although guided by coaching theory, still involves a process of discovery through trial and error. Coaching is a journey where it is not the start point that matters but how the individual strives for continuous improvement. Ultimately, coaches who journey well in the learning process will have the greatest opportunity to develop abilities that will be respected and admired.

It may help the developing coach to progress better if they have an idea of the path to pursue and the steps involved. The following model is merely a recommended process, and it is noteworthy that the title of 'coach' is not assumed until the third step. An important objective of the process is to ease the tasks and responsibilities of the developing coach and to avoid the situation where they are overburdened. It is for this reason that there are two prior steps recommended before a person is deemed to be a qualified coach. These steps will afford the opportunity to develop the skills and confidence needed before taking on the full responsibility of the coach position.

	Non-Accredited		Accredited	
				
	<b>Intern</b> 20 Hours	<b>Instructor</b> 200 hours	<b>Coach</b> 200 hrs - 5 years	<b>Advanced Coach</b> Over 5 years
Task Area	Safety induction	Supervising	Managing	Setting standards
Training environment	Safety induction	Supervising	Managing	Setting standards
Training programs	Familiarisation	Implementing	Modifying	Designing
Skill teaching	Orientation	Practising	Refining	Perfecting
Athlete management	Observing	Supporting	Managing	Mentoring
Competitions	Observing	Supporting	Coaching	Managing teams

Figure 1-1: Steps in the coach development process

It is not expected that the proposed model will be met with consensus. There will be debate about the steps involved and the required practise period before eligibility is achieved for the next step. It is also recognised that the opportunity for learning at each step will be dependent on several factors, including the quality of the training environment, access to athletes training in a meaningful way and the supervision or mentoring that the learner receives. Much will also depend on the commitment, keenness, and resilience of the learner. The proposed model seeks only to guide the steps of people interested in coaching Weightlifting and to make the task easier.

## Reinforcement

In a sport coaching context, reinforcement is a consequence imposed on the athlete when they exhibit a specific behaviour. The consequence may be positive (reward or praise) or negative (taking something away). Negative reinforcement should not be confused with punishment or criticism. The goal of reinforcement is to strengthen or increase the frequency of desired behaviour (positive reinforcement) or withdraw any stimulus that may reward unwanted behaviour (negative reinforcement) (Cassidy, Jones, & Potrac., 2008). In this context, athlete behaviour should be construed as an effort to change or improve an aspect of their performance (a body position, a movement pattern, or diligence). This effort may occur as a response to the coach's specific instruction, or it may occur spontaneously.



*Figure 2-9: Offering praise when the athlete exhibits a required change in body position is an example of Reinforcement.*

### Positive Reinforcement

- Verbal praise, for example, "yes, well done, that's exactly what you need to do".
- Reassurance, for example, "that's an improvement", "keep going with it", "needs further practise but you are moving in the right direction".
- Non-verbal praise, such as a rewarding signal from the coach (see figure 2-9).

### Negative Reinforcement

- Observing but not providing praise for the athlete's efforts when praise is normally forthcoming. However, the absence of praise may be interpreted as there was nothing worth criticising.
- Reduction in the extent of corrective work and returning to more normal training. This signals success has been achieved.

**Table 2-7: Advantages and disadvantages of reinforcement**

Advantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive and negative reinforcement are both useful, but positive reinforcement should predominate.</li> <li>• Positive reinforcement is useful to:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reward efforts of the athlete to improve training behaviour or technical performance.</li> <li>• Motivate the athlete to persist with strategies to improve technique.</li> <li>• Reassure the athlete that efforts taken to improve technique are having a beneficial effect.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reinforcement will lose its value if used too frequently.</li> <li>• Coaches must be able to observe athlete performance before utilising reinforcement. In a busy gym, coaches will not be able to observe all athlete performances.</li> </ul>
Issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The appropriate use of reinforcement depends on the coach's interpersonal skills as well as their knowledge and understanding of Weightlifting technique.</li> <li>• Reinforcement should be intermittent, not regular, or it diminishes in value.</li> </ul>

**Table 3-10: Criteria for determining whether athlete should go heavier**

Criterion	Athlete is going well	Time to stop or reduce bar weight
Movement start	No unusual hesitancy	Obvious hesitancy displayed
Degree of effort	Lift completed comfortably and easily	Signs of exaggerated effort to complete the lift (perceives the bar as heavy)
Movement under the bar	Well timed, easy movement flow	Rushed movement under the bar
Foot movement	Consistently appropriate	Restrained or none at all
Foot landing	Lands flat-footed	Lands on toes
Elbow lockout	Achieved every repetition	Fails to lockout whereas previous sets were successful
Receiving position balance	Displays confidence and remains in balance in receiving position	Loss of confidence displayed, hurriedly recovers to finishing position
Receiving position depth	Consistent depth of receiving position	No longer confidence to drop to previous depth
Major technical flaws	Major technical flaw very occasionally exhibited but corrected on subsequent lifts	A major technical flaw displayed throughout one set i.e. not a random variation that beginners typically display

It is a task of the Weightlifting coach, on an exercise by exercise basis, to assess the athlete's movement quality and judge when the weight of the bar should not be increased further. It is necessary to guard against the tendency to overstep the comfort zone of the beginner and cause a breakdown of the movement pattern. If this does occur, and it likely will, then there is little benefit in repeating the set with the same weight. Instead, the weight of the bar should be significantly reduced to enable the athlete to regain confidence and freedom of movement. A weight reduction of 20% of bar weight may be sufficient for the athlete to regain their confidence as per figure 3-9.

**Example E:**  
Dropping back in weight to regain movement confidence

set 1	set 2	set 3	set 4	set 5	set 6	set 7	set 8	set 9
15kg	15kg	18kg	20kg	22kg	24kg	26kg FAIL	20kg	20kg

*Figure 3-9: Example of dropping back in weight if failure or difficulty is experienced.*

It is worthwhile to do 2-3 more sets at the reduced weight so that the athlete finishes the exercise feeling positive. The number of extra sets is always dependant on the time available.

Beginners have little experience or understanding of the risks and issues caused by failure. For example, it is highly likely that the beginner will not contemplate in advance what to do if they lose balance and control of the weight overhead. Coaches should therefore not only impose control on the weight of the bar but also inform the athlete when to let go and how to lose the weight safely. In addition to safety, building the athlete's confidence is the highest priority and frequent failure at weights is highly detrimental.

## Using Legs in Middle of Pull

The middle of the pull is an interesting and problematic stage and is often referred to as the Transition Phase (transition between First Pull and Second Pull). As the barbell approaches and passes the knees, the acceleration of the bar reduces mainly as a result of a momentary ending of knee extension. A simple way to view the problem is that the inability of the knees to extend further at this point ceases the contribution of the quadriceps to create an upward movement of the body. Other muscle groups must take over to keep the bar rising. Figure 5-21 provides a graph of force exerted during a lift as measured by a force platform. In this example, which was a 120kg Clean performed by a junior lifter on a force platform at the Australian Institute of Sport, a fall in force can be seen. As force is a product of mass and acceleration, there is a loss of acceleration at this point.

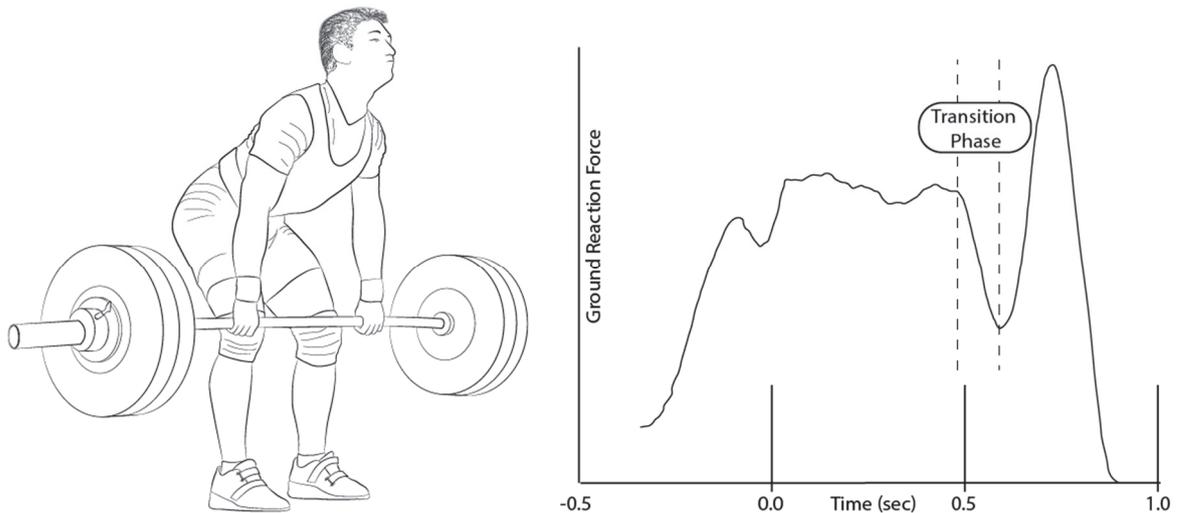


Figure 5-21: A force platform is an instrument on which the athlete stands and measures the downward force of the athlete AND the barbell. When the bar reaches the knee in the pull there is usually a momentary loss of force. This is called the transition phase.

In a small minority of athletes, the transition phase is marked by a momentary but visible slowing or stopping of bar movement. This is not only undesirable from a performance viewpoint but also risks a rule infringement on the competition platform. To reduce this possibility, the athlete must avoid excessive rotation of the body (see figure 5-22) by keeping the shoulders in front of the bar for as long as possible during the pull.

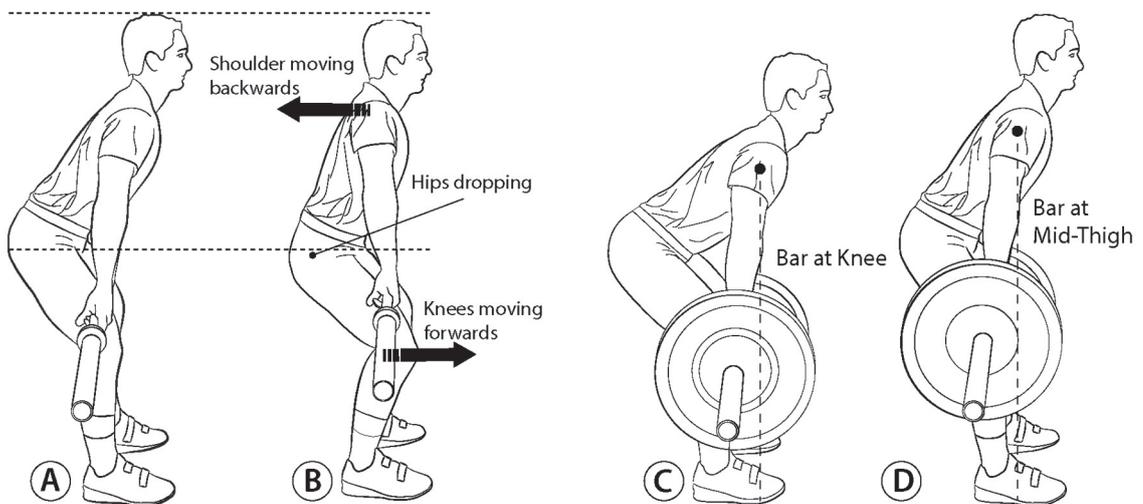


Figure 5-22: A and B - Excessive backward rotation of the body in the middle of the pull results in loss of force and failure to gain height. C and D - Athletes must focus on keeping shoulders in front of the bar between position C (bar at the knee) and D (bar at mid-thigh).

## Segment 7: The Second Pull Finish

One of the most important coaching objectives is to help the athlete develop a strong finish of the pull. This objective requires the athlete to achieve a powerful upward extension of the body as depicted in figure 7-17. In addition to power, the athlete must also develop a sense of timing, and this will partly rely on their confidence. In the last moments of the pull, the velocity of the bar reaches approximately 2 metres per second, or 2 cm for every 1/100<sup>th</sup> of a second. Thus, if an athlete finishes the pull a few hundredths of a second early, they are potentially denying themselves several centimetres of bar elevation. There is likely to be a close association between confidence and timing. The more confident the athlete is, the more likely they will avoid finishing the pull early to start their descent into the receiving position. To develop this confidence, beginner athletes need to engage in skill drills that develop speed and fluency of movement under the bar and practise success rather than failure. The finish of the pull is further discussed in detail on page 153.

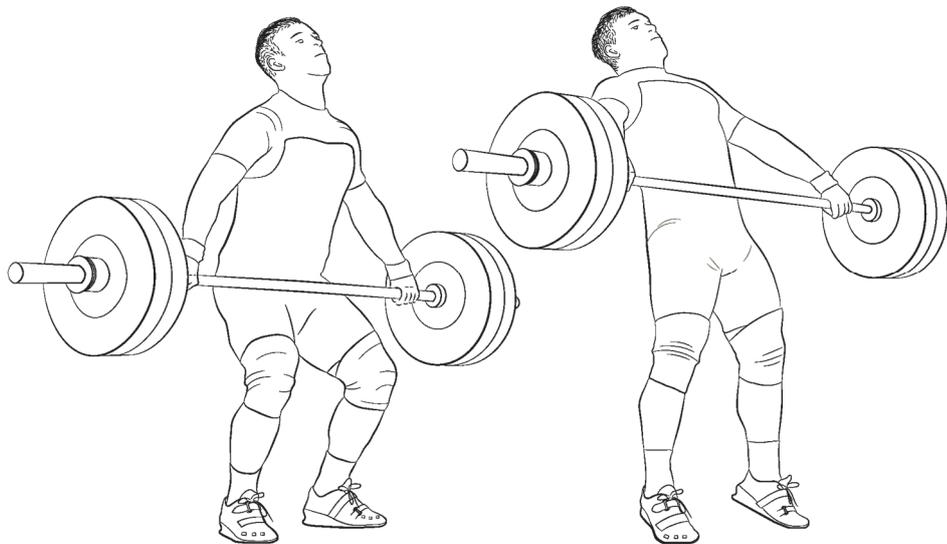


Figure 7-17: Position left – 0.77 sec, position right – 0.97 sec.

### Coaching Priorities

Help athletes to:

- Develop balance and control at full extension of the body (many novice athletes fail to exhibit this).
- Improve timing of the finish by developing trust and confidence in their ability to move under the bar.
- Keep the head still and curb tendencies for excessive backwards movement of shoulders.
- Keep arms straight until the finish of the pull.
- Keep the bar close to the body.

### Exercises and Skill Drills

- Snatch Pull from Mid-Thigh (page 239), encouraging the athlete to briefly remain balanced at full extension.
- Snatch Pull from Knee (page 240), initiating pull slowly but sharply accelerating from mid-thigh upwards.
- Jumping Snatch Pulls (page 238), ensuring that the athlete keeps arms completely straight, holds the bar against the body, and focuses on raising the body vertically as high as possible.
- Snatch from Top-Thigh (page 252) isolates the finish of the pull, develops trust and confidence in timing.
- Snatch with No Pull (page 253) develops confidence and a better understanding of pull finish.
- Guided Pulls (page 263) are useful if the athlete persistently leans backwards at the top of the pull.

## Snatch Pull, Slow Lower and Touch

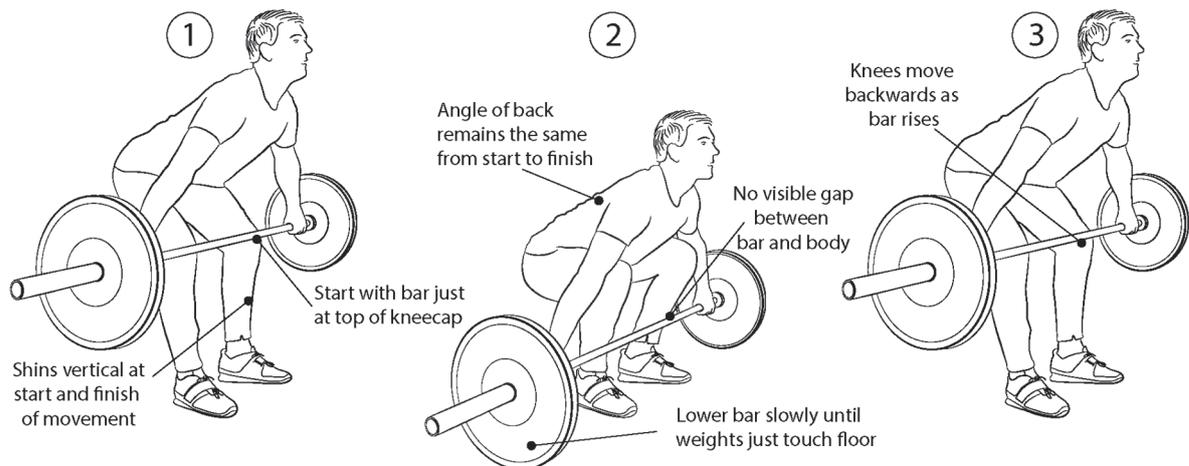


Figure 8-17: In this skill drill, the bar is lowered slowly from the knee until it lightly touches the ground, and then raised again to the knee.

This skill drill is recommended as the beginner's first formal learning experience of the First Pull. It is useful to load the bar with light full-sized weight discs, for example, plastic 2.5kg discs of 45cm diameter. Starting with the bar at the top of the kneecap, the learner lowers the bar slowly until the weight discs just touch the floor. There should be no relaxation of tension in the body as the discs touch the floor. The bar is raised again slowly to the top of the knee cap. Ideally, there is a brief pause (count to 2) in both positions. This action of lowering and raising slowly should be repeated three to five times in a set.

In all positions and stages of movement, the learner must endeavour to keep the angle of the back the same. The beginner needs to move the bar slowly so that they can develop control, receive instruction, and gain proprioceptive information from the various positions adopted. For example, the beginner should be given cues to ensure shins are vertical when the bar is at the top of the kneecap and also to keep shoulders slightly forward of the bar.

In the first few repetitions, it may be advisable for the beginner NOT to lower the bar by more than 10 centimetres so they can more easily master the angle of the back. As the beginner develops understanding and control, the bar can be lowered slightly more each set until the full-size discs just touch the floor.

If not already understood, it is useful to discuss with the beginner why it is important for the shins to be vertical when the bar is at the knee. As the bar is lowered and raised, the beginner should be guided to think about how their knees move forwards and backwards. If the knees do not move backwards while raising the bar, the athlete is likely to experience the common and painful issue of shin scraping.

### Key Coaching Points

1. At the start of the movement, the bar should be positioned at the top of the kneecap, not higher.
2. There should be no visible gap between the bar and body at any stage of the movement.
3. Shoulders should remain slightly in front of the bar at all times.
4. Movement should be purposefully slowed to increase positional accuracy and control.
5. The weight plates should touch the ground lightly and without any relaxation of tension in the body.
6. The athlete's attention should be drawn to the small movement of the knees backwards and forwards.

## Developing an Intervention Strategy

It must be emphasised that the mere occurrence of a performance error does not always mean that intervention by the coach is required. For example, an athlete may fail a lift as a result of a random movement variation or an error that is uncharacteristic of their normal abilities. When such a failure occurs, the athlete will usually self-correct and succeed quite normally in remaining lifts. In such circumstances, it can be more beneficial for the coach to simply observe the next few lifts and reassure the athlete if necessary. Knowing when intervention is needed, and when it is not, is a matter of coaching knowledge that takes time to develop. Greater experience in coaching probably leads to less 'over-coaching', a situation in which the athlete is subjected to overly frequent coaching cues and feedback on errors made. Over-coaching can impact on athlete confidence, motivation, and skill development.

### What is an intervention strategy?

An intervention strategy is the action or series of actions that the coach takes to improve the performance of the athlete. Actions may be as simple as a few words of advice given on just one occasion, to the implementation of a variety of corrective measures over several competition cycles. Commonly, an intervention strategy will involve prescribing exercises or skill drills that enable the athlete to focus on some phase of the lift where the error is deemed to occur. However, the mere prescription of exercises and skill drills does not ensure that change will occur in the athlete's technique. The athlete must understand the movement goal to be achieved and to receive reliably appropriate feedback as they attempt to change their movement patterns. All too often, strength exercises are prescribed, and the athlete's movement pattern remains the same.

Figure 13-3 depicts a 5-step error correction process.

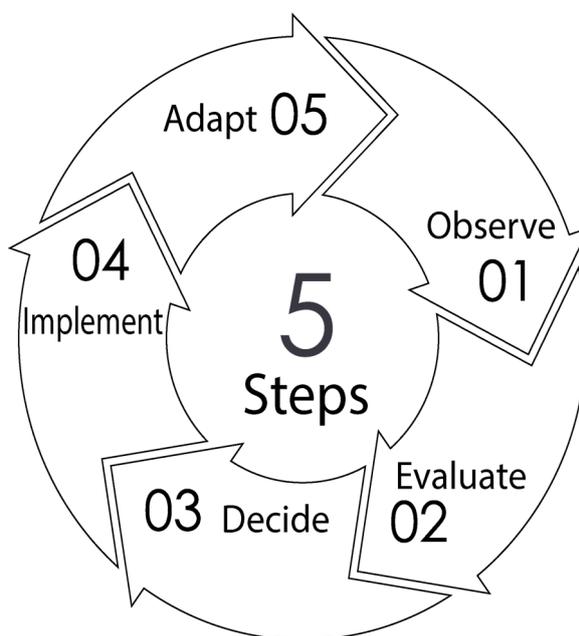


Figure 13-3: A 5-step process for error correction.  
Note: A strategy can include "do nothing".

Step 1: **Observation** is overwhelmingly the most prolific activity of coaches when they are with athletes in the gym. Observation is a disciplined skill that takes time to learn.

Step 2: **Evaluation** is dependent on the coach's mental model of Weightlifting. The coach must compare the observed performance with what they believe to be correct.

Step 3: If the coach perceives that the athlete has some form of persistent error, they must **decide** whether intervention is warranted and what form it should take. This step may occur outside the gym and often in consultation with others.

Step 4: If the coach determines that intervention is warranted, they must **implement** strategies to correct the error. In the implementation phase, the athlete must endeavour to follow any guidance given or the coaching intervention will have no value.

Step 5: There are plenty of reasons why an athlete will either ignore coaching guidance or make only a half-hearted attempt to implement the strategy. Furthermore, the strategy provided may simply not be appropriate. Therefore, it may be necessary for the coach to **adapt** their strategy and try a different approach.

## SESSION 3

<p><b>Overhead Squat, Partial Depth (#2)</b> p.235</p> <p>TF: 5s x 3r; RWL: 40% BW</p> <p>Primary Objective: Develop a basic receiving position for the Power Snatch.</p>	<p>The bar must be directly overhead with arms locked out.</p> <p>Raise shoulder girdle in lockout (page 180).</p> <p>Heels slightly wider than hips, feet turned out 20° approx.</p> <p>Move slowly to develop balance and control.</p>
<p><b>Snatch Pull from Mid-Thigh (#2)</b> p.239</p> <p>TF: 5s x 5r; RWL: 30%BW</p> <p>Primary Objective: Achieving full extension of the body.</p>	<p>Lift from mid-thigh to achieve a fully extended position.</p> <p>Raise shoulders high in the full extension position.</p> <p>Keep arms completely straight. Rise on toes.</p> <p>Maintain balance at full extension.</p> <p>Use Guided Pulls skill drill (page 263) to help the learner understand how shoulders move upwards not backwards.</p>
<p><b>Snatch Pull Jumping (#1)</b> p.238</p> <p>TF: 5s x 5r; RWL: 40% BW</p> <p>Primary Objective: Develop awareness of powerful use of legs in finish of pull.</p>	<p>Focus on raising the height of the body, not height of the bar.</p> <p>Keep arms completely straight.</p> <p>Keep head still and eyes looking forward.</p> <p>Encourage pause at mid-thigh before starting each rep.</p>
<p><b>Good Mornings (#2)</b> p.237</p> <p>TF: 5s x 5r; RWL: 25% BW</p> <p>Primary Objective: Learn to bend at the hips without bending the spine.</p>	<p>Bend by pushing hips backwards to initiate movement.</p> <p>Keep lower back tight.</p> <p>Bend at hips only to 45° angle or to limit of hamstrings.</p> <p>Bending action should be slow and controlled.</p> <p>Pause briefly at the fullest extent of hamstring stretch.</p> <p>Keep knees straight but slightly unlocked.</p>
<p><b>Press in Split Position (#2)</b> p.321</p> <p>TF: 4s x 5r; RWL: 30% BW</p> <p>Primary Objective: Develop awareness of vertical alignment of the body and the bar in the receiving position for the Jerk.</p>	<p>Use some form of cushioning under the rear knee.</p> <p>The upper body must be vertical at all times.</p> <p>The front shin is vertical, the femur of the back leg is vertical.</p> <p>Tense abdominal muscles strongly to pull the pelvis forward.</p> <p>Push bar as high as possible (page 321).</p>
<p><b>Rapid Drop-downs for Snatch (#1)</b> p.236</p> <p>TF: 4s x 5r (2 sets free standing, 2 sets with a light bar); RWL: 5-10kg bar</p> <p>Primary Objective: Develop an understanding of rapid downward movement.</p>	<p>Feet must change position fast (page 162).</p> <p>Perform free-standing in the first two sets, using a fast upward movement of the arms.</p> <p>Perform with a light bar (5-10kg) for the second two sets.</p> <p>Move bar in a vertical straight line, from waist to overhead.</p> <p>Pause momentarily with bar overhead to work on lockout.</p>
<p><b>Front Squat, Partial Depth (#1)</b> p.293</p> <p>TF: 5s x 5r; RWL: 40% BW</p> <p>Primary Objective: Develop receiving position for the Power Clean.</p>	<p>Grip slightly wider than shoulders. All fingers behind bar.</p> <p>Work to keep upright with elbows raised high.</p> <p>Keep the bar on the shoulders against the neck.</p> <p>Inflate chest fully before descent and keep upper body rigid.</p> <p>Breathe out at the completion of ascent.</p>
<p><b>Front Plank (Ex05) (#2)</b> p.396</p> <p>TF: 3 x 40 seconds; RWL: None</p> <p>Primary Objective: Develop an ability to brace the body.</p>	<p>Use soft mat under elbows.</p> <p>Observe the athlete's ability to brace the body rigidly.</p> <p>Reduce time if the athlete struggles.</p>