

A DIFFERENT APPROACH TO TACKLE FOOTBALL TRAINING

TRAVIS BROWN, MS, CSCS,*D

As a former college football player, I can remember the countless hours and days of Olympic-style lifts and power lifts that we did to prepare our bodies for the wear and tear of the grueling Southeastern Conference (SEC) season. I firmly believe that these types of lifts are cornerstones to any major football program that strives to be successful. My teammates and I were involved in one of the elite strength and conditioning programs in the nation that resulted in multiple conference championships and a national championship. So you may ask, why change anything with that program? If it is not broke, then it does not need to be fixed, right? Why adapt to anything different than what produced such great results? My answer to those questions would be not to completely change the traditional Olympic-style and power lifts, but to supplement those exercises with loaded athletic movements that you see on the field of play, thus potentially increasing the strength carryover to the field. This may also decrease the risk of injury through building balanced strength and maintaining proper joint alignment throughout. The goal of this approach is to implement movement-based exercise that a football player can relate to in their specific position, whether it be an offensive or defensive lineman, running back, linebacker, defensive back, receiver, or quarterback.

There are many great qualities with the traditional Olympic-style lifting that can carry over to the football field (such as hip explosion, triple extension of the hip, knee, and foot, etc.). These qualities are necessary in the sport of football. Ideally, getting those same movement patterns in a lift from a different force line (diagonal or horizontal) rather than strictly vertical could complement that particular player's position and performance at that position. Multiplanar movements (i.e., frontal, sagittal, and transverse), rather than just sagittal plane movements such as the traditional Olympic-style and power lifts, may offer a training atmosphere that is almost identical to that football player's position. This may benefit the athlete on two fronts; it may increase strength carryover to the field and decrease the risk of injury. Several pillars of motion in Olympic-style and power lifting translate to the sport, such as pushing, pulling, level change, and complexity (a combination of any of those movements), but these exercises lack the important component of rotation. Nearly every position in football utilizes rotation to some degree. Efficient and loaded rotation on your feet needs to be an integral part of any athlete's training regimen. Loaded locomotion forwards, backwards, and laterally can also be extremely beneficial to the athlete in developing balanced strength for all directions.

The following are some exercises that can complement the traditional Olympic-style and power lifts in a strength and conditioning program for football players using various implements. It is important to note that these exercises can be performed using other training equipment but the figures provided should be used as a reference for the movement pattern of each exercise.

LINEMAN SQUAT

Start: Athletic stance, with feet hip-width apart and heels off the ground. Keep body at a 90 degree angle to bar (Figure 1).



FIGURE 1. LINEMAN SQUAT - START

Finish: Keeping the chest up, squat down towards heels, keeping the body at the same angle (Figure 2).



FIGURE 2. LINEMAN SQUAT - FINISH

This is a great exercise to implement with any offensive or defensive lineman. Notice the angle of the movement and how it relates to those particular positions and movements that those players must perform during a game.

POWER CLEAN

Start: Athletic stance with feet hip-width apart and heels off the ground while keeping the butt down, back flat, and eyes up (Figure 3).



FIGURE 3. POWER CLEAN – START

Extension: Triple flexion (ankles, knees, and hips) to triple extension with shrug.

Catch: As bar travels up, shift feet back slightly to offset arc of the bar. Keep the body at a 90 degree angle to the bar, and catch with knees bent and hands above shoulders (Figure 4).



FIGURE 4. POWER CLEAN – CATCH

BEAR FIGHT

Start: Wide athletic stance, with the bar extended overhead and a slight bend in the elbows, hips, and knees. Whichever hand is on the end of the bar indicates which way to turn. Remain on the balls of the feet and keep body at a 90 degree angle to the bar.

Finish: Pivot feet, hips, and shoulders while maintaining slight elbow flexion. Control the bar down to mid-thigh level (Figure 5).

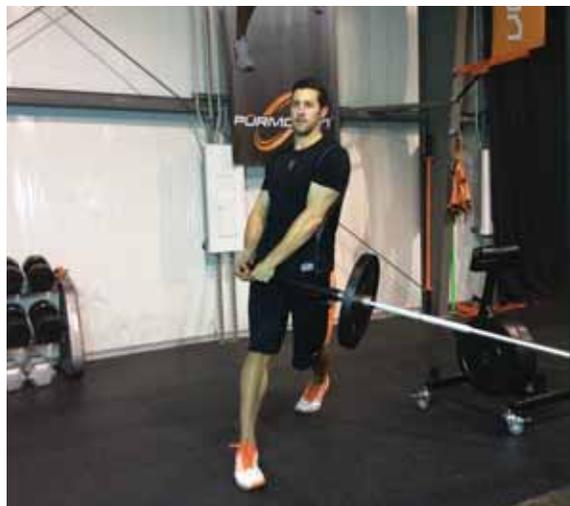


FIGURE 5. BEAR FIGHT

A DIFFERENT APPROACH TO TACKLE FOOTBALL TRAINING

QUARTET

Start: Securely attach cable from harness to tires, sled, or other object to pull.

Backward: Keep shoulders behind hips, and use small steps to push backward while remaining balanced (Figure 6).



FIGURE 6. QUARTET - BACKWARD

Forward: Stay on balls of feet while driving forward (Figure 7).



FIGURE 7. QUARTET - FORWARD

Crossover: Keep shoulders, hips, and feet perpendicular to object being pulled. The leg nearest to the anchor point (inside leg) crosses in front with small steps (Figure 8).



FIGURE 8. QUARTET - CROSSOVER

LATERAL LUNGE

Start: Split lunge stance with outside foot forward and flat on the ground, and heel of back foot up. Shoulders, hips, and feet should all be turned towards front (Figure 9).



FIGURE 9. LATERAL LUNGE - START

Finish: Take back knee straight down to the ground while maintaining an upright torso (Figure 10).



FIGURE 10. LATERAL LUNGE - FINISH

BRAZILIAN ROPE PULL

Start: Move the anchor point of the rope to about the middle of the body. Use a wide staggered stance with hips, shoulders, and feet facing the anchor point (Figure 11).



FIGURE 11. BRAZILIAN ROPE PULL - START

Finish: Reach out and pull the rope to the chest, allowing the torso to rotate and then alternate arms (Figure 12).



FIGURE 12. BRAZILIAN ROPE PULL - FINISH

SUMO SQUAT

Start: Staggered stance, keeping knees over toes and open at groin and hips. Back foot is at a 90 degree angle to the bar (Figure 13).



FIGURE 13. SUMO SQUAT - START

Finish: Squat while maintaining knees over toes and keeping the chest up through the movement (Figure 14).



FIGURE 14. SUMO SQUAT - FINISH

A DIFFERENT APPROACH TO TACKLE FOOTBALL TRAINING

SQUAT TO PRESS

Start: Athletic stance with feet hip-width apart and heels off the ground. Hands and handles stay at or above shoulder level through the entire movement (Figure 15).



FIGURE 15. SQUAT TO PRESS – START

Squat: Flex the ankles, knees, and hips to lower into a squat (Figure 16).



FIGURE 16. SQUAT TO PRESS – SQUAT

Press: Fully extend with a press, keeping the wrists straight (Figure 17).



FIGURE 17. SQUAT TO PRESS – PRESS

SPLIT CLEAN AND JERK

Start: Athletic stance with feet hip-width apart and heels off the ground (Figure 18).



FIGURE 18. SPLIT CLEAN AND JERK

Extension: Triple flexion (ankles, knees, and hips) to triple extension with shrug.

Catch: As bar travels, shift feet back to offset arc of bar. Keep the body at a 90 degree angle to the bar, and catch with knees bent and hands above shoulders (Figure 19).

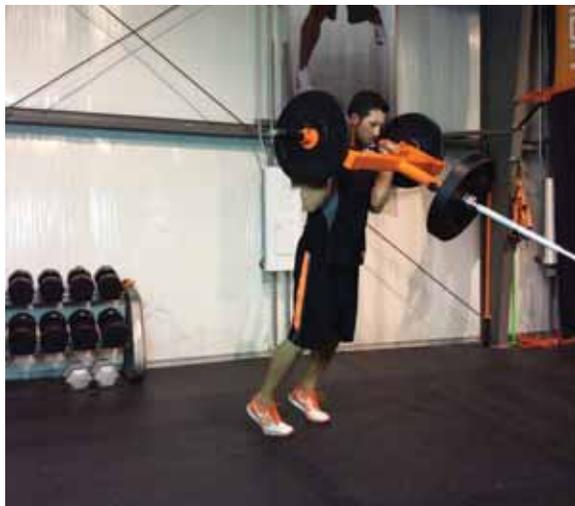


FIGURE 19. SPLIT CLEAN AND JERK – FIRST CATCH

Split/Jerk: Wide split with the legs with overhead extension (Figure 20).



FIGURE 20. SPLIT CLEAN AND JERK – JERK OVERHEAD EXTENSION

Catch: Back to catch above the shoulders (Figure 21).



FIGURE 21. SPLIT CLEAN AND JERK – SECOND CATCH

Finish: Back to start position.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Travis Brown has led a career as a strength and conditioning coach for over 14 years in Atlanta, GA and at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. He currently works for Pinnacle Athletics, which is a sports performance company that trains professional, college, and high school athletes. He has trained, or played next to, over 120 National Football League (NFL) starters, including dozens of Pro Bowlers and first round NFL draft picks. Throughout his career, he has trained a number of athletes ranging from youth to elite professionals, which include several Major League Baseball (MLB) players, National Basketball Association (NBA) players, and two Olympic Medalists. Brown is currently working towards his PurMotion Master Trainer certification and is a Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist® with Distinction (CSCS,*D®) through the National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA).*