

The Snatch Balance & Overhead Squat

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These two exercises are something I've only ever done a minimal amount of training on, but the question is do they improve your squat snatch?

Snatch Balance

I first encountered this assistance exercise during my resurgence into weightlifting in 2011, as up until this point I had never really trained on it at all – apart from an odd flirtation with it and that was about it! When I initially had this exercise in my training I did come across a few problems. Repetitions of it were a bit of a nightmare. If I recall correctly I was doing 5 sets of 4 to 5 reps. By the end my technique was suffering and all I was ending up with was a sore wrist. This was partly my own doing, as I was using a far too wide grip, but also I didn't feel like I was getting anywhere fast with it all and ultimately it wasn't even really improving my receive position.

Currently, I only use snatch balances purely as warm-up exercise and in that respect it has proven very useful, but as a method for improving your snatch overall I'm not so sure!

However, that being said, by going heavy on this exercise does it help the receive position? In many ways I would say yes, as the weakest point on a snatch is in the 'receive', as it's very easy to sink and lose all tension in the bottom position. If anything, the snatch balance teaches the lifter to keep the body under tension, but I would say that the overhead squat is the better of the two exercises to increase the upper body and core strength required for the receive.

Overhead Squat

The overhead squat is a very popular exercise in the world of CrossFit. I should know as I train in a CrossFit gym and I see it performed quite regularly. Again, this

was not something I was familiar with back in my early days of weightlifting, but it is now widely used in Olympic and CrossFit circles.



As mentioned above, it's a great exercise for building the core strength required in the bottom position of the snatch. Now I know it's not strictly speaking a 'snatch balance', as its not called a snatch balance, but I would say that it is more of a balancing exercise than a snatch balance simply because the lifter has a barbell (or other appliance) overhead at arm's length throughout the duration of the exercise, which takes a tremendous amount of 'control' and you guessed it... 'balance'!

There are also occasions when the exercise calls for the lifter to settle in the bottom if he/ she becomes off balance at any point of the downward movement. In many ways, this is good practice for the snatch to be able to adjust and regain balance in the receive position, as the old splitters did.

Going slightly off topic for a moment, my coach Mr Cook often tells me the story of the Russian weightlifting teams of old who would test their athlete's degrees of balance by how narrow they could squat snatch (see below). The theory was if they could squat with their feet together then they had perfect balance. He's also said to me on occasion that I should be able to do it with ease, but I'm not so sure about that!



Figure 2: Technical curiosities (Source: BSAG, Back-Hang Gazette)

Above on the left is *David Rigert* showing a training exercise for the snatch and on the right *Victor Kurentsov* using a narrow grip for squat style snatch.

Conclusion

To answer the initial question do these exercises improve your snatch? I say yes, but most importantly these movements instil a tremendous amount of confidence in each and every lifter, because as with so many Olympic style techniques they require a fair amount of commitment to execute. If there's one thing I hear from other lifters more than anything, it is that fear of the barbell overhead or losing it behind them and performing either one of these exercises will certainly help blow away those fears.

As a closing thought, it's important to bear in mind that these exercises are 'assistance exercises' and only give you an idea of where you are at in your training. The reason I say this, is that when you perform a snatch, no two snatches are the same. For example, your feet may not be in the same position each time or you may receive the bar a bit lower or you may have to sit in the bottom to regain balance,

whereas when performing an overhead squat you would fix your feet position for the entirety of movement. My point is that these exercises are great as a test and are superb for breaking down the manoeuvre into its component parts, but ultimately a snatch is a snatch and what you do on the day e.g. in a competition or a training hall is what's important.