

Why I Love Hang Cleans, but Don't Use Them with My Athletes (Anymore)

Up until recently, whenever I have designed programs for hockey players, the Hang Clean has always been a part of my program. I always found it to be one of the most important exercises for developing power. I was very fortunate to learn how to coach them effectively earlier in my career. As a result, I had the confidence to implement them in my athletes' programs. I have continuously seen positive results and specifically noticed our guys improve their on-ice acceleration and speed. However, despite my love for Hang Cleans, I no longer use them with MOST of our players.

Prior to working in the professional sport setting, I worked in the college environment for 4 years. In the college setting, I was able to coach my athletes' everyday during the whole entire year. Therefore, I was able to coach, evaluate, and periodize their programs and see Hang Cleans and all other exercises being done on a weekly basis. In my present coaching situation, with the exception of 4-5 players, I don't get to coach my athletes throughout the whole year. The reality is I coach most of our players during the pre-season and in-season phases only. (If I was still working in the college setting, I would be using the Hang Clean).

At the conclusion of every season, our current roster players will receive an off-season training manual and then depart for their off-season homes which may be in a different part of the world. We will then maintain communication throughout the off-season as best as we possibly can. For our drafted players who may be in the minor leagues, juniors, or college, they will be sent a manual in the mail. With these players, we may only see them for a week during our developmental camp where we can actually coach the Olympic lifts (as well as several other lifts). Sometimes, we may acquire new players through free agency and trades. Some of these new players have never done a hang clean or may have been taught different techniques other than what I would have liked to see them do. With our older players who are newly acquired through free agency or trades, it gets a little tricky. Sometimes we get players who are established veterans who have never done Hang Cleans before or may have tried them and got hurt. In their minds, why perform Hang Cleans if they can play the game at a high level without doing them? These guys are hard to convince. The guys that I really enjoy coaching are the ones that are willing to learn. For example, we once acquired one of the best players in the game who also happened to be a three time Stanley Cup winner at the time. He also happened to be one of the most powerful skaters in the game. He had never done a hang clean before and wanted to try it in one of our first training sessions. After coaching him through a couple of reps with a very light weight, we discontinued them right away because of his poor and inadequate form. I honestly didn't feel that the benefits he would get from the hang clean would outweigh the risk of him getting hurt. I don't ever want to risk having any of our players possibly get hurt in the weight room. How much more power did one of the most powerful players in the game actually need with the risk of possibly hurting himself?

It is clearly my job to coach my athletes and ensure that Hang Cleans or any other exercises are being done properly. However, teaching correct form with a Hang Clean can be problematic because of the technicality of the lift. I have found that bad habits with the clean are hard to break. Some bad habits I have seen include flexion of the lower back, bending the elbows at the start, not exploding, and improper start and finish positions. Sometimes, previous injuries will also inhibit our ability to teach them correctly. This would include previous low-back, knee, shoulder, and wrist injuries.

(It is important to note that with players who stay in the area throughout the off-season, we are doing Hang Cleans 1-2 times per week. For the players who live elsewhere in the off-season, we are going to

do alternative exercises.) Listed below are some of the exercises that we do to substitute for the Hang Clean to allow us to increase power in our players:

Snatches- We will use 1-arm dumbbell snatch consistently with our players, even if they are doing Hang Cleans. We will use the barbell snatch during the off-season program with our players in town. We will not however, advocate the Kettle bell snatch for a power exercise. Although it's a great exercise, I don't use it for power development. We will usually do 2-5 sets of 3-5 reps.

DB Jumps- Basically, these are squat jumps while holding dumbbells. The key to this exercise is to make sure that the arms are straight, chest is up, and back is arched at both the start and the finish. We usually may do 2-4 sets of 6-8 reps. We will coach our guys to be elastic as possible with these.

DB Push Jerks- I've recently become a big fan of these again. What I like about them is that they help our less-explosive players generate power quickly. The athletes are also getting some shoulder stability at the top of the exercise. Once technique is established, this can be an easy exercise for our players to get stronger with. We will do 2-4 sets of 5 reps with this exercise.

MVP Shuttle Jumps- The MVP Shuttle has been a great tool for us not only in power development, but also its use with injured players. We also use it for both double leg and single leg squatting for our guys who may have previous low back issues. We will usually do 3-4 sets of 6-10 reps of these.

If I had the ability to coach every player in our organization on a daily basis, there is no question we would use the Hang Clean. Due to the fact that I don't have that ability, we've had to come up with other strategies to develop our players' power. We've found that we haven't missed a beat when it comes to this important aspect of our players' development.