

TECHNICAL ASPECTS OF LINEOUT LIFTING

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LINEOUT LIFTING

A successful lineout, in attack or defence, relies on both tactical and technical aspects working together and there a lot of elements involved.

When casual observers see a good lineout call create space for a jumper who goes up uncontested but the ball sails over their outstretched hands, it's a common reaction to blame the thrower for getting it wrong but often the ball was delivered to the required spot by the thrower and the jumper wasn't at the height they needed to be because of a poor lift.

It's a bit like moving the dartboard from where the thrower expected it to be and then blaming the thrower for not hitting the bulls eye.

The technical elements of a lineout therefore start with the lift to make sure the jumper is consistently in the position the thrower is expecting them to be.

The difference between a good lift and a poor lift is well demonstrated in the following example.



I like to use key words when coaching – I find it makes it easier for players to remember what's required if coaches and players keep using one word as a trigger for a concept.

The outcomes of a good lift, and the keywords I associate with each outcome, are that the jumper:

- reaches the top of their jump as the throw arrives - **Timing**;
- reaches that point faster than any opposition jumper - **Explosive**;
- reaches maximum height consistently so the thrower doesn't have to keep varying the height of their throw - **Extension**; and
- is in position to provide clean delivery to the receiver on the ground - **Direction**.

A summary of what I look for in relation to each of these areas follows.

Timing

Getting the timing of the lift right requires every player in the lineout to be ready to react to the call because every player in the line has to be ready to be a lifter. There is no opportunity for any player to have a rest in a lineout as even after a call has been made it often has to be changed at the last moment.

Speed across the ground to get in the right position is also extremely important. If a lifter is late into position, it's often very hard to catch up during the actual lift. A lineout can still work if the jumper is a little early to the top of their jump but rarely works if the jumper is late to the top of their jump.

Timing in a lift also requires co-ordination between the two lifters and the jumper. The force each lifter applies to get the jumper into the air is counteracted by the force of the other lifter and there is virtually nothing the jumper can do to produce a successful jump if one of the lifters isn't in position when required and the lift becomes one-sided.

Explosive

The jumper initiates a lift but the reality is that the jumper doesn't get very far off the ground at all – nearly all the speed and height in a jump is produced by the lifters.

The jumper can certainly make it easier for the lifters but once the lifters take over, how quickly the jumper gets to the top of the lift is a result of how effective the lifters are.

Speed in a lift can only be generated by the lifters 'pushing' or 'throwing' the jumper up using explosive force.

Extension

The higher the level of competition, the better the lineout defence a team will face.

Often a difference of less than 200 mm in the height of the jumper's hands over that of the opposition jumper can mean the difference between a win and a loss at the lineout.

There are four main ways for lifters to gain every last millimeter in a lift:

- getting as close together as they can to reduce the loss of height from poor angles;
- getting up on their toes;
- achieving full extension of their arms;
- using the release and catch technique.

Direction

Lifters must also be conscious of the direction in which they lift the jumper.

In attacking lineouts the jumper's body should be as far away from the opposition line as possible to minimize the disruption opposition jumpers can cause in the air. This requires the lifters to lift the jumper straight up and not into the middle of the lineout. The jumper can then reach in to the line to retrieve the ball.

Once the jumper has caught the ball the lifters need to turn the jumper away from the opposition, firstly to minimize the disruption the opposition jumpers can cause by reaching across and secondly to make it easier for the jumper to make a clean delivery to the receiver on the ground.

In defensive lineouts, the opposite is required. The lifters need to lift the jumper towards the opposition side of the line to give the jumper as much opportunity as possible to steal or disrupt the opposition's throw or delivery.

COACHING THE TECHNICAL ASPECTS OF A GOOD LIFT

Lineout lifting is quite technical and yet I often see experienced players repeating basic errors with their technique.

As I said earlier, I think a successful lineout starts with a good lift so that's where I start lineout practice.

Of course most players expect lineout training to primarily be practice of lineout calls, rather than working on the basics of lifting – in much the same way that players want to practice attacking moves and are less enthusiastic about working on the basics of catch & pass which are essential to execute those attacking moves.

To demonstrate to players how important the basics of lifting are and make sure they're focused on what's required, I like to use something a little different when demonstrating the correct technique.

I coach lifters to imagine they are Olympic weightlifters performing a 'Clean and Jerk', something most players have seen when they've watched coverage of the Olympics. Despite the fact that players usually know what a 'Clean and Jerk' is, there are always plenty of bemused looks from players I haven't coached before when I turn up to lineout practice with a barbell in hand.

The 'Clean and Jerk' is a composite of two lifts. The first (the 'Clean') involves lifting the barbell off the ground to chest height, and then after a pause for composure, the second (the 'Jerk') which involves lifting the barbell above the head with straightened arms and legs before holding the weight in that position until three green lights are shown.

The 'Jerk' component of this lift has many similarities to lineout lifting and we can significantly improve lineout lifting performance by applying some of the techniques used by weightlifters in this type of lift.

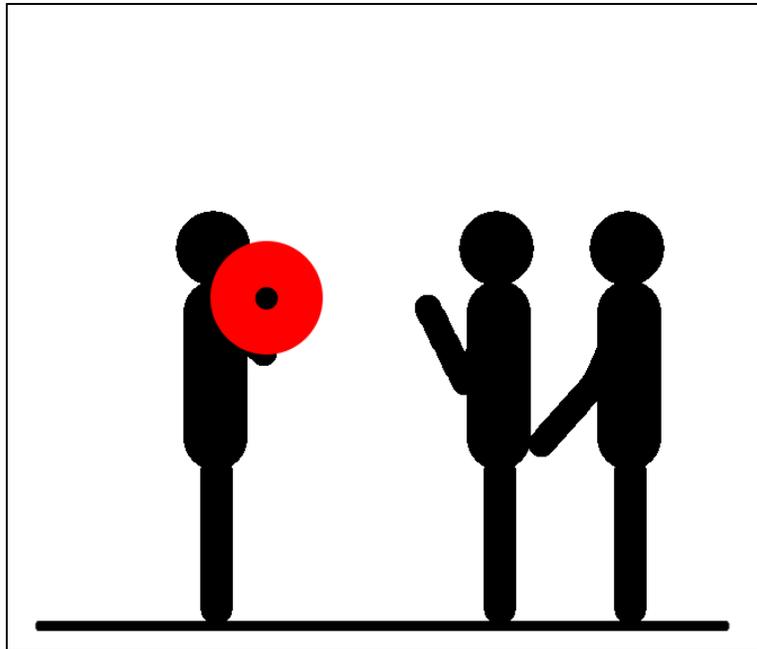
There are two key elements to completing a successful 'Jerk' – the first is the use of explosive power to get the weight into the air – the second is getting the body into the right position to remain stable whilst holding that weight in the air.

These two elements are exactly the same for a lineout lifter – the same explosive power is required to propel the jumper quickly to the top of their jump and then the lifter must hold the jumper in a stable position above their head until the ball is caught.

Of course a lineout lifter's job is a little easier because they're normally sharing the lifting with another lifter and the ratio of a lineout jumper's weight to that of the lineout lifters is a lot better than what a weightlifter has to deal with where they are often lifting two to three times their own bodyweight.

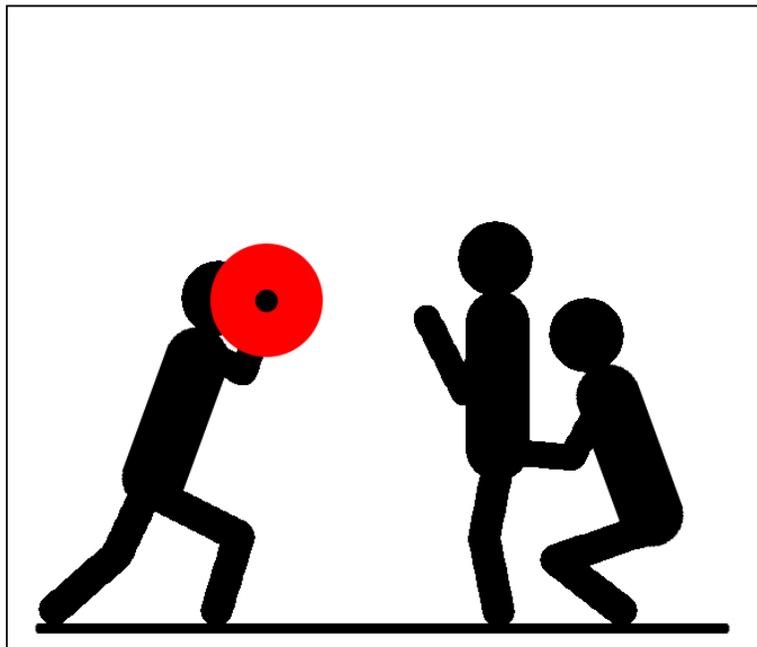
Let's look at the various stages of a 'Jerk' and see how they compare to lineout lifting.

Once the weightlifter has the bar across their chest they're in a very similar starting position to a lineout lifter.



The first movement a weightlifter makes from this starting position is to dip down to get themselves under the bar. Similarly, the lineout lifter dips down to get themselves under the jumper. The dip is much greater for the lineout lifter because they have to get down much lower to connect with the weight they're lifting, the jumper.

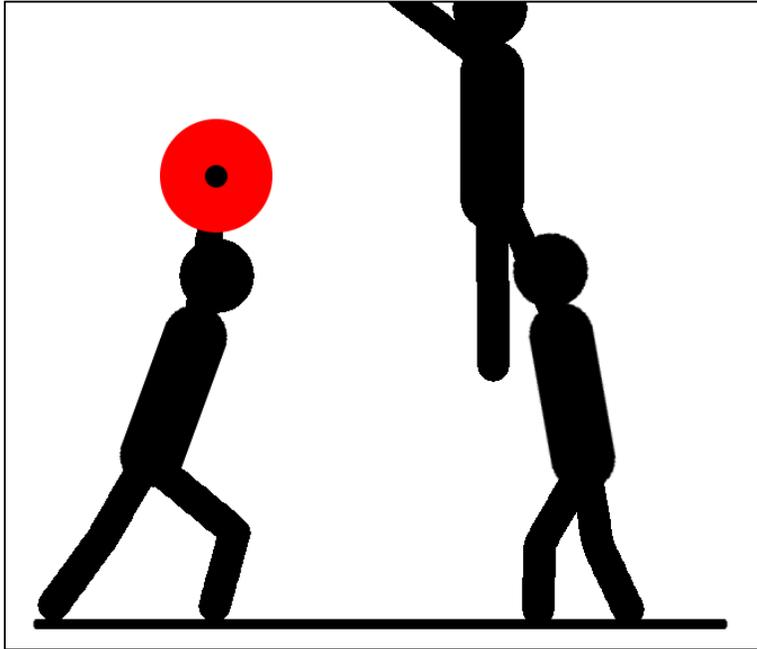
Some lineout lifters go into a split stance to dip down in the same way as a weightlifter and some weightlifters use a 'Power Jerk' where they don't go into a split stance which is much more like a lineout lift.



From the bottom of the dip, the movement of the bar upwards by the weightlifter has to be explosive – there is simply no way such a heavy weight can be propelled upwards if the movement is not explosive. This is exactly the same for a lineout lifter.

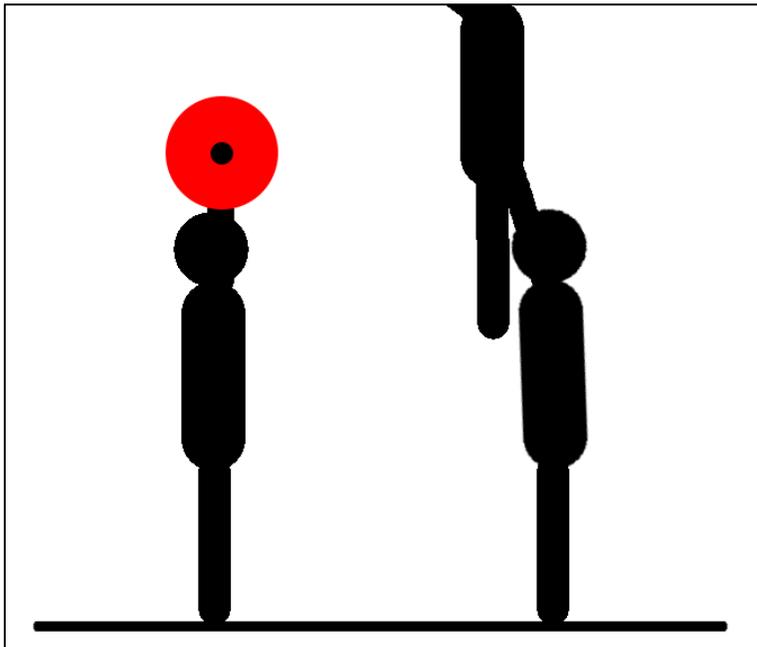
The weightlifter starts to move the bar up above their head but the lineout lifter has to lift the jumper straight up so instead of moving the lifter above them, the lineout lifter steps in to get themselves further under the jumper.

You'll often hear coaches telling players that they need to step in, make an 'A' frame or get chest to chest with the other lifter.



The weightlifter then locks out, or straightens, their arms and legs and holds the weight stable above their head because it's not possible to hold such a heavy weight up if the weight is out in front of them.

The lineout lifter has to do exactly the same so they can hold the jumper up until the ball is won.



There are of course more technical elements to performing a 'Jerk' but those simplified steps essentially describe the technique and demonstrate how similar the technique is to lineout lifting.

THE LESSONS WE SHOULD LEARN FROM WEIGHTLIFTERS

Starting Height

The first thing that is relevant to lineout lifting is starting height.

The 'Clean' component of the lift is not that relevant to lineout lifting because the weightlifter uses this part of the lift to get the weight up from ground level, whereas a lineout lifter starts their lift at somewhere around thigh height.

However, where it is relevant is that to get a massive weight from ground level up to their chest using a 'Clean' the weightlifter gets as low as possible before starting to lift the weight.

Then when they start the 'Jerk' component of the lift with the bar already at chest height, they dip down further to get under the weight.

The weightlifter knows that the key to lifting a heavy weight into the air is to start lower than the weight and push up, not start higher than the weight and lift it up, because lifting is nowhere near as explosive as pushing.

Lineout lifters have to do the same – when they dip down to make first contact with the jumper they have to be low enough that their hands are above their elbows so they're pushing up rather than lifting up.

A lift is much more effective if a faster push is used from the beginning.

If the hands are lower than the elbow at the start, the first part of the lift will be slow until the hands get above the elbow and it becomes a push.

Explosive Power

How often do you see kids who have only recently started lifting in lineouts struggling to pull the jumper upwards in the early part of a lift?

It's only when their hands get above their elbows and they can switch to a push that they can start to use explosive power and throw the jumper into the air.

I use a barbell to start lineout lifting practice and have players repeatedly start squatted down at the same height they need to start their lift, with the bar on their chest and then have them use a fast push to get the bar to the top of the lift as fast as possible.

For more experienced players, I just add more weight to the bar and it becomes a good warm up exercise whilst reinforcing the need for an explosive 'push' into the air.

Get The Weight Above You

Have you ever seen a weightlifter try to hold the bar out in front of them whilst they wait for three green lights? No, because it's simply not possible to hold a massive weight up out in front of the body.

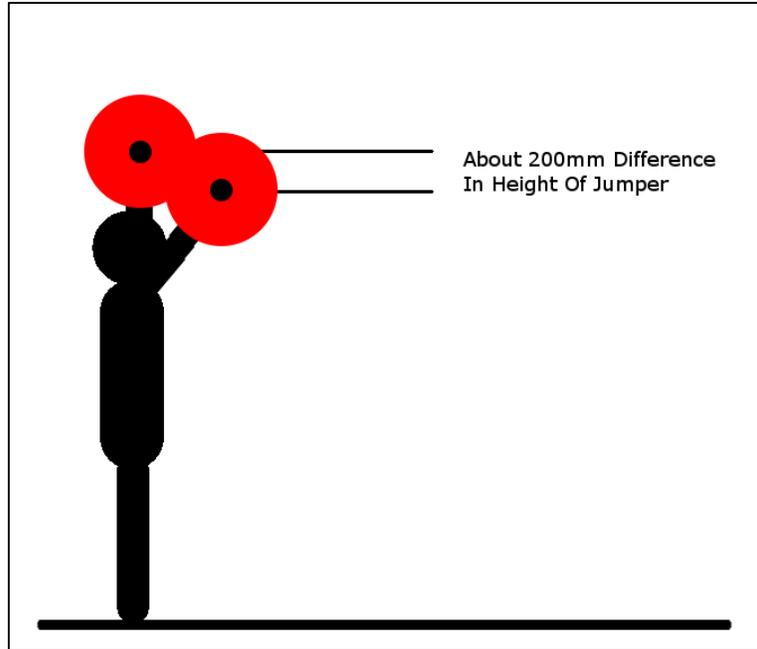
It's exactly the same with lineout lifting. If the throw is slightly delayed, there's a need for the lifters to hold the jumper up but they can't do that if the weight of the jumper is out in front of them.

The difference with lineout lifting is that there are usually two lifters involved and ideally the jumper's weight should be distributed evenly between the lifters, so the jumper's weight is always going to be a little out in front of each lifter.

To counter this, the lifter must step in as far as possible so they are chest to chest with the other lifter to get the jumper's weight above them.

Of course the other benefit of both lifters getting as far under the jumper as possible is that the jumper achieves maximum height as there is no height lost through the lifter's body being on an angle.

I use the barbell in practice to demonstrate how much height can be lost if the jumper is held out in front of the lifter.



Lock Arms Out

The other thing that impacts on the ability of a lifter to hold a jumper in the air is whether the lifter is able to lock their arms out.

Have you ever seen a weightlifter holding the weight up above them with bent arms? Of course not and the reason it doesn't happen can be found in how the weightlifter places their hands on the bar – with their palms on the top of the bar so that the weightlifter can see the back of their hands.

If they were to place their palms on the bottom of the bar, then at the top of the lift their elbows would have a tendency to bend and the weight would come back down on top of them.

Try it for yourself – hold your left arm straight out in front of you with the back of your hand facing you – now with your right hand apply pressure downward on your left elbow. With your hand in that position your arm is solid and locked out.

Now do the same thing with your palm facing you – your arm bends at the elbow and can't be locked out.

It seems obvious but how many times do you see a lineout lifter with their hands on the outside of a jumper's legs which means their palms are facing in? If a lifter has their hands in this position the same issue arises as having their palms facing up.



The basics of poor hand position from the front lifter at international level in the example above clearly cost the jumper height at the top of their jump. Firstly because the lifter couldn't lock their arms out to achieve full extension and secondly because he wasn't gripping under the chocks on the jumper's legs.

Watch closely next time you see a high level match and you may be surprised how many times these basic errors are repeated.

So, to lock their arms out a lineout lifter must be able to see the back of their hands when they grip the jumper.

If they're a rear lifter this means they have to get their thumbs together and make a seat under the jumper's backside.

If they're a front lifter they have to get their thumbs on the inside of the jumper's legs and have their thumbs under the chocks on the jumper's legs.

Therefore the key to getting a lifter's hands in the right position and being able to lock their arms out is actually what they do with their thumbs!

Reinforcing these lessons from weightlifting will significantly improve lineout lifting technique.