

Slow Down: Chad Vaughn's Free 4-Week Weightlifting Program From Breaking Muscle

More often than not when working with new athletes, I hear them talk about speed. They talk about wanting to be faster in their lifts, faster in their WODs, and faster to their goals. But the mantra that has repeatedly gotten me the best results is, as Coach Burgener says, “slow is smooth, and smooth is fast.”

With that in mind, I am going to highlight the principles of my four-week intro program. This will be what I would consider the “tip of the iceberg” in terms of my methods, theories, and philosophy of technique and programming. Anyone who knows me will agree that I could go from front cover to back simply discussing my squat talk, but I will leave that for another time.

A 4-Week Intro to the Principles of Vaughn Weightlifting

Rhythm and timing are essential to developing proficient Olympic lifts; however, faults and mistakes can overwhelm and delay the desired progress of any competitive or casual fitness enthusiast. I believe the initial breakdown and emphasis on four core principles can set a foundation that will ultimately lead to the smoothest and most successful path to optimizing anyone’s snatch, clean, and jerk.

Overhead stability, bar path, extension, and head movement are the principles that guide this initial program and lead towards all of the following variations and progressions by Vaughn Weightlifting.



Principle I: Overhead Stability

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When setting a foundation for the snatch, it is vital to ensure the optimal position of support overhead and in the overhead squat. This initial program emphasizes multiple drills and holds in the overhead position to reinforce the following themes for best stability.

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These themes are demonstrated in the picture above. A deliberate and consistent stacking of the wrist, elbow, and shoulder joints ensuring a stable and healthy support system that can transfer to the torso and hips. Notice the vertical nature of the torso, which allows for the weight to transfer straight down to the hips while keeping the bar over the lifter's midline and base of support. Drills in the intro program will be focused on setting this position and strengthening it through isolated exercises.

Principle II: Bar Path

The debate and talk of bar path could encompass an entire magazine, so I will strive to be concise in what I have found to be the most efficient and consistent way to move the body and bar during the snatch and clean pulls. My goal is simple. I want to limit the distance the weight is traveling. Consequently, the most vertical line and path overhead is my route.

In order to accomplish this path, lift-offs (partial deadlift to above the knee) and snatch/clean deadlifts are seen repeatedly in the accompanying program. These auxiliary lifts are essential in building the first pull and strengthening the necessary muscle groups to tell your bar where to move. Most lifts are made or missed before the bar ever reaches our knees, so take note of the amount of emphasis on the first pull within the program.

Principle III: Extension

I won't get too controversial here and throw out the common terms like "catapult" and "triple extension." What I will say is that, in order to optimize our bodies potential to put max weights overhead, the body needs to use every inch of extension to cause an aggressive reaction in change of direction under the barbell. Too often I see an emphasis being put on getting under the bar quickly.

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Is that my goal? Yes, of course it is! However, I want this speed to be a reaction resulting from great body positions. Cuing yourself and other athletes too early for a quick pull under often results in poor timing and missed lifts. Working from the high hang, or hip position, will reinforce the smooth extension and reactionary speed that I believe results from slowing down position work and being deliberate.

Principle 4: Head Movement

The final core principle I want to emphasize in this intro program is the head movement during the shoulder to overhead or jerk. With bar path and efficiency being an aforementioned principle, I want to expand that specifically to the jerk. In order for the bar to move in the straightest, smoothest, and quickest path overhead, I believe the chin and head need to extend back to full range and get out of the bar's way. Think Pez dispenser if you're having trouble visualizing.

To re-enforce this principle and put it to practice, there will be isolation drills during the dip and drive phase of the jerk. Try lifting that chin to help with your power and path my friends. I think you'll like it. But keep in mind, this alternative method is specific to lower rep and max effort jerks not the snatch, clean or standard metcon shoulder to overhead movements where a neutral head will still be your best cue.

Slow Is Smooth Is Fast

The corresponding program may seem a bit segmented, isolated, or even slow in progressing, but I want you to keep in mind the core principles I am trying to establish and make concrete. Olympic lifts are skills that take practice, patience, and time to develop. Slow down your movements in order to become smooth and balanced. Once this smooth and ease of movement becomes natural, the aggression and speed that we all desire in the lifts will become as natural of a reaction as breathing.

Week1

Day 1

1) Jerk Grip strict press w/ Head Tilt: 60%x10, 65%x10, 70%x10, 75%x8

Chin up and eyes find the ceiling on each rep

2) front squat: 70% x5x6sets

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Relaxed hands and High Elbows

3) hip clean: by feel x3x5-7sets

Emphasis is on vertical torso and straight extension through the shoulders

4) Clean Lift- Off: 90-100%(% of full clean) x5x4sets

Partial DL to above the knee using leg drive and acquiring vertical shins as bar lifts off

Day 2

1) 1~Snatch Push Press + 3~OHS w/ 3 second pause in bottom: 5-7 sets ending at no more than 80% of snatch

Emphasis is to keep the joints stacked and bar staying vertical over the body's midline

2) Hip Power Snatch + OHS: by feel x3x5-7sets

Emphasis is on vertical torso and straight extension through the shoulders

3) SDL w/ 3second pause above knee on descent (% of snatch): 85%x5 90%x5, 95%x5x3sets

Reinforcing the above knee position and vertical shins

Day 3

1) Two Pause Push Press: 70%x5x6sets

Pause in dip for 2sec & pause head tilt 2sec finding ceiling with eyes

2) Back Squat: 70%x5x6sets

3) Hang Snatch Above Knee w/ 2 Pauses: by feel x2x5-7sets ending at no more than 80%

Pause 2sec above knee & 2second in OHS

4) Snatch Lift-Off: 90-100%(% of full snatch) x5x4sets

Partial DL to above the knee using leg drive and acquiring vertical shins as bar lifts off

Day 4

1) Power Clean Above Knee + FSQ: by feel x3x5-7sets

Emphasis is on getting shoulders over bar, knees back with vertical shins, and straight extension through pull

2) CDL (% of estimated quality CDL): 80%x5x6sets

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3) Rack Jerk w/ 2 Pauses: 60-70% x2x6sets

Pause in dip for 2sec & pause head tilt 2sec finding ceiling with eyes

Day 5

1) Back Squat w/ Pause: 70% x2x6sets

First rep is each set has 3-5second pause in bottom

2) Snatch Balance w/ 3second Pause in Bottom: 3, 3, 3, 2, 2, 1

Warming the receiving position and feeling base of support/balance during pause

3) Snatch w/ 3second Lift-Off: 12 reps total reps @ 75%

Emphasizing leg drive and controlled bar path during the initial pull to above the knee

4) Clean w/ 3second Lift-Off + Jerk w/ 3second Pause in Split: 8-10 total reps @ 75%

Emphasizing leg drive and controlled bar path during the initial pull to above the knee while demonstrating balance/control with pause in split

Week2

Day 1

1) Jerk Grip strict press w/ Head Tilt: 65%x10, 70%x10, 75%x8, 80%x6

Chin up and eyes find the ceiling on each rep

2) Front Squat: 65%x2, 72.5%x2, 77.5%x5x3sets, 77.5%xAMRAP

Relaxed hands and High Elbows

3) Hip Clean: by feel x3x5-7sets

Emphasis is on vertical torso and straight extension through the shoulders

4) Clean Lift- Off: 95-105%(% of full clean) x5x4sets

Partial DL to above the knee using leg drive and acquiring vertical shins as bar lifts off

Day 2

1) 1~Snatch Push Press + 3~OHS w/ 3 second pause in bottom: 5-7 sets ending at no more than 80% of snatch

Emphasis is to keep the joints stacked and bar staying vertical over the body's midline

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2) Hip Power Snatch + OHS (% of Power Snatch): 60%x3, 65%x3, 70%x3, 75%x3, 80%x3

Emphasis is on vertical torso and straight extension through the shoulders

3) SDL w/ 3second pause above knee on descent (% of snatch): 85%x5, 90%x5, 95%x5x2sets, 100%x5

Reinforcing the above knee position and vertical shins

Day 3

1) Two Pause Push Press: 60%x2, 65%x2, 72.5%x5x2sets, 77.5% AMRAP

Pause in dip for 2sec & pause head tilt 2sec finding ceiling with eyes

2) Back Squat: 65%x2, 72.5%x2, 77.5%x5x3sets, 77.5%xAMRAP

3) Hang Snatch Above Knee w/ 2 Pauses: by feel x2x5-7sets ending at no more than 80%

Pause 2sec above knee & 2second in OHS

4) Snatch Lift-Off: 95-105%(% of full snatch) x5x4sets

Partial DL to above the knee using leg drive and acquiring vertical shins as bar lifts off

Day 4

1) Power Clean Above Knee (% of Power Clean): 60%x5, 65%x5, 70%x5, 75%x5, 80%x5

Emphasis is on getting shoulders over bar, knees back with vertical shins, and straight extension through pull

2) CDL (% of estimated quality CDL): 65%x2, 72.5%x2, 77.5%x5x3sets, 77.5%xAMRAP

Emphasis on reinforcing perfect form and transitions through positions of pull

3) Rack Jerk w/ 2 Pauses: 65-75% x2x6sets

Pause in dip for 2sec & pause head tilt 2sec finding ceiling with eyes

Day 5

1) Front Squat w/ Pause: 70% x2x6sets

First rep is each set has 3-5second pause in bottom

2) Snatch Balance + OHS: 65%x3+1, 70%x3+1, 75%x3+1, 80%x2+1, 85%x2+1 65%x1+AMRAP

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Bar should maintain a line over the base of support during each rep. Focus on control rather than speed

3) Snatch w/ 3second Lift-Off: 60%x5, 65%x5, 70%x5, 75%x5, 80%x5 (reps do not need to be consecutive but rather accumulated)

Emphasizing leg drive and controlled bar path during the initial pull to above the knee

4) Clean w/ 3second Lift-Off + Jerk w/ 3second Pause in Split: 60%x3, 65%x3, 70%x3, 75%x3, 80%x3(reps do not need to be consecutive but rather accumulated)

Emphasizing leg drive and controlled bar path during the initial pull to above the knee while demonstrating balance/control with pause in split



Week3

Day 1

1) Jerk Grip strict press w/ Head Tilt: 70%x10, 75%x8, 80%x6, 85%x5

Chin up and eyes find the ceiling on each rep

2) Back Squat: 50%x5, 60%x3, 70%x2, 75%x1, 80x1, 85%xAMRAP

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3) Hip Clean: by feel x2x5-7sets

Emphasis is on vertical torso and straight extension through the shoulders

4) Clean Lift- Off: 100-110%(% of full clean) x4x4sets

Partial DL to above the knee using leg drive and acquiring vertical shins as bar lifts off

Day 2

1) 2~Snatch Push Press + 2~OHS w/ 3 second pause in bottom: 5-7 sets ending at no more than 90% of snatch

Emphasis is to keep the joints stacked and bar staying vertical over the body's midline

2) Hip Power Snatch + OHS: 65%x5, 70%x3, 75%x3, 80%x3, 85%x3

Emphasis is on vertical torso and straight extension through the shoulders

3) SDL w/ 3second pause above knee on descent (% of snatch): 85%x5 90%x5, 95%x5, 100%x5x2sets

Reinforcing the above knee position and vertical shins

Day 3

1) Push Press: 50%x5, 60%x3, 70%x2, 75%x1, 80x1, 85%xAMRAP

Pauses removed but still finding ceiling with eyes and aggressively throwing head

2) Front Squat: 50%x5, 60%x3, 70%x2, 75%x1, 80x1, 85%xAMRAP

3) Hang Snatch Above Knee w/ 2 Pauses: by feel x1x5-7sets ending at no more than 90%

Pause 2sec above knee & 2second in OHS

4) Snatch Lift-Off: 100-110%(% of full snatch) x4x4sets

Partial DL to above the knee using leg drive and acquiring vertical shins as bar lifts off

Day 4

1) Power Clean Above Knee: 65%x3, 70%x3, 75%x3, 80%x3, 85%x3

Emphasis is on getting shoulders over bar, knees back with vertical shins, and straight extension through pull

2) CDL (% of estimated quality CDL): 50%x5, 60%x3, 70%x2, 75%x1, 80x1,

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85%xAMRAP

3) Rack Jerk: 70-80% x2x6sets

Pauses removed but still finding ceiling with eyes and aggressively throwing head

Day 5

1) Back Squat w/ Pause: 70% x2x6sets

First rep is each set has 3-5second pause in bottom

2) Snatch Balance + OHS: 65%x3+1, 70%x3+1, 75%x3+1, 80%x2+1, 85%x(2+1)x2sets 70%x1+AMRAP

Bar should maintain a line over the base of support during each rep. Focus on control rather than speed

3) Snatch w/ 3second Lift-Off: 65%x5, 70%x5, 75%x5, 80%x5, 85%x5

Emphasizing leg drive and controlled bar path during the initial pull to above the knee

4) Clean w/ 3second Lift-Off + Jerk w/ 3second Pause in Split: 65%x3, 70%x3, 75%x3, 80%x3, 85%x3

Emphasizing leg drive and controlled bar path during the initial pull to above the knee while demonstrating balance/control with pause in split

Week4

Day 1

1) Jerk Grip strict press w/ Head Tilt: 70%x10, 75%x8, 80%x6, 85%x4 90%x3

Chin up and eyes find the ceiling on each rep

2) Front Squat: 75%x3x7sets

Relaxed hands and High Elbows

3) Clean: by feel x2x5-7sets

Emphasis is on vertical torso and straight extension through the shoulders

4) Clean Lift- Off: 105-115%(% of full clean) x2x5sets

Partial DL to above the knee using leg drive and acquiring vertical shins as bar lifts off

Day 2

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1) 1~Snatch Push Press + 1~OHS w/ 3 second pause in bottom: 5-7 sets ending at no more than 100% of snatch

Emphasis is to keep the joints stacked and bar staying vertical over the body's midline

2) Hip Power Snatch + OHS (% of Power Snatch): 70%x3, 75%x3, 80%x3, 85%x3

Emphasis is on vertical torso and straight extension through the shoulders

3) SDL w/ 3second pause above knee on descent (% of snatch): 90%x5, 95%x5, 100%x5x3sets

Reinforcing the above knee position and vertical shins

Day 3

1) Push Press: 75%x3x7sets

2) Back Squat: 75%x3x7sets

3) Hang Snatch Above Knee: by feel x1x5-7sets ending at no more than 95%

4) Snatch Lift-Off: 105-115%(% of full snatch) x2x5sets

Partial DL to above the knee using leg drive and acquiring vertical shins as bar lifts off

Day 4

1) Power Clean Above Knee (% of Power Clean): 70%x3, 75%x3, 80%x2, 85%x2

Emphasis is on getting shoulders over bar, knees back with vertical shins, and straight extension through pull

2) CDL (% of estimated quality CDL): 75%x3x7sets

Emphasis on reinforcing perfect form and transitions through positions of pull

3) Rack Jerk: 85-95% x1x6sets

Day 5

1) Front Squat w/ Pause: 70% x2x6sets

First rep is each set has 3-5second pause in bottom

2) Snatch Balance + OHS: Find Max

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Bar should maintain a line over the base of support during each rep. Focus on control rather than speed

3) Snatch w/ 3second Lift-Off: 70%x3, 75%x3, 80%x3, 85%x3 (reps do not need to be consecutive but rather accumulated)

Emphasizing leg drive and controlled bar path during the initial pull to above the knee

4) Clean w/ 3second Lift-Off + Jerk w/ 3second Pause in Split: 70%x2, 75%x2, 80%x2, 85%x2 (reps do not need to be consecutive but rather accumulated)

Emphasizing leg drive and controlled bar path during the initial pull to above the knee while demonstrating balance/control with pause in split

