

This article is a classic reprint from the Volume 5, March 2003 edition of the Powerlifting New South Wales Newsletter. I received plenty of positive responses from it originally and hope it rekindles some safe thoughts the next time you are in the gym!

Editorial Article – Safety in the Gym and on the Platform

[Article by Mark Roskell; all photos by Tyrone Hunter; models Max Bristow and Mark Roskell]

I think it is about time we had an article that explores the different aspects of safety. As many of you know, we had a nasty accident at the Eastern Grading competition last month, and I thought with so many newcomers to the sport, it would give them a good platform to start from as well as remind some more experienced lifters and helpers that safety is the most important thing.

The Squat

The squat is potentially the most dangerous lift of them all with not only the possibility of serious injury to the lifter but also the five spotters as well. Here are a few tips for the lifter. (1) After taking an even grip on the bar, stand upright with the weight **BEFORE** starting to walk back. Then pause and take as few steps as possible to achieve your stance. It's a waste of energy and time and increases danger if the lifter walks the weight back five or six steps and **THEN** takes the stance. (2) This is probably the most important—if you fail an attempt, **NEVER**, I repeat **NEVER** dump the weight behind or as I have seen once, over your head in front (with 280 kg). The spotters are not there to lift the entire weight for every failed lift. You **MUST** stay with the weight and the spotters will assist you back to the racks with it. Imagine if you were a spotter and a lifter failed a squat. Without warning, the lifter dumped the weight behind and it landed on your foot. Even 60 kg would do some damage let alone 250–300 kg. Even the quickest of reflexes would be nowhere quick enough to do anything about it. (3) Lastly, when returning the bar to the racks, never (as I saw at the Eastern Grading competition) remove your hands from the bar before it is back in the racks. Always put the bar in the racks, pause to glance at each side to be sure the bar is sitting correctly, and then climb out from underneath.

The Bench Press

The same basic rules apply (except for the walking out) to the bench that apply for the squat, i.e. if you fail the lift, stay with the bar. Don't expect the spotters to lift the total weight until it is safely in the rack.

Tips for the Spotters: Squats

As a spotter, the safety of the lifter is your main concern. The following pictures will demonstrate the right and wrong way to spot for the squat from various positions.



The first photo demonstrates the wrong way to spot from the rear in a squat. With the hands of the spotter where they are, there is no way he can react in time if the lifter fails or injures himself and falls straight to the floor. The second photo demonstrates a much safer way with the spotter's arms ready to react if needed.

In the photo on the left, one can see where the spotter's hands are—away from the bar, not close enough to react if needed—where as to the right, they're in a much safer position.



Tips for the Spotters: Bench Presses

As a spotter, the safety of the lifter is your main concern. The following pictures will demonstrate the right and wrong way to spot for the bench press from various positions.



The above photo to the left of the page clearly demonstrates that if a lifter tore a pec or for some unknown reason failed the lift, he would be in serious trouble **BEFORE** the spotter could react. To the right, you will see a much safer way to conduct yourself as a spotter.

Spotting from the sides is also an extremely important aspect of benching safely. The first photo below shows the wrong way, and the second photo shows the correct way. Both are wrong and right for the same reasons as the two photos on the previous page.



I hope that you can also see where the safety pins are located in the power rack: right under the lowest range of motion the lifter can get to. This is extremely important because if the lifter fails and the spotter is not strong enough to lift the entire weight (although the lifter should always stay with the bar), then the other option is to place the bar on the safety pins and with the holes as close together as possible, as shown in the photo, the right safety level can be sought by everyone in any lift (as well as partial deadlifts). Also, for those who train by themselves (me included), this set-up in a power rack is an absolute must for safety reasons. I never bench without the safety pins in place now because several years ago, I had 140 kg land on my chin (luckily I only got seven stitches—luckily because it could have quite easily killed me if it had landed on my throat)! You could say I learned the hard way about the safety bars in a power rack. (Note: That incident with the 140-kg bar was the only time, even back then, that I benched without the pins in the rack!!!)

I hope I have given everyone some good and practical tips for safety in the gym and on the platform, particularly the beginners who have not as much experience in the field as some others have. Most of it really boils down to common sense—what is the best way of doing something without increasing the dangers of injury to myself or others.

Yours in sport,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M. J. Roskell".

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