

# Final Preparations for a National Championship

By Leo Isaac

## Dealing with Emotion

The final two weeks preparation for a national championship is an anxious and exciting time for every athlete, whatever their level of experience. As each of the last few training sessions arrive, you will walk into the gym hoping to feel strong and wanting weights to feel good and easy. Then as training begins you will continually evaluate every lift, perceive technical issues that don't exist and be oversensitive to any little pain that you would normally ignore. As you leave the gym, and until you return for the next session, you will have a tendency, fuelled by anxiety, to contemplate your competition plan and to engage in a kind of 'numerology', conjuring various permutations of lifts you will do on the platform. You may even attempt to beat down and trample your worry by working hard to the last possible moment in an effort to stay strong! Some of you will, no doubt, recognize these symptoms.

The truth of the matter is that experiences in sport are all about emotion, and it is important to embrace this. Think about emotion positively, for it is the primeval and instinctive mechanism that prepares your body for performance. Consider that all the emotions you will experience are the reason why you do this sport, indeed why anyone does. Realise that emotion is the human condition, not to be avoided but instead celebrated as it means you exist, you are experiencing life and you are striving.

When at last it is your time to lift, TRUST that you will be at your strongest and best because your emotions have prepared you to be so. Be at home on the platform, don't rush for it is your moment in time, and just do what comes naturally.

## Bodyweight management

You have been entered into a bodyweight category and in the days leading up to the championship, you should be checking your bodyweight twice a day, morning and night. This information should be recorded and shared with your club coach and your team coach. By recording your bodyweight twice a day, you will be able to see the normal fluctuation that occurs and be able to make appropriate plans to reduce your bodyweight, if necessary. Ideally reductions in bodyweight in the days/hours before the weigh-in should be small and easily achievable. It is normal for people to fluctuate 2% of body during the day. This occurs as a result of water loss and waste elimination. Water loss occurs not only as a result of urine production but also water loss through the skin and lungs. Depending on body size, an individual might lose 35-50 grams of water every hour (840 -1200 grams per day) doing absolutely nothing, just sitting in a chair. If you then add the effect of a raised metabolism as a result of anxiety, a hot climate and exercise, you can see the potential for athletes to misjudge and overshoot the amount of weight-loss needed. In most cases, weight reduction requires just a measure of well-timed hypohydration (taking in less water than you lose) rather than dehydration (stopping water intake). It's important for your team to have scales in your hotel and if you do, you can check your bodyweight very regularly and finely tune the amount food and fluid you take in.

If there is a possibility that you may struggle to make weight, you have the opportunity to move up to a higher category PROVIDED the competition secretary is notified of your intentions BEFORE THE VERIFICATION OF ENTRIES DEADLINE. This deadline is usually the day before the event starts but it is important to know the date

and time of the deadline for changes. It is usually published in the rules at time of entry but if in doubt find out as soon as you can from the National Body. It is your team coach's responsibility to help you with this.

### **Warm-up**

A very important part of the preparation process is for you to construct a warm-up plan. This is something that your team coach is definitely going to need. Your warm-up plan should provide information about (A) how long you need before you start lifting a bar and (B) all the weights you will need from the start to the end of a warm-up, including sets on an empty bar. Your warm-up plan for a first lift in the Snatch of 70Kg might look something like this:

|                        |     |     |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
|------------------------|-----|-----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Mobilisation<br>10 Min | Bar | Bar | 30 | 40 | 47 | 53 | 58 | 63 | 65 | 68 |
|------------------------|-----|-----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|

The example given shows a 10 minute period for warming up and stretching and mobilisation and then 10 sets, including 2 sets on an empty bar. You don't really need to nominate the number of reps at each weight as it is really your choice. However, you can presume that the last 3 sets will be singles. The objective is to warm-up well, taking time on the empty bar and the first few sets to settle down. It's a good idea in the early sets to slow the pull (because you will be firing on all cylinders) and to work on receiving positions by exaggerating the length of time you stop at the bottom of your snatches, or in the receiving position for the jerk. This is really good for feeling in control and building confidence.

### **Starting Weights**

This is always the vexed question and often a source of disagreement between coach and athlete. There is very little point in worrying about starting weights as your performance will not depend on starting weights but on the number of lifts you make. You have to declare starting weights at the weigh-in and the aggregate of these weights must be within 20kg of your entry total. So, if your entry total is 100, the aggregate of your starting weights must be at least 80. This is an international rule called the 20/20 rule. Again, this is a team coach responsibility, but you can help. Make sure you are aware of your entry total as per the published preliminary start list of competitors. When you entered yourself in the competition, you were asked a question about your "Entry Total". The question may have been "what is your best total?"

You can reduce your entry total if needed PROVIDED the competition secretary is notified BEFORE THE VERIFICATION OF ENTRIES DEADLINE. This is the same deadline for changing bodyweight category, and part of the same process. Situations that call for a reduction in entry total are a pre-existing injury or simply a lack of form. Sometimes, it is necessary to lower your entry total for safety sake, but the reality is that 20Kg is a really big margin of error if your Entry Total is 150Kg or less, and quite a small margin of error for athletes that might have an Entry Total of 250Kg or greater. Just be aware of the 20/20 rule and what your entry total is in the preliminary start list.

### **Competition Apparel**

There are multiple rules regarding clothing, bandages, finger taping, belts and strapping. It takes time to get to know all the international rules but your team coach will know. If you want to look up the rules, you can download the International Weightlifting Federation publication "TECHNICAL AND COMPETITION RULES & REGULATIONS" - [https://www.iwf.net/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2019/02/IWF\\_TCR\\_01012019\\_v2.pdf](https://www.iwf.net/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2019/02/IWF_TCR_01012019_v2.pdf)

The main things to know are that you must wear a weightlifting costume, you cannot cover your elbows, finger tape must not extend further than your fingertips, and you can put tape around your hand if you tear a callous

or are in danger of doing so. Be aware that you will be given a small card with a number on it which must be pinned to the leg of your weightlifting costume. Ask the competition marshals leg if you are unsure, as this matters. You will be given safety pins for this but use only one as the number often tears if you use two safety pins

Be sure to create a checklist of all your competition clothing, shoes and accessories and pack into hand luggage that you take on to the plane rather than put through checked-in baggage.

### In the weigh-in

You absolutely must present photo ID at the weigh-in (a driving licence or passport) or you will not be allowed to compete. The referees will have your 'competitor's card' on the desk and they will write down your bodyweight. You must give your starting weights, and you will be asked to sign (initial) the competitors card in four places, see the red crosses in the example below:

| Competitors Card                 |                      |                        |              |                  |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|--------------|------------------|
| Start no.                        | Name: Joe Bloggs     |                        |              |                  |
| 6                                | State: Tas           | Birth date: 08/08/1954 |              |                  |
| Lot no. 92                       | Category: M67        | Body weight: 66.80     | Signature: X | Entry total: 180 |
| Snatch                           |                      |                        |              |                  |
| 1st Attempt                      | 2nd Attempt          | 3rd Attempt            |              |                  |
| Declared Weight at the Weigh-in: | Automatic Increment: | Automatic Increment:   |              |                  |
| 74                               |                      |                        |              |                  |
| Declared Weight:                 | Declared Weight:     |                        |              |                  |
| Sign: X                          | Sign:                | Sign:                  |              |                  |
| 1st Change                       | 1st Change           | 1st Change             |              |                  |
| Sign:                            | Sign:                | Sign:                  |              |                  |
| 2nd Change                       | 2nd Change           | 2nd Change             |              |                  |
| Sign:                            | Sign:                | Sign:                  |              |                  |

| Competitors Card                 |                      |                        |              |                  |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|--------------|------------------|
| Start no.                        | Name: Joe Bloggs     |                        |              |                  |
| 6                                | State: Tas           | Birth date: 08/08/1954 |              |                  |
| Lot no. 92                       | Category: M67        | Body weight: 66.80     | Signature: X | Entry total: 180 |
| Clean & Jerk                     |                      |                        |              |                  |
| 1st Attempt                      | 2nd Attempt          | 3rd Attempt            |              |                  |
| Declared Weight at the Weigh-in: | Automatic Increment: | Automatic Increment:   |              |                  |
| 93                               |                      |                        |              |                  |
| Declared Weight:                 | Declared Weight:     |                        |              |                  |
| Sign: X                          | Sign:                | Sign:                  |              |                  |
| 1st Change                       | 1st Change           | 1st Change             |              |                  |
| Sign:                            | Sign:                | Sign:                  |              |                  |
| 2nd Change                       | 2nd Change           | 2nd Change             |              |                  |
| Sign:                            | Sign:                | Sign:                  |              |                  |

So, the places where you must sign/initial are under the recording of your bodyweight and under your declared starting weights. Remember that you do not have to start on these weights, it's just a necessary administrative process.

You may not have seen this competitor's card before if you have only competed in local competitions but actually it should be a standard part of the way competitions are conducted.

### After the weigh-in

This is a time to replenish fluid that you have lost to make weight. This is the really important task. Eat food by all means but don't stuff yourself full of food that you cannot possibly digest before lifting. It will just hang there in the stomach when you are lifting. A small amount of food, mostly carbohydrate and a little bit of protein, is okay but keep high glycemic foods to a minimum i.e. sugar. There is a prevalence these days for athletes to buy confectionery such as Snakes but be careful not to over-indulge as your blood sugar will spike and then hormones will kick in to eliminate the excessive blood sugar.

### In the warm-up room

Get into the warm-up room as soon as you can and if there is a session prior to your session, you will have to wait until competitors in the previous session have largely all completed their warm-ups for the clean & jerk.

Usually in a national championship, every competitor is allocated a platform but some sharing is still often required as there will be more competitors than platforms.

In the warm-up room, your task is to make yourself at home. Find your platform and put your things over and under a chair. That chair is your place!! You can leave the warm-up room if you need to go to the toilet or to purchase some drinks. If you have been given entry tags for the warm-up room, take them with you as you leave so you can get back in. Usually a national championship is not so strict but at international level it is.

It is the task of your competition coach to make sure that you warm-up in a timely fashion for your lifts on the platform. Make sure you don't disappear from the warm-up room without telling the coach. You would be surprised how many athletes go missing for a toilet break just when the coach wants to start the warm-up. Make sure therefore that you are fully dressed with weightlifting costume and shoes on well before the start of your warm-up.

Prior to starting to warm-up with a bar, you should do some gentle mobilization and stretching. At this time you might feel queezy in the stomach and your heart may be racing. Don't be alarmed by this, it is a normal response of the body preparing you for the event. In between, bouts of mobilization sit in the chair, relax, shut your eyes if you want, and focus on bringing your respiration rate down and your heart beat down. You can practice a form of mindfulness by relaxing parts of the body, one by one, and breathing, breathing, breathing.

When you start to warm-up with the bar just go very slowly and steadily at first, nothing dramatically fast, and try to settle down. Focus on feet landing flat on the floor and being steady and well-balanced in the moment that you receive (catch) the bar. Try to elongate the pause in the receiving position, and perfect your balance. The first few sets is all about settling down.

As you continue the warm-up with heavier weights don't be worried about missing a weight, it happens to everyone. Just take a few moments rest and go again.

It is your competition coach's task or even another helper to count the attempts before you will be called to the platform. It is not your job to worry about this counting. Your task is simply to lift the bar when you are given the signal by the coach or helper to do so, and then return back to your seat.

Try to ignore completely what is going on around you including your team mate, if there is another member of the team in the same session, and this can definitely happen. Don't worry about what's going on in the competition arena and definitely don't try to watch. Just keep going back to that chair.

It's not easy for your coach to predict what happens in a competition, so sometimes you have to go more quickly and take less time between warm-ups, and sometimes you have to go more slowly or even take more warm-ups to avoid sitting still for too long. Don't be perturbed if this should happen it's just the normal course of what happens in competitions, just keep going back to that chair, sitting in between warm-ups and doing your mindfulness thing.

When at last you walk out on to that platform for your first lift, stroll out with tunnel vision and take a moment on the back of the platform to tingle all over before you approach the bar. Don't look at the clock but just setup and lift like you normally do. Every weight that you will attempt is achievable.

Be open to the idea of doing more warm-ups between platform lifts if the wait is more than 5 lifts. Ideally the coach or helper will be aware of how long you are likely to wait, and you don't need to worry about this. Rather than simply waiting, if there is a possibility of 6 or more lifts before your next lift on the platform, go back into the warm up area and do another lift about 10% less than what you last did on the platform. Then go back out to the waiting area just off the platform. Your coach and/or your personal helpers will be with you at all times.

### **If you are helping others**

Usually in national championships, team members must be assigned as helpers in the warm-up room. Each athlete can have two people helping. If you are helping, there are some very important things to consider:

- (1) Don't distract your athlete with chit-chat unless they have specifically asked you to prior to the event.
- (2) Allow them to focus on their task
- (3) Don't coach, don't give any technique instruction. The athlete needs to run on automatic pilot.
- (4) Keep your own emotions and facial expressions under control
- (5) You can provide simple re-assurance e.g. "looking good" or "nice lift" but sparingly, don't overdo this.
- (6) You may need to count the board for your athlete if you are up to this task. If you are not up to this task, don't offer to do this. The athlete will need someone counting the board, and if the coach has two or more athletes on the go, a more experienced team member needs to help with this task.
- (7) As a helper, your task is to load the bar on the warm-up platform, fetch anything the athlete wants, keep your ears open for calls for your lifter to the platform, and WATCH THE CLOCK when the athlete is called.
- (8) If you are an experienced helper, talk to the coach prior to the start of the competition about making changes on the competitor's card. It's the coach's task but you are their back-up. Somebody has to make a declaration of the next weight required for the athlete or they will be confined to the automatic increment of 1Kg. Remember that weight changes must be made within the first 30 seconds of the athlete being called to the platform. Therefore, keep the task of nominating the next weight for the athlete always in mind. Every time a weight is nominated on the competitor's card it must be signed for.

### **Final Word**

Lifting in the big events is what it is all about. Yes, it's a challenge but take it on board and love every moment including the wonderful camaraderie of your team mates and other competitors. It is a great experience and one you should not miss.