

Weight Training For Soccer

This is a weights program specifically designed for Soccer players. The program consists of 6 exercises making up a basic whole-body routine that can be done in less than 30 minutes using free weights. This routine should be three times a week in the summer, twice a week in preseason, and once a week during the season.

- Back Squat
- Overhead Press
- Power Clean
- Bench Press
- Sit-Up Crunches
- Hamstring Curls

Back Squats. Assume a high bar posture with the bar resting on the trapezius muscles about 2 inches below the base of neck and your hands spaced evenly on the bar several inches outside your shoulders. Lift the bar off the supporting pins of the squat rack and step into starting position.

Foot placement can be adjusted according to your flexibility. A base of 4–6 inches wider than the shoulders usually yields the best results. Place your feet with the toes pointing out 20–45 degrees. Make sure that your heels stay in contact with the ground at all times.

The key to the squat is keeping your torso tight with a straight back and lowering the bar under control. Pushing your chest and stomach out compresses the lower back and is referred to as keeping the torso tight. This helps protect you from lower back injury. You should focus on using your gluteal and hamstring muscles to control the pace of descent. A complete squat is attained when the upper thigh, the line from knee to hip, is parallel to the ground. Don't force a full squat if you have poor flexibility or poor balance. By the same token, don't lift more weight until you learn proper technique.

A properly performed squat feels almost as if you are about to sit in a chair: Your knees don't move forward beyond your toes, and your heels never leave the ground. If your heels come off the ground, you are doing the squat incorrectly and endangering your knees.

Your eyes should look straight ahead during the entire lift. (Many athletes tend to look at the floor, which causes them to lean too far forward.) Also, make sure that both feet are spaced evenly and in line with your body. Some beginners tend to place one foot forward.

When returning the bar to the rack, don't rush back or catch your hands on the supports. Fatigue can make this a dangerous moment.

Overhead Press. This lift, also called the military press, develops the arms, shoulders and upper chest muscles. Use a weight machine or free weight squat rack. Lift the weight so that it rests on your upper chest, with your hands placed slightly outside the shoulders. Once the bar is balanced, press the bar directly overhead until your arms are fully extended. Lower the bar back to the chest and repeat. Make sure that you stand erect and don't arch your back during the press. Your eyes should look forward.

Power Clean. The power clean is an explosive total-body exercise. It requires coordination and good technique, and is an excellent strength building exercise.

The power clean is divided into three active phases and two recovery phases.

Phase I is the starting position. First, stand with your feet flat, slightly less than

shoulder width apart, and the bar over your shoes. Grip the bar with your hands evenly spaced at 1–2 inches outside your legs. Rotate your wrists inward and lock both elbows, pointing to the sides. Your back should be straight, with your torso arched slightly and the shoulders back.

Pushing your chest and stomach out compresses your lower back. Keeping the torso tight helps protect the lower back from injury. Your chest should be a few inches in front of the bar so that your back is at about a 45-degree angle to the floor. At this point, your hips should be a little bit higher than the knees, with your eyes focused straight ahead, not up.

Phase II is the pull to the knees. This is where most athletes make technique mistakes. The weight should be moved by using the large muscle groups of the legs, not the arms. The bar is lifted by straightening the legs and lifting the hips. Make sure you keep the chest over the bar. The initial drive to clear the knees will create a shift of the center of gravity from above the front of the foot to the center of the foot. Curling the wrists inward keeps the bar as close as possible to your shins and lower thighs. At no point during this phase should the elbows bend. The arms hang straight, with the torso as tight and straight as possible.

Phase III is the acceleration. Now, drive your hips forward forcefully, and raise your torso up and back. This movement allows the large muscle groups to act powerfully upon the bar, creating great acceleration. As the hips drive forward, the weight shifts to the balls of the feet and you should try to get as tall as possible. Note: A quick way to spot a major error is to see if the athlete stays flat-footed. The athlete should actually rise onto the balls of the feet.) If the lift is properly executed, the bar will make contact with your mid thigh. As the bar travels upward, the trapezius muscles contract in a shrugging motion. Raising the elbows as close to shoulder level as possible creates the final pull on the bar. It is important to keep the elbows pointed away from the body and not pull backward.

Phase IV is the recovery. When the bar reaches its highest point, a slight flexing of the hips and knees will act as a shock absorber. Trap your elbows by moving them from the side to the front of your body. The upper arms must be held parallel to the ground. Most beginners catch the bar with the elbows close to the torso. The final resting place for the bar is along the clavicles, with pressure from the high elbow position keeping it in place.

It is a very dangerous mistake to bend backward to catch the bar. The bar should be caught with the torso erect, not leaning. Another error is jumping or throwing your body unevenly in order to complete the lift. The feet may move a few inches to either side but not forward or backward. It's best if your feet stay in place.

During Phase V, the weight returns to the starting position. Here, powercleans become a problem in weight rooms without bumper plates or padded surfaces. The bar can be lowered safely to the floor if done in stages. First, drop the bar from the rack position on the chest to the hips. Then slowly lower the bar past the thighs until it reaches the floor. Your back must remain straight, with legs flexed, to decrease pressure on the lower back.

The rhythm of the lift is very important. Movement is slow to fast. If you rip the weight off the floor as fast as possible, lower back problems usually result from the premature use of the arms and shoulders. There should never be a struggle for control at the end of the lift. Reduce the amount of weight if this happens.

Flexibility of the ankles, hips, shoulders and wrists is a major factor affecting technical proficiency. If you are not flexible, a remedial stretching routine must be undertaken. Until you improve flexibility, only light weights should be lifted.

Back Press. Also referred to as Good Mornings, this lift strengthens the thighs, buttocks, hamstrings, stomach and lower back. Place a bar on the shoulders as in the squat, spreading the feet slightly more than a shoulder width apart. Keep the back straight and the head up while bending forward at the waist. To minimize the shearing forces on the lumbar spine, maintain a moderate bend in your knees. Lower until the back is parallel to the floor, hold for a count of two, and then slowly raise back to the starting point. It may take a while to get the bar in a comfortably balanced position.

When doing this lift, it is essential that the athlete keep the back straight and the knees bent. Otherwise, very serious back injury can result.

Sit-Up Crunches. Abdominal conditioning is a very important element of strength training and also one of the most neglected. We recommend sit-up crunches. When doing a crunch, only raise the shoulders about 30 degrees off the floor. Beyond that point, most of the work is done by the psoas muscles, putting unhealthy stress on your lower back.

Hamstring Curls. Players need to maintain a balance between quadriceps and hamstring strength, since running tends to overdevelop quad strength. Most weight rooms have machines that isolate the hamstrings. If not, you can use elastic tubing.

Supplemental Lifts

During the pre-season, or if weight training replaces running on any given day, the following exercises can be added for a more comprehensive workout. Secondary or supplemental lifts should be done after the core lifts. These exercises enhance general strength, develop muscle balance and strengthen weak areas. As a general rule, you do slightly more repetitions in a single set; 10–15 repetitions are recommended.

Bent Over Rows. Bend over and grab the bar with a grip slightly wider than your shoulders. Keep the back parallel to the floor, head up and legs straight. Pull the bar up to the bottom of the chest. Bent rows strengthen the back and shoulder muscles.

Curls. Using an underhand grip (palms up), stand with the hands at arm's length against the thighs. Slowly curl the bar up to the chest while keeping the back straight. Lower the weight until the arms are fully extended again. If necessary, standing against a wall helps eliminate the tendency to throw the hips forward and arch the back while lifting the weight.

Triceps Press. Stand, holding the bar with the hands about 8 inches apart, palms facing the thighs. Press the weight overhead until the arms are fully extended with the elbows near the ears. Holding the upper arms still, lower the weight as far as possible behind the head. Press the weight to the overhead position, keeping the back straight, head up and upper arms motionless.

Lateral Raises. Hold a dumbbell in each hand at the sides of the body, palms facing slightly forward. Keeping a slight bend in your elbows, raise your arms away from your sides until they're just below shoulder level.

Bench Press. To perform the lift, lie on your back with your feet spaced about one foot out on each side of the bench. Keep the feet on the ground, with the heels touching. Your head should rest on the bench, with the nose/eyes directly below the bar. Grip the bar slightly wider than the shoulders. Most bars will have knurled markings to ensure a symmetrical grip on the bar.

After taking a couple of deep breaths, inhale and take the bar from the bench supports. (Sometimes a spotter helps to pick up the bar, depending on the weight and bench construction.) Stabilize the extended weight before attempting the lift.

When you are ready, begin the eccentric, or descending, phase of the lift. Lower the weight slowly until it touches the bottom of your pectoral muscles. The motion should be controlled, and the weight should not bounce off your chest.

The next step is the push from the chest (concentric, or ascending, phase). Drive the bar up in a slight arch toward the upper chest. This keeps the elbows in line with the direction of force on the bar. When the repetition is complete (arms extended and the bar stabilized), attempt the next repetition. During the drive off the chest, your buttocks should stay on the bench. If you need to raise them to finish the lift, lower the weight and emphasize proper technique.

Training Routine

- Squats — 3 sets x 8 reps
- Leg Curls — 3 sets x 12 reps
- Overhead Press — 3 sets x 8 reps
- Power Cleans — 3 sets x 6 reps
- Back Press — 2 sets x 10 reps (light weight)
- Sit-Up Crunches — 2 sets x 30 reps
- Pull-Ups — 2 sets of max reps
- Medicine Ball Tosses — 2 sets

Add two to three of the supplemental exercises each training but vary them each day.