

PROPOSAL CONFUSION

By Dan Wagman, PhD, CSCS

I read through the proposals for the national meeting with great interest. There were, however, several that left me with a sense of confusion. Allow me to share those thoughts with you so that perhaps they will yield meaningful debate.

PROPOSAL 1: KNEE SLEEVES

This one confuses me on several levels. First consider that the International Weightlifting Federation (IWF), International Powerlifting Federation (IPF), and United States Powerlifting Federation—Raw (USAPL) technical rules on knee sleeves require them to, collectively, “allow free movement,” be “single ply,” be “non-supportive,” and not “provide any appreciable support or rebound.” So they basically offer nothing...other than maybe a fashion statement?

In contrast USAWA’s rules under VI.8. considers elbow and knee sleeves “braces or supports.” To that end I contacted one of the major lifting gear manufacturers who wished to remain anonymous. The company offers different kinds of IPF approved knee sleeves. What I learned is that knee sleeves can increase lifting strength—depending on their stiffness and tightness—by up to 50-some pounds. So despite the legal requirements set by the IWF, IPF, and USAPL they are in fact ergogenic. This renders USAWA’s terminology of being a brace and offering support to the knees spot-on. In the event USAWA accepts this proposal, I wonder how it would reason that what has been considered illegal equipment is that no longer.

Also confusing is the aspect of the proposal stating that knee sleeves must be able to be “pulled up by the lifter unassisted.” Does this not imply two things: 1) The tighter the knee sleeves, the more of an ergogenic benefit? 2) The lifter with greater strength who can pull up a tighter and stiffer knee sleeve receives more benefit than one with less strength? Now we are not only in the realm of allowing artificial ergogenic devices but also the inherent unfairness of implementing it. So basically the amount of ergogenic aid a lifter gets for any number of lifts that require knee extension depends less on the actual knee sleeves but more on how tight and stiff of a pair he/she can crank over the knees. How is that fair?

It seems to me that if the current rules set by other strength sports are such that knee sleeves must be constructed in a manner that does not artificially enhance strength, yet they do, then USAWA’s decision tree should consider three branches: 1) The branch that does not allow ergogenic aids, 2) the branch that allows ergogenic aids, and 3) the branch that contemplates fairness in competition. If the organization chooses the second branch, then legitimate arguments can be made for additional ergogenic aids in the future. It might be wiser for USAWA to stick to its mission of contesting unadulterated muscular strength.

To me, the ergogenic branch needs to be hacked off. Besides, does the hypothetical potential of a few new members justify changing the fundamentals of contesting strength this sport has enjoyed since its inception? And if USAWA allows knee sleeves in the future, the next line of reasoning would have to include in which lifts they should be allowed. Then, of course, all those lifts would require a new category for records.

PROPOSAL 4: UNIFORM

This is complicated and confusing. When the word “shirt” is used, by definition that means the sort of upper body garb that has a collar, sleeves, and an opening in the front. And while nobody I know—including me—has been competing in a shirt, thus violating USAWA law, the proposed rule change doesn’t assuage any of the obvious concerns. The IWF, IPF, and USAPL make it simple by stating that only a “t-shirt” may be worn. Therefore it would be much easier for USAWA to simply add a “t-” before the word “shirt” and to avoid judges needing to measure sleeve length simply state that the elbows shall not be covered. Then there would also be no need to mention tank-tops. See IWF Technical Rule 4.7.2. for the cleanest and simplest language.

PROPOSAL 5: SAXON SNATCH

I have been under the impression that most of all-round is about keeping that which the old-time strongmen and strongwomen did alive. In the case of the Saxon snatch, that is based on Arthur Saxon snatching a wooden plank while pinch-gripping it during performances with the Ringling Brothers’ Circus in 1909 through 1910. The membership should note, however, that there are already several differences in how USAWA contests that lift, likely because otherwise nobody could perform it. Saxon used a 15’ wooden plank that was 10” wide, 3” thick, weighed 90 pounds...and snatched it with one arm! If USAWA ended up allowing a 3” rectangular steel plank to be used, then all that remains of Saxon’s lift is 3”. Would that not take it too far?

Another consideration worth deliberating is that of making the Saxon snatch easily accessible to the membership. I went to the lumberyard to get a 3" plank, then the hardware store for floor flanges on either end, and two 1" bars to be screwed in to the flanges for the weights. All that cost me around 25 bucks. I can imagine having that out of steel to easily cost 10 times as much. Who would want to spend that much for just one lift? Also, steel would not offer the same sort of texture for gripping as wood, making steel also a poor investment decision. Finally, it might also be necessary to have two categories of Saxon snatch for purposes of records: wood and steel.

PROPOSAL 6: FULTON BAR

Why piecemeal this? The rulebook already lists many lifts that can be done with a barbell and a Fulton bar. So instead of every now-and-then adding another Fulton bar lift, why not simply go through the entire list of barbell lifts and place a superscript next to all that could be contested with a Fulton bar as well. Then at the end of the category a few words would explain the superscript.

PROPOSAL 7: BAVARIAN DEADLIFT

Here I am bewildered because there is no such thing as a Bavarian deadlift in Bavaria. What this proposal seems to be referring to is what in Bavarian dialect is called Stoaheba, which means stone lifting. Unlike deadlifting, in traditional Bavarian stone lifting the objective is to lift a set amount of a stone's weight for height; whoever lifts the stone the highest wins. One of the more famous old stones weighs 508 German pounds (a few modern-day competitions have been held with a T-bar on an adjustable weight stack). In order to perform this lift an elaborate platform is built high off the ground so that the lifter can straddle the tall stone/weight-stack that rests at ground level, lift it, and the platform registers the height of the lift. Some set-ups allow for starting height adjustments so that taller lifters do not have an advantage over shorter ones. Others require the stone/weight to be lifted from foot level. But regardless of starting position, it is the height of the lift that matters. You can see where the fundamental differences lie between traditional Bavarian stone lifting and what is proposed, rendering the suggested name inaccurate on two counts.

I sincerely hope that the above is able to generate thoughtful and reason-based discussions before decisions are made.