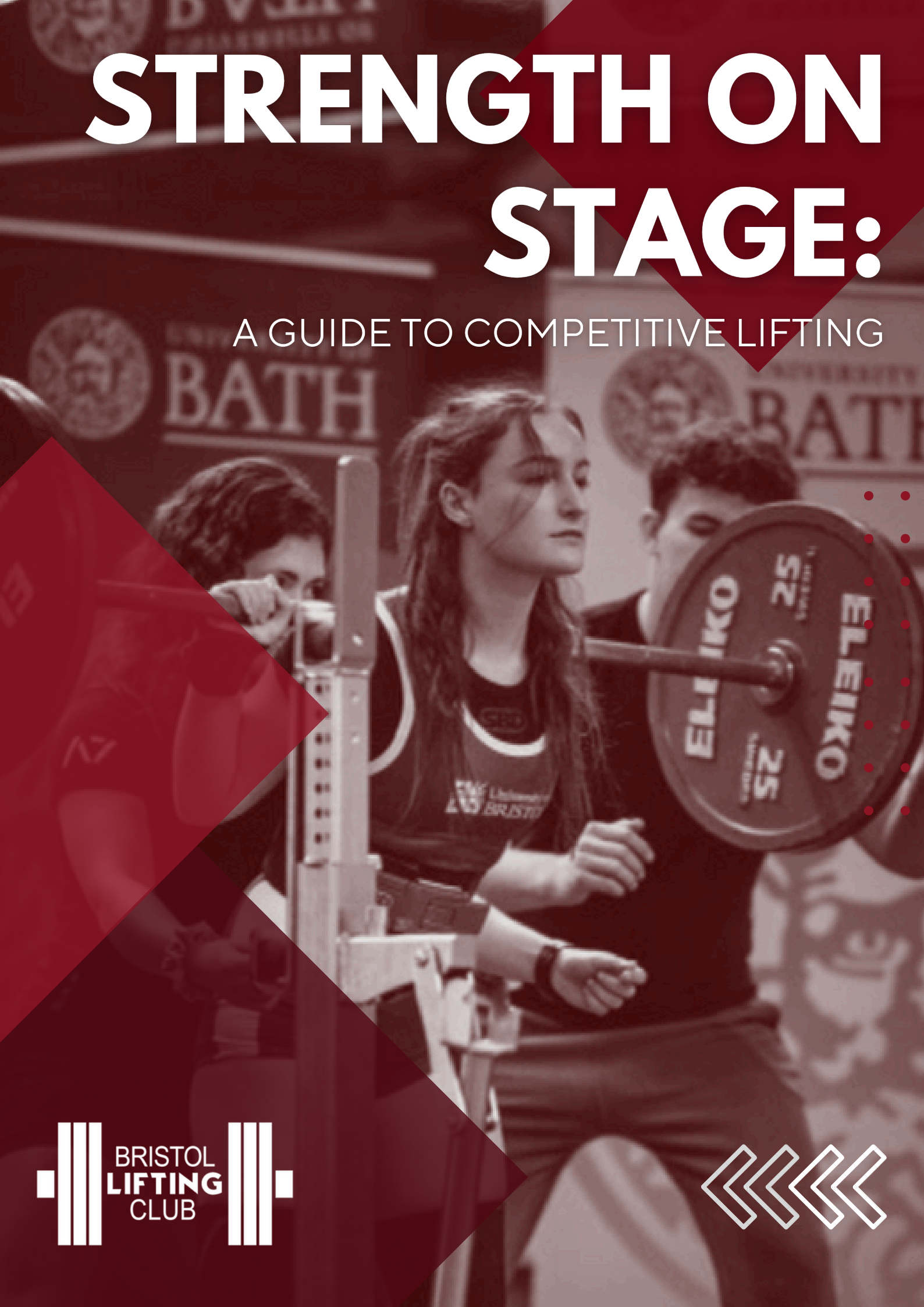


# STRENGTH ON STAGE:

A GUIDE TO COMPETITIVE LIFTING



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# INTRODUCTION

**Welcome to strength on stage, a brief guide to competitive lifting brought to you by the University of Bristol Lifting Club.**

This handbook is designed to help you navigate every phase of your competitive lifting journey - from the gym, to the platform and what comes afterwards. We'll cover how to prepare physically and mentally for competition, meet-day strategies and tips for recovery and reflection. Whether you're competing for the first time or a seasoned lifter, this guide is tailored to help you meet your goals - good luck!

## FINDING A COMPETITION

**Lifting competitions take months of work and preparation - so book a competition well in advance. Whether you want to compete in weightlifting or powerlifting, you must decide which federation is best for you. Different federations have different rules and hold competitions in different styles - so do your research!**

### Powerlifting

The International Powerlifting Federation (IPF), founded in 1972, is the largest powerlifting federation globally. All British IPF competitions can be found under 'Championships' on the [\*\*British Powerlifting website\*\*](#). Here you can also purchase a British Powerlifting Membership, which you will need to compete.

### Weightlifting

The International Weightlifting Federation (IWF), founded in 1905, governs selection for the Olympic team. All British IWF competitions can be found under 'Competitions' on the [\*\*British Weightlifting website\*\*](#). Here you can also purchase a British Weightlifting Membership, which you will need to compete.

## NATIONALS AND INTERNATIONALS

Depending on your goals, you may be considering a national competition, or even working towards international selection! To be considered for international selection, you must compete at select national competitions, and usually achieve a gold or silver podium position. National competitions require you to secure a minimum qualifying total (QT). All powerlifting QTs can be found [\*\*here\*\*](#). Weightlifting QTs are specific to the championship - here you can find QTs for [\*\*British Championships\*\*](#) and [\*\*British University Championships\*\*](#).

# THE TRAINING PHASE

The training phase is a key component of competitive lifting and really where all the hard work is done. This is where you build your strength and develop your technique so focus and train thoroughly if you want to put your best foot forward on the platform!

## THE RULES

On the day, you will be judged by referees. Your lifts must comply with the rules set by your federation or they will not count. Even if you are an experienced lifter, ensuring your techniques meet these requirements takes practice – so learn the rules well in advance and consider them throughout your training. There may also be rules about the clothing and equipment you are allowed. Here you can find the [IPF rule book](#) for powerlifting and the [IWF rule book](#) for weightlifting.

## CHOOSING A WEIGHTCLASS

Lifting competitions are divided by bodyweight and sex for fairness. You'll select your weight class on the entry form and must meet it on competition day. For your first meet, choose a class that matches your natural weight. As you become more advanced, you may want to bulk or cut for competitive advantage. Just remember, cutting can be challenging and increase injury risk—weigh the pros and cons carefully.

## TRAINING PROGRAMMES

**Training for a lifting competition is all about timing** — gradually build your strength to peak at the right moment. Don't forget to deload! This means reducing training volume and intensity in the final week to recover from fatigue while staying active, ensuring you're at your strongest on the platform!

If you hire a coach, they will create a personalised program based on your goals. However, if you do not want to commit to a coach, plenty of free programs are available online for powerlifting (**E.g., [Candito](#), [Calgary Barbell](#)**) and weightlifting (**E.g., [Catalyst Athletics](#)**). UOB Lifting club offers programs for both with a full membership! Since these programs follow a set timeline, choose one that aligns with your competition date.

# THE COMPETITIVE MINDSET

Mental preparation is just as important as physical training when competing. Lifting on the platform requires focus, composure, and the ability to handle setbacks under pressure. Use your training period to build these skills with techniques that help you stay confident and in control. Here are a few strategies to make the most of your training.

## LIFESTYLE

To perform your best, maintaining a healthy lifestyle is key. Focus on sleep, diet, and recovery—insufficient sleep increases injury risk, slows recovery, and impacts mental health, so aim for 8 hours per night.<sup>1</sup> A balanced diet is essential: carbs for energy, protein for muscle growth, and fats for nutrient absorption (a very brief overview).<sup>2</sup> Many lifters cut alcohol before competition as it hinders recovery.<sup>3</sup> Remember, lasting change takes time, so prioritize small, gradual improvements for long-term success.

## MOTIVATION

**Goal Setting** - Identify specific, measurable and realistic things that you want to achieve throughout your training and on the platform. Setting goals as it is linked with better motivation, commitment and self-confidence within sports.<sup>4</sup>

**Self-talk** - Develop a set of phrases you can say to yourself out loud to cue motivation and manage nerves. These can be instructional (e.g., "Take your time") or motivational (e.g., "I can do this") but should always be positive. Self-talk can improve skill-learning, concentration and performance in sports so consider this throughout training and on the day!<sup>5</sup>

**Imagery** - Mentally visualise your lifts and imagine yourself achieving your goals. You want to create a life-like experience so be positive and detailed, using all five senses. Using imagery consistently can increase the effectiveness of training while improving motivation and confidence.<sup>6</sup>

Here are some guides on how to practice goal-setting, self-talk and imagery.

# THE COMPETITIVE MINDSET

## MANAGING NERVES

**Mindfulness** - Work on centering your attention on the present moment by acknowledging your thoughts, feelings and physical sensations without trying to change or analyse them. This can help you stay focused on a specific task (lifting!) and ignore distractions. Practicing mindfulness can help athletes achieve a flow-state, improve performance and reduce stress when competing.<sup>7</sup>

**Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)** - Gradually release tension in your body by tensing and relaxing different muscles, focusing on one at a time. Practice doing this from head-to-toe. Training PMR can be used to manage feelings of stress and anxiety, in the moment and in the long-term.<sup>8</sup>

**Here are some guides on how to practice mindfulness and PMR.**

Keep in mind, these techniques are skills, and like lifting techniques, take time and effort to learn so using them throughout your training will give you the most benefit!

## RITUALS!

A ritual is something an athlete always makes sure to do before, during or after competing. Serena Williams ties her shoe laces in a specific way before every match. Ronaldo makes sure he's the last player off the team bus. Michael Jordan's socks have to be exactly the same height before a match.

**It can be anything - literally, ANYTHING.**

It's a sporty superstition but, believe it or not, rituals have real power! Ritual behavior is linked to fewer mistakes in performance settings and improved confidence and self-control.<sup>9</sup> **So wear your lucky socks!**

# COMPETITION DAY

**Congratulations! You completed your training programme (without skipping any accessories of course) and you made it to meet day! This is where you get to showcase all of the hard work and dedication you put into your training. Here's how you can make the most out of your day.**

Meet day can be very hectic so its important to be prepared and stay organised. Try to have everything prepared the night before - including your planned warm-ups, opening lifts and attempts! Here is a checklist that may be helpful:

## ARRIVAL

Meet day moves fast, so know your **weigh-in and lift-off** times and arrive early to stay stress-free. Upon arrival, sign in and head straight to weigh-in, where you'll be weighed and given your attempt slips. Weigh-ins last 1.5 hours for powerlifting and 1 hour for weightlifting—if you miss your slot, you'll have to wait until the end, leaving less time to adjust and re-weigh if needed.

Have your membership card, ID, and openers ready, as they'll ask for them here. You'll also need to complete a **kit check**, so stay calm and manage your time wisely.

### Checklist

- Photo ID
- Membership card
- Singlet and t-shirt
- Squat/deadlift shoes
- Belt
- Knee sleeves
- Wrist wraps
- Deadlift socks
- Headphones
- Caffeine/pre-wrokout
- Isotonic drink
- Chalk
- Talcum Powder
- Snacks
- Pen
- Attempts + warmups

# COMPETITION DAY

## PREPARING TO LIFT

After the weigh-in period ends, you have 2 hours before lift off. Use this time to fuel up and begin warming up for your first lift. When fueling your body, stick to familiar, easily digestible foods and stay hydrated - that way there will be no surprises.

### Warming Up

**Timing is EVERYTHING!** You want to be ready when your lift is called. Roughly calculate how long your warm-ups will take to ensure you can do them in good time. Warming up too early can cause your muscles to cool down, reducing flexibility and increasing your risk of injury. Rushing your warm ups may mean they are not done properly, also increasing the risk of poor performance or injury.

If you have a handler, they can guide you through this process. Remember, **the warm-up room is shared space** - so don't be stingy with equipment, keep tidy and be considerate.

## Ready... Set... SQUAT!

Now it's show time. Bringing your lifts to the platform can be nerve racking, so here are some tips that can keep you grounded and performing your best.

1. **Stick to your routine** - you've practiced these lifts over and over in training, so stick to your usual process. Avoid last-minute technique changes.
2. **Take your time** - don't rush your set-up, you have plenty of time on the platform. Rushing your set-up can lead to mistakes and missed attempts!
3. **Commands, commands, COMMANDS!** - Listen to the referees, missing commands leads to disqualified lifts, so stay focused and listen carefully.
4. **Focus on one lift at a time** - treat each lift as a separate event and mentally reset between attempts. If you miss a lift, don't dwell on it; adjust, refocus, and move forward.
5. **Stick to your plan** - choose your attempts based on what you've trained for, not how others are performing.
6. **Communicate and trust your handler!** - They will view your lifts more objectively and be able to help you if things don't go as planned

# POST-COMPETITION

**Last lift completed, competition over. You did it!**

**Competing can be physically and mentally exhausting, so don't forget to wind down properly afterwards. Be sure to take the right steps towards recovery.**

## **1. Cool Down Properly**

After competing, you need to gradually return your body to a resting state. This will reduce muscle soreness, prevent injury and speed up recovery. You can relax your muscles by:

- Doing some light stretching
- Foam rolling tight areas
- Going for a light walk

## **2. Rehydrate and Refuel**

Recovery takes energy. Drink water and eat a balanced meal to replenish fluids and nutrients after competing.

## **3. Celebrate!**

Competitive lifting is no easy feat, so its important to recognise your achievement and foster a positive relationship with competition.

Regardless of the outcome, take a moment to celebrate small wins (Like hitting all your openers!) and acknowledge all your hard work.

# POST-COMPETITION

## REFLECTION

Reflecting on your performance is crucial for personal growth and development within sport. The goal of reflection is to learn from experience and adapt to improve future performance – so be constructive! Below is a popular reflective framework you may find helpful. Note down your thoughts for each section, starting with ‘description’ and discuss them with your coach (if you have one).



# TIPS FROM OUR TEAM



**Elena, PL Captain**

Embrace nervousness and use it as adrenaline on the platform to hype up the lift. It's supposed to be fun! No one is forcing you to do it, you are there because you want to be, so make sure you have a good time.

Don't open too heavy, especially at your first comp. Going 9/9 will probably get you highest total, but if that doesn't matter to you sending for PBs (sensibly) is also ok.



**Paul, WL Captain**

Give yourself the space to be upset or frustrated, process the way you feel, but once you have done that, dust yourself off and pick yourself up. Look for the silver lining, remind yourself how far you have come, one 'bad' performance doesn't reflect your potential.



**Laila, President**

Don't compare yourself to others and "villainise" your competitors, I have made some really good friends with the people I have competed against! :)



**Olivia, Former president**

Deload also means distress. If you can, take the time to relax and do activities you enjoy the week before comp. It really helps to kill the nerves and let your body recover.



**Ayishah, EDI Officer**

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