

Maine Senior Games Powerlifting

Opening Attempt Reference Guide

Read this before filling out your registration form.

(we are grateful to the MA Senior Games for sharing this document with us)

What Is an Opening Attempt?

In a powerlifting meet, every athlete performs three attempts on each lift. The first of those three is called your opening attempt, and it is the only one you have to commit to in advance.

Your registration form will ask you for your opening attempt on the squat, bench press, and deadlift. This is how your flight is organized before the event. With 4 flights of 6 athletes running across two simultaneous platforms, getting these numbers in early means the whole day runs smoothly for everyone.

You will declare attempts two and three on the day, after you see how attempt one goes. So for now, your only job is to pick a smart opener for each lift.

How to Pick Your Opener

Here is the simplest rule in powerlifting:

The Opener Rule

Choose a weight you could lift for 3 clean reps on an average training day.

Not your best day. Not a PR. An average day.

If it feels too light, that is probably right.

Your opener is not where you make your score. It is where you build your foundation. A successful first attempt settles your nerves, gets your body into competition mode, and puts weight on the board. From there, you go up.

Missing your opener, on the other hand, means you either repeat the same weight or scratch the attempt. It is a rough start and one that is easy to avoid with a conservative number.

Working Out Your Numbers

Step 1: Find your comfortable triple

Think about each lift separately. Ask yourself: what weight could I do for 3 reps right now, not pushing hard, just moving well? That is your reference point.

If you do not regularly track your lifts, here is a rough way to estimate: take a weight you have done for 5 reps recently and subtract about 10 lbs. That is a reasonable triple estimate.

Step 2: Use that as your opener

Your comfortable triple is your opener. You do not need to adjust it down further unless you have been dealing with an injury, have not trained the lift in a while, or are genuinely unsure about your current capacity.

Example

| Lift | Comfortable 3-Rep Weight | Suggested Opener |
|-------------|--------------------------|------------------|
| Squat | 185 lbs | 185 lbs |
| Bench Press | 115 lbs | 115 lbs |
| Deadlift | 225 lbs | 225 lbs |

Notice the opener and the comfortable triple are the same number. That is intentional. This athlete will nail attempt one, then jump to something heavier for attempts two and three.

Planning Ahead for Attempts 2 and 3

You do not have to lock in attempts two and three right now. You will declare them on the day after each attempt. But it helps to have a rough plan in mind so you are not doing math under pressure.

A simple framework for a first meet:

- **Attempt 1:** Comfortable triple weight. Goal: make it look easy.
- **Attempt 2:** Add 5-10 lbs. Goal: still in your wheelhouse, building toward a total.
- **Attempt 3:** Add another 5-15 lbs. Goal: push toward a strong finish. This is where you can take a shot at something meaningful.

Use this planning table to sketch out your day:

| Lift | Attempt 1 (opener) | Attempt 2 (if made) | Attempt 3 (if made) |
|-------------|--------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Squat | _____ lbs | +5 to +10 lbs | +5 to +15 lbs |
| Bench Press | _____ lbs | +5 to +10 lbs | +5 to +15 lbs |
| Deadlift | _____ lbs | +5 to +10 lbs | +5 to +15 lbs |

Only attempt 1 is submitted in advance. Bring this sheet to the event so you have a reference when declaring attempts 2 and 3.

A Few Things Worth Knowing

The squat has a depth standard

Your squat opener needs to be a weight you can hit to depth, meaning your hip crease at or below the top of your knee. Most CrossFit athletes are already comfortable with this standard. If you have mobility limitations that affect your depth, you will do a quick bodyweight squat check at check-in and a personalized depth target will be set for you. Choose an opener you can hit to whatever your depth standard ends up being.

The bench press has a pause

In powerlifting, the bar must come to a full stop on your chest before you press. It does not have to be a long pause, but it must be visibly motionless. If you are used to touch-and-go bench in CrossFit, factor this in. Your opener should be a weight you can pause confidently, not just touch and fire.

Deadlift is the most forgiving for openers

Most athletes find their deadlift opener comes most naturally. Pick a weight you can pull smoothly and lock out with control. The only command is "Down" after you reach lockout, so the lift itself is straightforward. Just make sure lockout is solid: hips through, knees straight, shoulders back.

When in doubt, go lighter

There is no penalty for opening light. There is a real cost to opening too heavy and missing. If you are on the fence between two numbers, take the lower one. You can always go up on attempt two.

Still Not Sure?

That is completely normal for a first meet. Here is what to do:

- Submit your best guess on the registration form. You can adjust your opener at check-in before your flight begins.
- Reach out to event staff before the day if you want a second opinion on your numbers.
- Show up to check-in a few minutes early. Coaches will be at the table and are happy to help you think through your attempts.

No one expects you to have this figured out perfectly on your first meet. The whole point of this event is to give you a safe, supportive place to try it. We will figure it out together.

See you on the platform.

The Maine Senior Games Powerlifting Team