

Maine Senior Games Powerlifting

Athlete Guide

Everything you need to know to show up confident and ready to lift.

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

Welcome

Whether this is your first time stepping onto a competition platform or you are a seasoned CrossFit athlete curious about the sport of powerlifting, we are so glad you are here. This event is designed to be welcoming, fun, and affirming for all athletes.

You do not need to be a powerlifter to compete. If you squat, bench press, or deadlift, you already do this. What is new is the structure, and that is exactly what this guide will walk you through.

Read it once before the event, bring any questions to check-in, and trust your preparation. You have got this.

The Short Version

New to powerlifting? Not sure what to expect? This guide goes deeper on each topic if you want it.

What This Event Is

- A non-sanctioned, beginner-friendly powerlifting meet open to athletes 45 and older
- Three lifts: squat, bench press, and deadlift, performed in that order
- Three attempts per lift; your best successful attempt on each counts toward your total
- One platform with 2-3 flights of 8-10 people. If there are more than 24 people who register we will run a second session
- Flights A and B lift at the same time; Flights C and D lift at the same time
- Medals for the top 3 finishers per gender per age bracket, scored pound-for-pound
- Plan for a 4 to 4.5 hour day from doors open to end of awards

What Happens at Check-In

- Confirm your name, age bracket, and gender
- Step on the scale (bodyweight is used for scoring, not weight classes)
- Confirm or adjust your pre-registered opening attempt for each lift (locked once your flight is posted)
- Find your squat and bench rack heights
- Complete a quick bodyweight squat depth check

The Biggest Thing That Is Different from CrossFit

- Every lift is judge-controlled with verbal commands. You do not move until you are told to, and you do not rack until you are told to.
- Squat: wait for "Squat" to descend, wait for "Rack" to re-rack
- Bench: wait for "Start" to lower the bar, wait for "Press" after pausing on your chest, wait for "Rack" to finish
- Deadlift: wait for "Down" before lowering the bar
- Check out this video for a demo of the commands:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jr9zITwpjKk>
- After each attempt, a volunteer hands you a card. Write your next attempt weight on it and hand it back immediately. That is how the order is set.

How Scoring Works

- Your total = best squat + best bench + best deadlift
- Your score = total lifted divided by your bodyweight
- Higher score wins. A lighter athlete who lifts proportionally more can outscore a heavier one.

What to Wear

- Singlet is required. What you wear under the singlet is up to the individual. Athletic clothing, a shirt, and flat shoes (Chuck Taylors, Vans, or similar)
- Belt and knee sleeves are allowed. Knee wraps, squat suits, bench shirts, and smelling salts are not.

What to Bring

- Water, snacks, and something to sit on between flights
- Your warm-up plan. There is a designated warm-up area with barbells and plates.
- Any questions. Staff and coaches are on the floor all day.

That is the whole picture. Read on for the full detail on any section, or bring your questions to check-in.

The Three Lifts

This is a full powerlifting meet, meaning you will compete in all three lifts: the squat, bench press, and deadlift. You will receive three attempts at each lift, and your best successful attempt on each counts toward your total.

Lifts are performed in this order:

- Squat
- Bench Press
- Deadlift

Athletes compete in groups called flights (typically 8 athletes per group at this event). All flights complete a lift before the competition moves to the next one. So every athlete will squat first, then every athlete will bench, then every athlete will deadlift. More detail on flights is in the How the Day Runs section below.

How the Day Runs

Arrival and Check-In

Check-in is where the day officially starts. Plan to arrive during your assigned check-in window with a few extra minutes to spare. Here is everything that will happen at the check-in table:

Check-In Checklist

1. Confirm your name, age bracket, and gender
2. Step on the scale for bodyweight (used for pound-for-pound scoring only, not weight classes)
3. Confirm or adjust your pre-registered opening attempt for each lift (changes are allowed at check-in; the number locks once your flight is posted)
4. Set your squat rack height (bar height when unracking)
5. Set your bench press rack height (bar height when unracking)
6. Complete a bodyweight squat depth check (details below)

Opening Attempts

Your opening attempt is the weight you will start with on your very first try of each lift. You will submit these on your pre-registration form before the event, so check-in is your chance to confirm them or make adjustments with a coach present.

Not sure what to open with? A simple guideline: choose a weight you could confidently lift for 3 clean reps on an average training day. This is not the place for a personal record attempt. A conservative opener gets you on the board, builds your confidence, and gives you two more attempts to go heavier.

Event staff and coaches will be at check-in to help you think through your numbers. If something feels off, say so. We would rather talk it through than have you open too heavy.

Rack Height Setup

During check-in, you will step up to the squat rack and bench and find the pin height that works for your body. For the squat, you want the bar sitting at approximately upper chest height so you can walk it out without having to rise on your toes or drastically dip under. For the bench, the bar should unrack with a slight downward press, not a reach or a lunge.

A volunteer will record your rack heights on your athlete card so the bar is set correctly before each of your attempts. You will not have to adjust it yourself during the competition.

Squat Depth Check

If you have any concerns about your squat depth or mobility, check-in includes a quick bodyweight squat assessment. You will squat to a target depth marker (a wallball set on plates) at a height that matches the required depth standard: hip crease at or below the top of the knee.

If you cannot reach that depth at bodyweight due to mobility limitations, the target height will be adjusted to what you can safely reach. That adjusted target becomes your personal depth standard for the competition. A judge will use the same target as a reference during your attempts. This keeps the standard consistent and takes the guesswork out of depth calls.

This is not a test to pass or fail. It is a tool to set you up for clean, confident lifts.

Flights and the Order of Competition

With 24 athletes registered, the event runs 4 flights of 6 athletes each, labeled Flights A, B, C, and D. The event uses two platforms running simultaneously, so Flights A and B lift at the same time, and Flights C and D lift at the same time. Each platform has its own judge, loading crew, and table volunteer.

Flights are assigned before the event based on your pre-registered opening squat attempt, grouped so that bar weight moves upward within each flight and loading changes between athletes are minimal.

The meet does not move to the next lift until every flight has completed the current one. All squatting happens before any benching begins, and all benching happens before any deadlifting begins. The full progression looks like this:

Full Meet Progression

Flights A + B — Squat simultaneously on both platforms (all 3 rounds)

Flights C + D — Squat simultaneously on both platforms (all 3 rounds)

— Equipment changeover to bench press on both platforms —

Flights A + B — Bench Press simultaneously on both platforms (all 3 rounds)

Flights C + D — Bench Press simultaneously on both platforms (all 3 rounds)

— Equipment changeover to deadlift on both platforms —

Flights A + B — Deadlift simultaneously on both platforms (all 3 rounds)

Flights C + D — Deadlift simultaneously on both platforms (all 3 rounds)

Each pair of flights takes roughly 30 to 35 minutes to complete all three rounds of a single lift. With two pairs per lift and changeovers between lifts, each lift takes about 75 to 85 minutes total. Plan for a 4 to 4.5 hour day from doors open to end of awards.

Approximate day timeline

Check-in: 60 minutes
Squat (both pairs of flights): 60 to 70 minutes
Changeover to bench: 10 to 15 minutes
Bench press (both pairs of flights): 60 to 70 minutes
Changeover to deadlift: 10 minutes
Deadlift (both pairs of flights): 60 to 70 minutes
Score tabulation: 15 to 20 minutes
Awards ceremony: 20 to 30 minutes
Estimated total: 4 to 4.5 hours from doors open

Approximate warm-up timing by flight

Flights A and B: you are up first for each lift. Begin your working warm-up as soon as the previous lift ends.
Flights C and D: you have roughly 30 to 35 minutes after Flights A and B begin before you lift. Watch the platforms and begin your working warm-up about halfway through their session.

Lifting Order Within a Flight

Within your flight, the order of lifting is determined by the weight on the bar. The lightest declared attempt goes first. The bar only moves up, never down, within a round.

This means your position in the lineup can change from round to round. If you and another athlete declare the same weight for the next attempt, whoever lifted later in the previous round goes first. They had less rest, so they earn the earlier slot as a courtesy.

You do not need to track any of this yourself. The table volunteer at your platform manages the order. Your only job is to declare your next attempt weight as soon as your attempt is done.

Declaring Your Next Attempt

Immediately after each attempt, a volunteer will hand you a card. Write down the weight you want for your next attempt and hand it back before you leave the platform area. That is it. No clock to watch, no deadline to stress about.

If you have not turned in a card by the time the current round ends, your next attempt will automatically be set to the same weight you just lifted. So when in doubt, hand the card back quickly and adjust if needed before your turn comes around.

Attempt Declaration Rules

You can increase your declared attempt as many times as you want before your turn comes up. You cannot decrease your attempt once it has been declared.

If you miss a lift, you may repeat the same weight on your next attempt.

If you miss a lift three times, you receive no credit for that lift but continue competing in the remaining lifts.

Only your opener is submitted in advance. Attempts 2 and 3 are declared on the card after each lift.

Warm-Up Area

There will be a designated warm-up area with barbells and plates available. You are responsible for managing your own warm-up. Here are some guidelines:

- Plan to take 3 to 5 warm-up sets leading up to your opener
- Work up to within about 10 to 20 lbs of your opening attempt, not beyond it
- Finish your last warm-up set about 2 to 3 lifters before you are up in your flight
- If you are in Flight C or D, do a light movement warm-up during check-in, then build your working warm-up about halfway through Flights A and B
- Do not max out in the warm-up room. Save it for the platform.

Awards Ceremony

After all three lifts are complete, athletes are invited to stay for the awards ceremony. Medals are awarded to the top three finishers in each gender and age bracket based on pound-for-pound scoring (see Scoring section below). We will announce winners, celebrate everyone who competed, and wrap up the day together with lunch included.

Understanding the Commands

This is the biggest learning curve for CrossFit athletes, and it is simpler than it sounds. In a powerlifting meet, you do not lift until you are told to lift, and you do not rack the bar until you are told to rack it. The judge controls the start and end of every attempt.

Here is a breakdown of the commands for each lift.

Squat Commands

Command	What It Means / What You Do
"Squat" (or "Start")	You have unracked the bar and are standing tall, still. Wait for this command before you descend. Do not squat until you hear it.
"Rack"	You have stood back up and are still. Wait for this command before stepping back into the rack. Do not re-rack until you hear it.

Key squat notes for CrossFit athletes

You must reach your personal depth standard, established during the check-in depth check. For most athletes this means hip crease at or below the top of the knee.

Stand completely still before the "Squat" command. Any downward movement before the command can result in a no-lift.

Stand completely still after completing the lift before the "Rack" command. Early re-rack = no lift.

Bench Press Commands

Command	What It Means / What You Do
"Start"	You have unracked the bar and are holding it at full arm extension over your chest, still. Wait for this command before you lower the bar.
"Press"	The bar has touched your chest and is motionless. Wait for this command before pressing the bar back up.
"Rack"	You have pressed the bar back to full lockout and are still. Wait for this command before re-racking.

Key bench notes for CrossFit athletes

The pause on the chest is the biggest adjustment. The bar must visibly stop moving (momentarily motionless) before you press.

No bouncing off the chest. The bar must be under control and still.

Your feet must stay flat on the floor (or on a riser if provided). No lifting your feet.

Your glutes must stay on the bench throughout the lift.

Deadlift Commands

Command	What It Means / What You Do
"Down"	You have locked out the lift and are standing tall. Wait for this command before lowering the bar.

Key deadlift notes for CrossFit athletes

Lock out fully: hips through, knees straight, shoulders back. Any soft lockout or hitching the bar up the thighs is a no-lift.

The only command you will receive is "Down." Hold your lockout position until you hear it before lowering the bar.

You may use straps if you choose. A belt is also permitted.

The bar must be lowered under control. Dropping or slamming is not allowed.

Scoring

Your Total

Your competition total is the sum of your best successful attempt on each of the three lifts:

- Best squat + best bench press + best deadlift = Total

If you do not successfully complete at least one lift in any of the three disciplines, you will receive a zero for that lift and it will not count toward your total. You can still compete and complete the remaining lifts.

Pound-for-Pound Scoring

Rather than using weight classes, this event uses pound-for-pound scoring so that athletes of all sizes compete on equal footing. The formula is straightforward:

$$\text{Score} = \text{Total Lifted (lbs)} \div \text{Bodyweight (lbs)}$$

Example: An athlete who totals 300 lbs and weighs 150 lbs earns a score of 2.0. An athlete who totals 240 lbs and weighs 100 lbs earns a score of 2.4 and would place higher.

The top three scores in each gender and age bracket earn medals. Ties are broken by total lifted.

Medals are awarded separately for each gender within each bracket. You only compete against athletes in your own age bracket and gender.

What to Wear and Bring

Required

- Need to wear a singlet. You can put a t-shirt under it if you'd like to.
- Flat or low-heel shoes (deadlift slippers, Chuck Taylors, Vans, or similar are ideal; running shoes with thick soles are not recommended). Weightlifting shoes with an elevated heel are permitted for the squat.

Optional But Recommended

- Lifting belt (any style, any thickness)
- Knee sleeves
- Wrist wraps
- Deadlift socks (to protect your shins from the bar)
- Chalk (if available at the event)
- Water and snacks for between flights

Leave at Home

- **Knee wraps:** Unlike sleeves, wraps store and return elastic energy out of the bottom of the squat, which functionally assists the lift. This event is raw, so sleeves are the standard. Wraps would give an unfair advantage over athletes in sleeves.
- **Squat suit, bench shirt, or supportive single-ply/multi-ply gear:** Equipped powerlifting gear can add hundreds of pounds to a lift by storing and releasing energy. Someone in a squat suit is not competing on equal terms with someone in shorts. This is a raw event, so all supportive suits and shirts stay home.
- **Ammonia / smelling salts:** Ammonia triggers a sharp involuntary inhalation reflex that jolts the nervous system and spikes blood pressure. For an experienced competitive lifter who uses it regularly, that is a deliberate choice. At a community event with newer and older athletes, that sudden cardiovascular spike is a real safety concern. It is also unpleasant and disorienting for bystanders and nearby competitors. We want everyone to feel comfortable in this environment.

Tips Specifically for CrossFit Athletes

You are more prepared than you think. Here is how to translate what you already know:

- **Depth on the squat:** You already squat to depth every day. Nothing changes here.
- **The pause on bench:** This is the biggest technical adjustment. Practice touch-and-pause reps in training before the event.
- **Commands feel awkward at first:** Practice saying "waiting for the Squat command" or "waiting for the Down command" in your head during warm-ups. It clicks fast.
- **The platform is quieter than a WOD:** There is no clock, no music pressure, no team counting reps. It is just you, the bar, and one command. Many athletes find it calming once they get used to it.

- **Opening attempts matter:** Go conservative. A successful first lift builds confidence and gets you on the board. You can always go heavier on attempts two and three.
 - **Rest between attempts:** Unlike a metcon, you have real rest time. Eat a snack, drink water, stay warm, and breathe.
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Quick Questions

Do I need a singlet? Yes

What if I am not sure about my opening attempt? The opening attempt reference guide sent with your registration walks you through how to pick your numbers. If you are still unsure, staff and coaches at check-in can help. When in doubt, go lighter.

Can I change my opening attempt after I register? Yes. You can adjust your opener at check-in. Once your flight is posted, the number is locked.

How do I declare my next attempt? A volunteer will hand you a card immediately after your attempt. Write your next weight on it and hand it back before you leave the platform area. No clock, no deadline to track.

What if I miss my first attempt? You can repeat the same weight on your second attempt. This happens to experienced powerlifters too. Take a breath and go again.

Do I have to compete in all three lifts? Yes, to receive a pound-for-pound score and be eligible for medals. If you complete only one or two lifts, you are still welcome to participate but will not be ranked.

Is there someone I can ask questions throughout the day? Absolutely. Event volunteers and staff are on the floor all day. Never hesitate to ask.

See you on the platform.

You trained for this. Trust your work, listen for the commands, and enjoy every second of it.
The Maine Senior Games Powerlifting Team