

USA Powerlifting Adaptive Athlete Division

In Effect January 1, 2021

Background and Eligibility. The adaptive athlete division is intended for athletes who, by virtue of their specific disability/disabilities, cannot adhere to 100% of the technical rules of performance as defined in the USA Powerlifting rulebook and would therefore be ineligible to compete in the able-bodied division. Examples of situations where athletes cannot compete in the able-bodied division due to disability that prevents them from being able to adhere to 100% of the technical rules of performance include, but are not limited to, the following:

- amputated/missing limb(s)/hand(s)/finger(s)/foot/feet/toe(s) with or without use of prosthetic device(s)
- inability to fully extend elbow(s) in the bench press
- inability to fully extend knee(s) in the squat and/or deadlift
- inability to rest head on the bench in the bench press
- inability to place one or both feet flat on the ground/blocks in the bench press
- inability to grasp bar without an assistive device
- inability to grasp bar in accordance with the rules

The adaptive athlete division in USA Powerlifting applies to single-lift, two-lift, and three-lift (i.e., full) competition. The adaptive athlete division is open to athletes 14 years of age or older with a disability [“defined by the ADA as a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such an impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment.”](#) It should be noted that the adaptive athlete division is separate from USA Powerlifting’s para bench division which applies specifically to single-lift bench press competition for athletes with one of eight eligible physical impairments, all of which involve an impairment in the lower limbs or hips which would prohibit athletes from competing in able-bodied bench press competition.

Rules and Procedures. Because each adaptive athlete has a unique set of circumstances/degree of disability and because there are no developed standards in the sport of powerlifting, it is impossible to create a set of rules/procedures that cover all possible situations. As such, the guiding principles of the adaptive athlete division in USA Powerlifting are inclusivity and accessibility as reflected by the following guidelines that apply to the adaptive athlete division:

1. Any reasonable/practical accommodations that can be made will be made (this applies to the competition lifts and weigh-in)
2. All technical rules of performance that can be adhered to by an adaptive athlete must be adhered to; those rules that cannot be adhered to will be waived
3. Creativity and improvisation will be required in some situations and such adaptability is allowed provided that, in the judgment of the referees present, the safety of all involved (i.e., lifter, spotters/loaders, referees) is not compromised and it is clear there is a genuine attempt to adhere to the spirit/intent of the rules/procedures

Amputees who will use a prosthetic device during competition must be weighed in with the prosthetic device. Athletes with an amputation (or amputations) that will not compete with a prosthetic device will be weighed in without any prosthetic device(s) and no adjustments will be made to their bodyweight. Any other assistive equipment (e.g., straps to hold the bar) will not be included in the athlete’s official weight. All other weigh-in rules/procedures will apply.

General Information.

- The adaptive athlete division may be offered at local, state, and regional meets. Meet directors are not required to offer the adaptive athlete division. If an athlete is interested in competing in the adaptive athlete division at a particular meet but an adaptive athlete division is not offered, the athlete is encouraged to contact the Technical Committee via email (TC@usapowerlifting.com) to see if the adaptive athlete division can be added to the list of divisions being offered for that particular meet; this request should be made as far in advance of the meet as possible
- Records and rankings will not be maintained due to the wide range in abilities, severity of limitations, and accommodations needed
- Those competing in the adaptive athlete division may choose to lift raw, equipped, or raw with wraps
- All [USA Powerlifting anti-doping rules](#) apply to those competing in the adaptive athlete division
- Interested adaptive athletes must submit an application and be approved by USA Powerlifting to compete in the adaptive athlete division; this designation will appear on the athlete’s membership card