

# Rediscover the Power Rack

*Practical advice on selecting the best power racks for your weightroom*

by Rick Anderson, Vice President, BFS



Poplar Bluff High School, MD

**A**t any Starbucks around the country today you might see a construction worker ask for a plain coffee—black, a businessman order an espresso, and a slender guy in a bright orange sweater ask for something like “a mocha-cocoa-decaf, with sprinkles!” People take their coffee very seriously these days. And just as there are seemingly countless choices for your morning brew, there are also many choices to make in power racks.



Power racks are the focal point of any serious weightroom. And with good reason: versatility. With a bench press station, you bench. With a squat rack, you squat. Having individual pieces of equipment is fine if you have the space, but the rack saves you money because so many exercises can be performed on it.

The classic power rack is a cage consisting of four pillars with holes driven at 1- to 4-inch intervals so that spotter rods can be

placed between each set of pillars. The barbell can be placed on these rods or on bar supports that can hook into the holes.

When performing a squat, for example, the lifter removes the bar from the bar supports and then squats down to just a few inches from the spotter rods. If the lifter should miss the weight, the safety rods will catch the bar and thereby help avoid injury to the lifter and minimize damage to the bar. Of course, at BFS



Classical power racks can be placed on top of lifting platforms to conserve space, as opposed to making separate stations as shown in this illustration of the weightroom at Salina High School, MI.

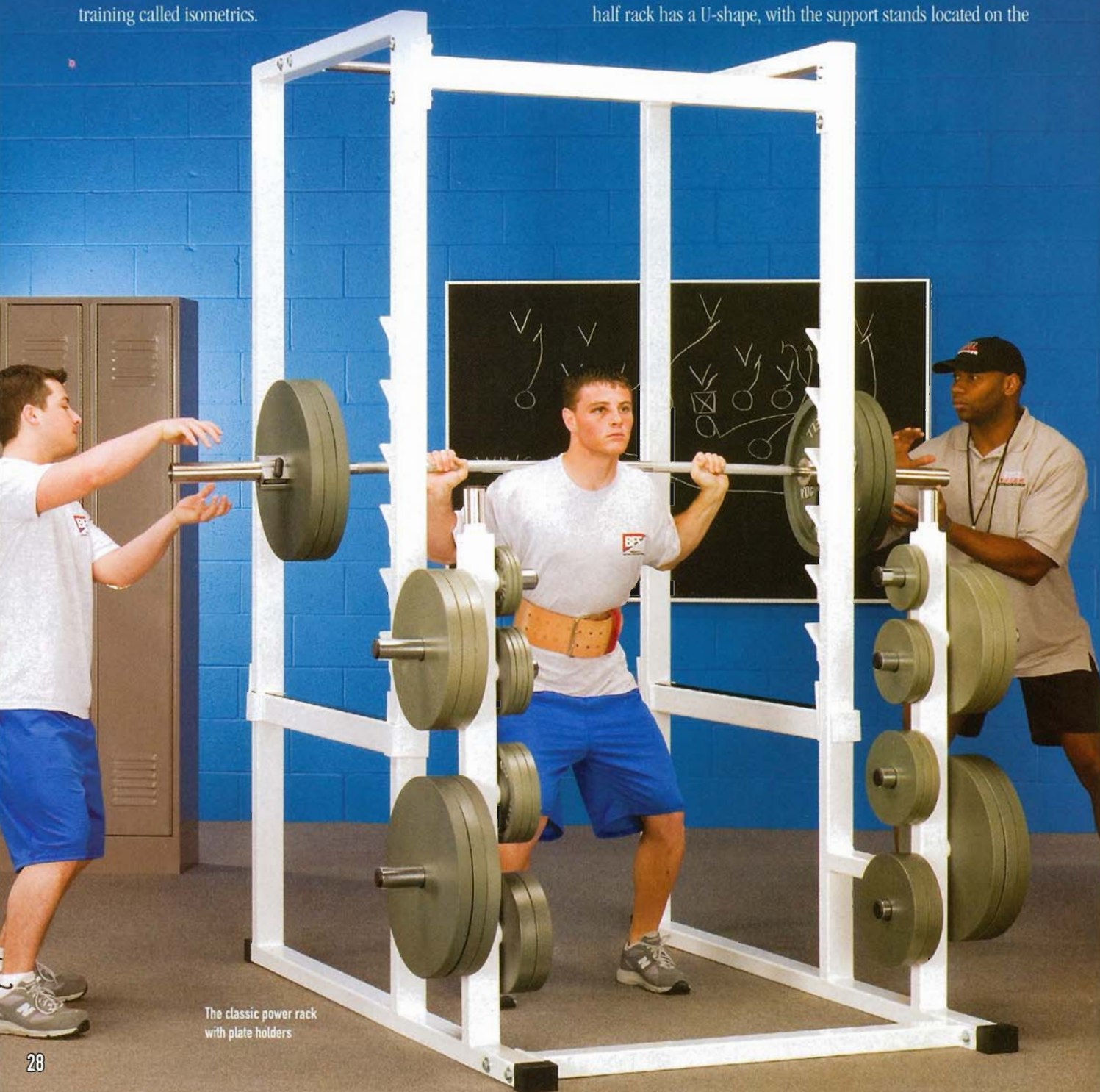


we always recommend having a spotter when performing squats or bench presses, as dropping the bar from even a short distance can bend the barbell. In fact, this is one way we test the quality of barbells: by loading it with several hundred pounds and dropping it from several feet onto the support rods.

The spotter rods enable athletes to perform partial-range-of-motion exercises in addition to regular squats and deadlifts. For example, lifters who have difficulty locking out their heavy bench presses can set the support rods several inches above their chest and isolate that portion of the lift. The rods can be set at precise sticking points on a lift so that the bar doesn't move, a method of training called isometrics.

With these core exercises, a crossbeam is available at the top of most power racks to enable athletes to perform chin-ups or hanging leg raises. One chin-up variation popular among football coaches is to hang a towel over the crossbeam, grasp the ends and perform chin-ups. Coaches believe this type of grip more closely approximates the movements that occur in some sports. Whatever the purpose, the exercise is a killer that really works the forearms, biceps and upper back muscles.

Although it may seem as if there are dozens of types of power racks on the market, there are basically only two styles: power racks and half racks. The difference between the two is that the half rack has a U-shape, with the support stands located on the



The classic power rack with plate holders



The half rack is practically a gym by itself!

outside of the two inside pillars. Each type has its advantages, and the major difference is not so much the price but the design of your weightroom.

## The Classic Power Rack

A power rack is designed for the basic core exercises except Olympic lifting movements such as the power clean or snatch. If you place a power rack on an 8 x 8-foot platform, the standard size, you reduce the amount of area you have to clean in half. For BFS clinician Jim Brown of Poplar Bluff High School this is fine, as he has his athletes clean inside his power racks. Others would prefer to lift on a separate platform or to have a longer platform to compensate for the space the power rack is taking up.

If you have lots of extra space, you may set up your weightroom with power racks and separate platforms. This will enable you to work with more athletes than if the power racks were placed on top of the platforms. If athletes are performing the classical Olympic lifts, the snatch and clean and jerk, they need the full platform, as they often move several feet in each direction and drop weights that can roll several feet. For those with limited space, however, the half rack would be a better option.




Amherst HS, Wisconsin

## Half Racks: Function and Flash

The U-shape design of the half rack provides the athletes more room to perform Olympic lifting movements than when the rack is placed on a platform. True, this configuration doesn't allow you to work with as many people as does having separate power clean platforms and power racks, since it would be unwise for safety reasons to have athletes cleaning and squatting at the same time. But if space is a

major limitation in your weightroom, half racks are a better choice. Also, half racks have a sleeker, more aesthetic design that appeals to many coaches – and with the importance of making good first impressions on recruits, this may be an important quality.

Regardless of the type of rack you choose, never buy racks that have pillars with less than 11-gauge steel construction. Weaker steel may not hold up to the heaviest weights your athletes use, and thicker steel is just for show – unless you're working with adult gorillas or elephants.

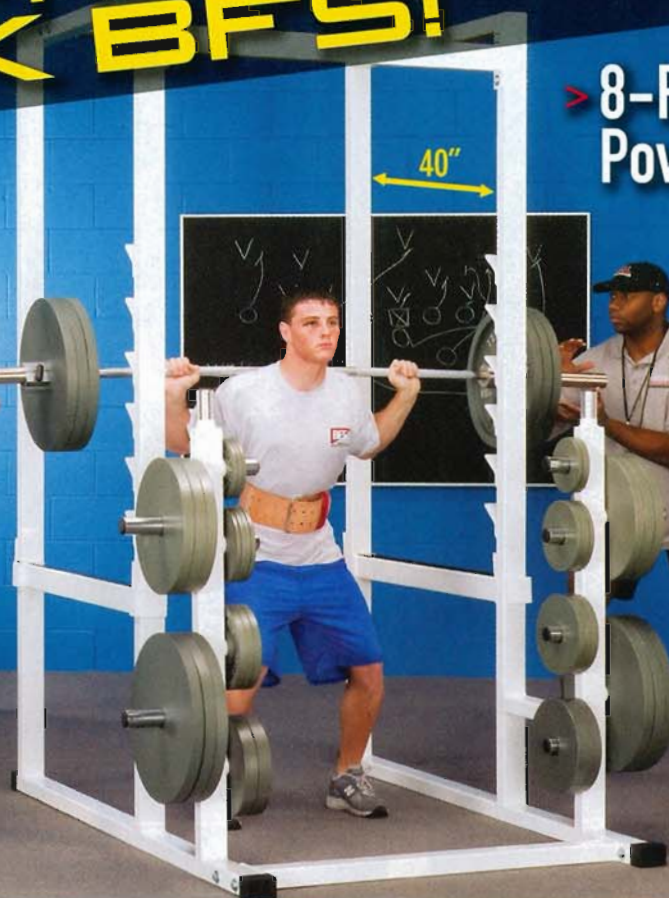
The power rack and half racks form the base of your weightroom. These pieces will last just about forever, so take your time thinking about what's best for your program—it's not like you're choosing your morning coffee, after all. 



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