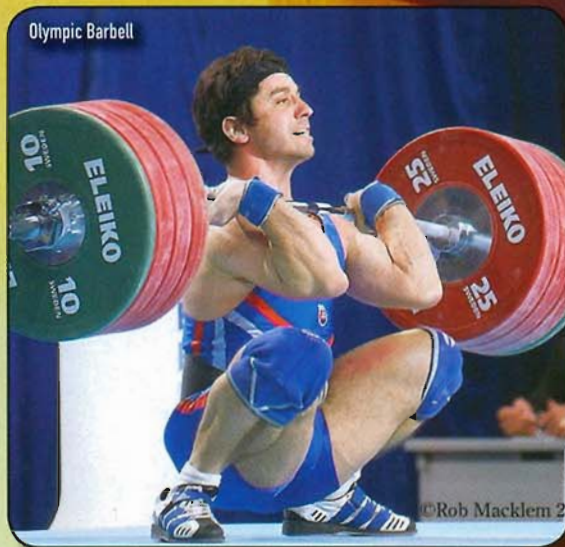


the Secrets *of* Steel

**A consumers' guide
to purchasing
barbells**

By Rick Anderson, Vice President, BFS



When it comes to exercise equipment I'm always looking for a bargain, especially when that means I can pass those savings on to our customers. So if we can save 5 percent by buying 1,000 bumper plates instead of 100, we'll buy 1,000. However, there are times when you shouldn't try to cut corners, especially when it comes to buying barbells.

Because BFS has been a leader in free-weight equipment for the past three decades, we are often contacted by manufacturers who want us to carry their products. This past year I've examined and tested at least two dozen new Olympic and powerlifting barbells, and there are only two I'm considering. The others simply did not meet our standards or were unreasonably priced.

For any barbell we might consider offering in our BFS catalog, I look closely at any scientific testing that has been performed on it and then go a step further: at BFS we take our testing outside the laboratory. First, we try it ourselves to see how it performs; then we load it with plates and drop it from various heights onto power rack spotter rods to evaluate its durability. Ultimately we send out several bars to our clinicians and have their athletes try them. Only after passing these "bar exams" do we consider adding the product to our catalog.

Because we take the time for extensive testing and listening to feedback from our customers, we've learned what it takes to make a great barbell. And this is essential, because the barbell is the key piece of equipment in the gym.

Although BFS sells a variety of barbells, including specialty lightweight training bars for young athletes — there are basically only three types of full-sized barbells: Power bars, Olympic bars and general-purpose bars. Here's an introduction to each type, followed by a list of features you'll want to look for when selecting a barbell:

Power Bar

A power bar is a barbell designed for the basic power lifts: the squat, bench press and deadlift. Because power lifts are performed with a considerable amount of weight and are performed relatively slowly,

this bar needs to be very strong but not very flexible. In fact, a more expensive springy-type bar is not desirable when performing these lifts, as the vibration makes it more difficult to control the lift. The sleeve needs to revolve smoothly, but it does not need to be silky smooth.



Olympic Barbell

So-called because it is used in the Olympic lifting movements of the snatch and clean and jerk, an Olympic bar is used for explosive exercises such as the power clean. These bars need to be very flexible to minimize the stress on the wrists and other joints, and because lifters can use the spring to lift more weight. It also needs to have smoothly revolving sleeves to facilitate the snapping of the wrists at the top of such exercises as power cleans and snatches.

General Purpose Bar

The general-purpose bar is a hybrid of the power bar and the Olympic barbell. For the competitive sport of powerlifting, bars can be expensive — the top Olympic bars cost as much as \$780, and the top powerlifting bar is not far behind. A multipurpose bar is perfect for those who are on a tight budget and can't afford several bars, especially bars of the highest quality. The majority of our bar sales to high schools are for multipurpose bars.



The box squat segment in this video is absolutely awesome. Every coach and athlete needs to see it! In addition, detailed instruction is given on the parallel squat and front squat. I guarantee every coach will be able to coach better and every athlete will be able to squat better.

~ Dr. Greg Shepard, BFS Founder/CEO

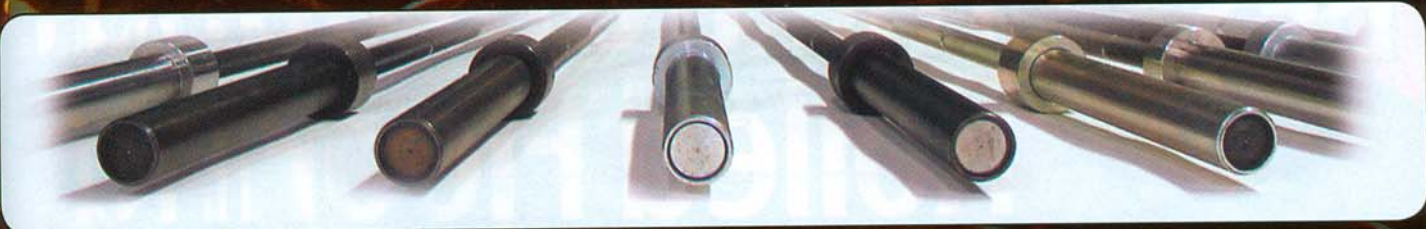
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What to Look for in a Barbell

Key qualities to look for in a good barbell are yield strength, sleeve construction, knurling and finish.

YIELD STRENGTH. This is a number that refers to the number of pounds per square inch (PSI) it takes for the steel to bend and stay bent. The higher the number, the better (and you should not consider a bar of less than 125,000 PSI, or 150,000 PSI for a heavy lifting environment), but this is reflected in a higher price. Yield strength is not to be confused with the expression "stress level." This is a bogus number, as there is no standardized way of determining an accurate number. For example, a manufacturer could place a barbell on a bench, add 1500 pounds to it, and if the barbell doesn't break after a few minutes, call it a 1500-pound-stress bar. What's worse, some manufacturers won't even go this far and they simply pull out a number from thin air and hope that their distributors don't ask for proof, which unfortunately many don't.

SLEEVE CONSTRUCTION. The sleeve should be anchored on the bar with strong snap rings, as this type of construction will never come loose and cause potential injury to the athlete. Avoid barbells that have sleeves that use exposed hex bolts, as these bolts almost always come loose after time and it is almost impossible to re-tighten them to factory standards.

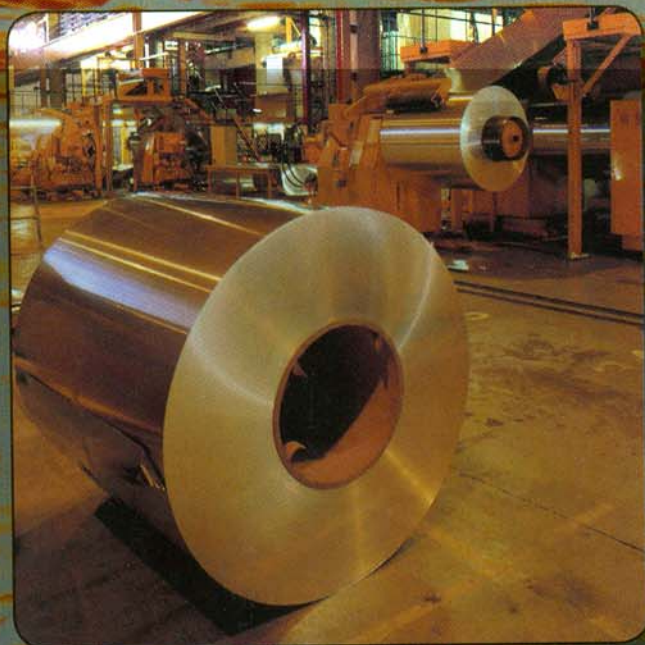
The revolution of the sleeve is accomplished either of two ways: needle bearings or bushings. What you need to know on this subject is that for the best rotation, needle bearings are the best; bushings are not as good as needle bearings, but they are less expensive and tend to last longer. A slightly more expensive bushing, the oil-impregnated bronze bushing, creates better rotation but not to the level of the needle bearing.

KNURLING. Knurling is the jagged marks that help you grip the bar. Powerlifters tend to like a thicker knurling than Olympic lifters. Also, for the squat, having an area of center knurling helps secure the weight on the shoulders.

FINISH. There are several ways of finishing a bar surface, including zinc oxide/silver, zinc oxide/black, chrome, and nickel – all these finishes are designed to retard rust and corrosion. The best possible finish is made of polished stainless steel, which provides the best protection against rust; the cost of upgrading to this type of material is a good investment.

Regardless of the type of bar you decide to purchase, you need to take care of it. It's good practice to use bumper plates for Olympic lifts and use spotters to prevent the bar from slamming on safety supports that can bend bars. Shop for the bar that is right for you and lift smart – your program will flourish. And hey, maybe on the way you might find a bargain!

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BFS warehouse worker Chris Collum prepares barbells for shipping

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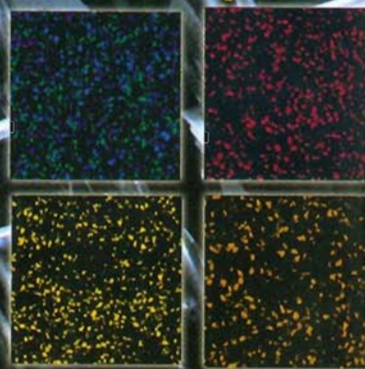
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