

THE DARK SIDE OF SPORTS

Can Spotters Be Sued?

Coaches and PE instructors must focus on doing their job when they are on the job

QUESTION: Can spotters be sued if they spot improperly and an injury results?

ANSWER: Yes. There have been cases where spotters have been brought in as defendants in litigations. Spotting in a weightroom is also a skill, just as spotting in gymnastics is a skill. Not everybody knows how to spot, say, a “round off, flip flop, double back” on-the-floor exercise. You need to be trained to understand how to spot that skill.

Even though it looks simple to spot a bench press, for example, when the weights get heavier and heavier you have to be well skilled and have enough strength yourself to spot. Some people spot simply because they think nothing is going to happen, and they just want to be there to enable someone to lift and feel good. That’s great – except that if the lifter really does need your skill and you don’t have it, then you could be held liable for not performing the job that you agreed to do.



Proper spotting, especially in lifts such as the towel bench press where heavy weights are used, is important to prevent injuries and reduce liability.

If you, as a coach or PE instructor, are spotting someone but don’t know how to spot properly, and one of your athletes gets hurt while you’re spotting, certainly that’s a supervision

issue and it’s also a spotting issue. Spotting is a skill, and people have to understand they must not spot anyone unless they understand the lift, know the lifter and know how to spot. BFS

The Dark Side of Sports is a question-and-answer feature by Dr. Marc Rabinoff that answers questions about safety and liability based upon actual litigations. You can watch a free video presentation of Dr. Rabinoff’s question-and-answer column by visiting our website, biggerfasterstronger.com.



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