

# THE DARK SIDE OF SPORTS

## Taking Spotting Seriously

A look at a growing safety problem in high school sports

BY DR. MARC RABINOFF

Can you give me a spot?" is a common question heard in any gym. And although the person you ask may be willing to help out and may have good intentions, it's simply unacceptable for someone to spot if they do not have the skills or physical capability to do so properly.

Think about it. What is the purpose of a spotter in weight training? There is basically only one: to get the weight off the person lifting should that individual fail to complete the lift. Rarely do we use spotters in weight training for the purpose of working on technique, because one nice thing about this activity is

that you can safely work on technique with very light weights. As the weight increases, the spotter must be *ready, able* and *willing* to hold the weight should the lifter fatigue or miss the lift or make an error.

The spotter's role is different in gymnastics and in cheerleading (the latter, unfortunately, is responsible for the highest number of catastrophic injuries in the United States for women). In both cheerleading and gymnastics, a spotter has two major purposes. The first is to help the athlete master their

technique. For example, if a gymnast is performing a rotation off a high bar, the athlete can't stop the rotation in the middle of the movement – he or she has to try to perform the complete movement. A spotter, by pushing a certain

head, and is now brain damaged for life. I saw a video of the accident, and it's obvious that the person spotting didn't know what the hell he was doing.

This brings me to my last major point, which I will make by using an

analogy of an airline pilot. These days the planes practically fly themselves, but if something goes wrong with the plane, the pilot must take over and that pilot had better know what he or she is doing. Likewise, anyone can spot a skill done well. It's when the skill fails that the spotter must be on their toes and their training comes in.

Offering moral

support when a person is lifting is fine, but if someone is not trained how to spot properly, then they absolutely should not be doing it. There's never a good reason to settle for anyone other than a trained spotter. It's your life we're talking about. **BR**



Use of a power rack and proper spotting technique, as shown here by athletes at Berrien High School, will help prevent accidents and injury in the weightroom.

part of the athlete's body or by helping to hold up the athlete, can help them complete the movement. The second major purpose is to keep the athlete's head or neck from hitting anything.

I am currently working on a case in which a Level 10 male gymnast was performing a horizontal bar routine in a meet. During the dismount the athlete made a serious error, and the spotter, instead of trying to help prevent the athlete from seriously injuring himself, moved out of the way! The result was that the athlete missed the mat, hit his

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