

# Cheerleading As Sport: A Moderately Outrageous Opinion

A look at the changing face of high school and college cheerleading



*Hellcats* is a new show from the CW network about the struggles of a college cheerleading squad. Shown left to right are Alyson Michalka, Robbie Jones and Ashley Tisdale.

BY DR. MARC RABINOFF

I'm not a big television watcher, but there's a new show about a cheerleading squad that caught my attention. It's called *Hellcats*, and what struck me was that in the second episode one of the athletes sustained a serious injury while performing a stunt and a comment was made about the sport's extraordinarily high injury rate. Although the show is a work of fiction, when it comes to providing an accurate portrayal of the true nature of cheerleading, *Hellcats* could be considered a form of reality television!

Please note that in the previous paragraph I referred to cheerleaders as athletes and cheerleading as a sport. The physical demands of competitive cheerleading, with its various levels of lifts, stunts and tumbling, put it in the same category as gymnastics. Unfortunately, in 2008 a study was published that looked at the injury rates of three million high school girls who participated in sports the previous year. Although cheerleaders represented only three percent of these athletes, they accounted for 65 percent of all catastrophic sport injuries! It's my contention that to reduce the risk of injury in cheerleading, it must be taken seriously and the athletes must have access to qualified coaches and

appropriate strengthening and conditioning programs.

USA Gymnastics has proposed to sponsor an association with a working title of Aerobics and Tumbling. They are in fact pushing to get the NCAA to recognize cheerleading as a college sport. I have some issues with this idea, so on September 10th I wrote a letter to Steve Whitlock, Director of Gymnastics for All at USA Gymnastics. Here are some excerpts from my letter:

"I recently read that the cheerleading associations at the college level wanted to start a new sport called something like "cheerleading stunts and tumbling sport." I have a major problem with that, as we in gymnastics already have such programs and there is no need for this. The reason I see for them to offer this is to raise cheerleading to a high level of performance. I have no problem with that as well, but, again, there is no need for another sport. In my professional opinion, having testified in many cheerleading quadriplegic injury cases..., if they want to raise it to another level, [then they need to have] coaches who are competent in gymnastics tumbling and stunting, as all these cheerleading skills are gymnastics movements placed in a

cheerleading setting.

"So my question is 'What is USA Gymnastics doing about this issue that is hurting hundreds of cheerleaders each year?'

"I see no reason for the cheerleading folks to start a sport we always had. I do believe that if a cheerleading team does want to do stunting and tumbling and gymnastics, [they must have] a qualified trainer in gymnastics skills teaching and coaching and spotting, [and then] the squad could be seen as a varsity sport....

"I'd appreciate your thoughts or those of USA Gymnastics, as I have knowledge of some seriously injured cheerleaders who are in litigation for just these concepts."

My letter is just one voice in a growing dialog on the physical risks of cheerleading. Too many young people are suffering life-changing injuries from this sport, and the public needs to know that. Most importantly, we need to move beyond talk and come up with solutions. **BR**

*"The Dark Side of Sports" is a regular feature by Dr. Marc Rabinoff that answers questions about safety and liability based upon actual litigations.*



# BEDROCK FOUNDATION



Dimensions - 6ft. x 8ft. x 2in.  
Custom Logo \$279

## ELITE POWER CLEAN PLATFORM DELIVERS THE STABILITY AND DURABILITY TO PUSH TO YOUR MAX!

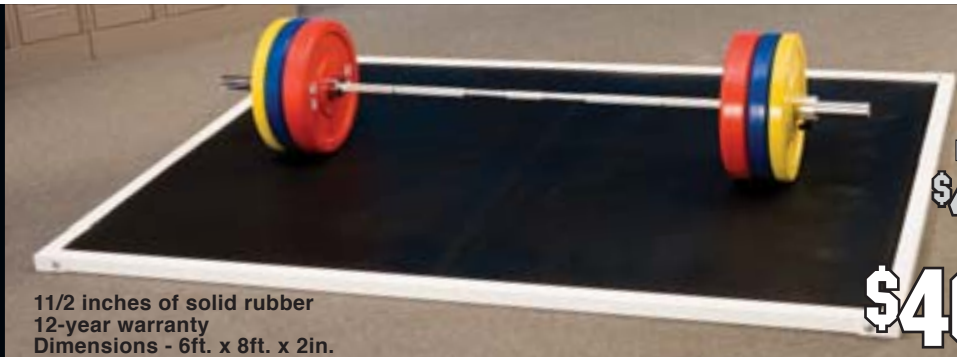
- ▶ Customizable Logos and Paint - Call for details and pricing
- ▶ Features ProtectAll™ long-lasting vinyl surface
- ▶ No warping. No wood. Solid rubber. Non-slip.
- ▶ Our most popular power clean platform

RETAIL PRICE WAS NOW ONLY

~~\$799~~ **\$695**

## VARSITY POWER CLEAN PLATFORM

- ▶ An affordable platform for years of reliable use



1 1/2 inches of solid rubber  
12-year warranty  
Dimensions - 6ft. x 8ft. x 2in.

Retail Was  
~~\$499~~  
NOW ONLY

**\$465**

## POWER CLEAN MAT

- ▶ 4'x8'x3/4" Solid Mat

WAS \$139  
NEW PRICE **\$125**

## POWER CLEAN MAT

- ▶ 4'x8'x1/2" Solid Mat

WAS \$89  
NEW PRICE **\$85**



BIGGER FASTER STRONGER



DEDICATED TO HELPING ATHLETES SUCCEED SINCE 1976

**EXPLOSIVE! • 1-800-628-9737**

online at [www.biggerfasterstronger.com](http://www.biggerfasterstronger.com) • email us at [info@bfsmail.com](mailto:info@bfsmail.com)

843 West 2400 South, Salt Lake City, UT 84119 • Fax (801) 975-1159

