Why You Should Consider Making Equipment for Your Weight Room

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RECENTLY MORE THAN EVER, and regardless of what level or kind of institution the strength coach or trainer is working at, there are many reasons for in-house construction of weight room equipment. Having a limited budget for facility equipment is probably the main reason for constructing it yourself.

By constructing your own equipment you can design it to fit into specific areas and to serve special exercise needs you may have. When you take the time and effort to construct some of your own equipment, in addition to the pride of creation you will have developed an understanding of the workings of that equipment or apparatus. This will allow you to enhance it easily, quickly, less expensively, and with safety and efficiency in mind. With good tools and average skills, you can build both safe and long-lasting equipment (particularly out of wood) as good as what is on the market.

If rules permit, it may be possible to utilize the capabilities of students, parents, or local boosters who would be willing to donate either their time and expertise (possibly a certified welder) or money and materials to the worthy cause of improving the weight room. This in turn contributes to the improvement of the sports program.

In buying local products and resources—wood from local sawmills, metal from the local salvage yard, and screws and nails in bulk—you are getting either reduced price or possibly donated items and keeping your money in the local area.

In the last 6 years, many of my associates have contributed average skills and tools along with much thought and energy to become increasingly proficient at building the following equipment:

- Platforms
- Jerk boxes (mostly for upper body explosive exercises)
- Blocks (elevated pulls and stepping)
- Record boards and bulletin boards
- Devices to hang (pews) or hold (boxes) various equipment such as machine handled bars, cables, or jump ropes
- Sit-and-reach measurement devices
- Vertical jump measurement devices
- Wooden bumper plates (these have a rubber outer edge, an inner metal ring, and weigh 10 lbs each)
- Plyometric boxes
- Stall bars
- Slide boards
- Chalk boxes
- Calf stretch boxes
- Hurdles
- Towing devices.

Now let's consider the tools, equipment, and skills you may have access to. It would be a real advantage to your program if you get to know a reliable welder, one who can make not only simple and quick repairs of your metal equipment in the weight room but can also construct some more customized apparatus. Perhaps someone at your workplace could take a welding class at the local community college.

There are some basic tools you will need to have on hand, not only to build equipment but also to
maintain this equipment: electric drill, circular saw, wrenches, ratchet and sockets, pliers, adjustable wrench, Allen wrenches, hammer, screwdrivers, hacksaw, file, a sharp heavy-duty knife, tape measure and square, mallet, tools and equipment for repairing cables and chains, heavy-duty stapler for repairing upholstery, glue and duct tape, and various fastening items (nails, screws, nuts, bolts).

Because of liability issues, you must be sure to use reliable materials and techniques in the assembly and repair of equipment. Buy high-quality tools, materials, and equipment. Also, get in the habit of regularly inspecting and maintaining all weightlifting equipment and machines. Keep them clean, lubricated, and functional. Restore and repair any broken or malfunctioning equipment as quickly as you can so as to avoid any negligence.

Everything you make—as well as any equipment you would buy from a company—should have certain properties such as the following. Can the equipment be repaired easily and quickly? Will it last many years? Will it be used frequently?

Any piece of equipment you make, repair, or purchase should be both safe and simple (i.e., few moving parts, easy to fix, and well-built; but not bulky, complex, or high tech). It is important to assess what equipment to build by considering such factors as type or mode of equipment (this choice reflects your training philosophy), how many pieces of equipment are required (depends on the maximum number of athletes in the weight room at one time), and the ability of the equipment to handle some very heavy loads.

Making our own equipment has given our staff, athletes, and program a renewed spirit and pride, which we feel is reflected in many professionally done and efficient projects. All this helps us to recognize a collective goal of improving the facility and program to its utmost.

Geoff Ginther received a BS Ed in physical education from Miami University and a master’s from Purdue. He has been the Assistant Strength and Conditioning Coach at the University of Oregon since 1988. Prior to this he was at Purdue University for 4 years and was a high school coach in Ohio for 5 years.

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