



How About a Little Bar Talk?

Frequently at trade shows, clinics, and in the coaches' room I become engaged in equipment conversations about specific equipment challenges as coaches usually have the best ideas and perspective on the specific purpose or use for equipment. Once we get beyond the latest innovation or ideas for training, we often settle in on a discussion of Uneven Bars and Single Bar Trainers. AAI alone offers at least 8 different sets of unevens

and 6 unique single bar trainers. Other manufacturers offer still others that have some unique properties.

Let's first consider Uneven Bars that are characterized by:

- Use and adjustability – Age or level appropriate from preschool to elite, certification by USA Gymnastics, NCAA, and FIG. Also designated for training or competition, based on adjustability in width and height.
- Space and anchoring - The footprint of a set of unevens can be 300 sq. ft, to 100 sq. ft depending on the support cables and anchoring system which ranges from free standing to 4 or 6 anchor points. Each has its own pluses and minuses.
- Performance – Uneven bars vary in performance based on the type of rails (stiffer rails for faster action and response), type of collars which offer different degrees of motion from a simple up and down flex to 360-degree rotation for more advanced swinging skills.



Most of these same options exist in single bar trainers with the added option of converting the single bar to a men's high bar trainer. All the options make the decision difficult when adding a new piece of equipment to the gym. Unfortunately, there is not a "one size fits all" option. If you want to save space, there's a 6-point attachment system that is more compact but isn't currently approved for competition.

If you want to move the bars from location to location or use them on floors that don't permit anchoring, there are free standing systems, but they cost a little more. And if you want to train elite skills there are high performance bar sets but they may not go as narrow or low as you'd want for your lower level classes.

The most prominent request is for a single bar trainer that can be used at all heights, and for all level skills. It currently doesn't exist. To accommodate multiple giant swings and release moves the bar must have a collar that allows for 360-degree rotation. Competitive uneven bars allow this as do elite



single bars, but once the bars are designed to adjust beyond the few notches need for competition, the adjustment by design restricts the rotation of the bar. This is the reason that we shouldn't put a men's high bar rail on a single bar trainer and use it for competition if that wasn't the design. We also shouldn't expect to have the flexibility to raise and lower the bar based on training needs and still feel safe to use it for training release moves at the upper setting.

Lastly on bar talk, as the skills have advance over the years, the stress on bars has also increased. In 2009 AAI made the determination that the advancement of skill was creating enough stress that there was a need increase the diameter of the anchoring bolt in the floor to withstand greater forces in more direction. Since 2009 AAI has only recommended ¾" anchoring bolts for Unevens, single bars, horizontal bars, and ring frames. Other manufacturers have followed. Most safety conscious clubs have been upgrading as well. If you haven't yet made the upgrade, now might be the time to change.



All sports evolve, and the top equipment companies change right along with it. The goal for the equipment should always be to provide the best environment for the athletes to shine. Basketball rims have been upgraded to withstand the dunking, volleyball nets went to stronger top cables to handle the spikes, and gymnastic equipment will continue to evolve.

What's in your gym?

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