

Weightlifters Pumped for Competition

By Olivia M. Hall

Imagine grabbing the butt end of a small car and trying to lift it off the ground. Now imagine that amount of weight loaded onto a barbell. These are the 500 pounds that Kathy Fields plans to deadlift at the International Powerlifting Association's (IPA) March 23 meet at Ultimate Athletics in Ithaca.

The 40-year-old former Black Hawk pilot will join about 50 other lifters to compete in powerlifting's three disciplines: squat, bench press and deadlift. These emerged out of a broad range of weightlifting activities that in the 1950s began to compete in popularity with Olympic lifting (consisting of the snatch and the clean and jerk).

The meet will be governed by the rules of the IPA, which has more than 5,800 active members worldwide. It is one of over 20 global powerlifting federations, which sometimes are rivals.

The athletes are grouped by age and body weight—the men's super heavyweight class exceeds 308 pounds.

While professionals are not tested for performance-enhancing drugs, elite amateurs and amateurs are. "I'd be naïve to think that drugs don't occur," says meet organizer James Howell, who has won nine world championships and holds several world records, including a 605-pound squat. "But no one's going to come in here enhanced and compete against my amateur lifters because I'm not going to let that happen."

Performance-enhancing clothing, on the other hand, is allowed in the "equipped" category. Heavy-



Photo by Olivia Hall

Powerlifter James Howell prepares to squat 440 pounds.

duty suits and shirts made from polyester and canvas can mean lifting hundreds of extra pounds over the "raw" or unequipped category. "On the bench press, I've seen a guy struggle with 550 pounds and nail 900 pounds in a shirt," Howell says.

Whatever the category, proper form is key. "You have to be a technician when you get to the heavier weights," says Fields. "If you do it wrong, you've got a real problem for the next few lifts and maybe even weeks of training."

Even with good technique, powerlifting can be hard on the body. Take the squat, for example: For a valid attempt, the hip has to come below the knee and then be lifted up again. "Imagine getting smushed by the weight and then trying to stand back up. The pressure's incredible," says Howell. "A lot of guys will blow their eye vessels, or

their nose will pop, or sometimes their eyes will roll and they'll pass out."

Nevertheless, people from all walks of life are attracted to powerlifting, a sport that Howell calls "hardcore." He has six anchors in his shoulder and his quads regularly turn purple from muscle tears. The 15 regulars in the trainings that he holds three times a week include Cornell graduate students, construction workers and a firefighter.

"I see doctors and lawyers come to training to take out the aggression that's built up over the day," says Fields, who trains in Allentown, Pa. Even an athlete with cerebral palsy participated at a recent meet. "He can hardly walk," says Howell, "but he was cranking it out on the bench press."

Women comprise just 10 percent

of lifters, but Fields is encouraged to see their numbers growing exponentially. "It's a tough barrier to overcome that many women worry about getting bulky," she explains. "But they can actually train hardcore like men without looking like them."

Mentally, on the other hand, men's and women's motivations are often similar. For many, powerlifting is an antidote to the difficulties of life. Howell, now 48, came to the sport when he was 27 and battling a number of issues, including alcoholism. Refocusing on improving himself in the gym has helped him to bring his life back on track and others into the fold. Mark Bailey, who Howell introduced to lifting over a decade ago, is grateful for a passion that "keeps me out of trouble and out of the bar. It changed my demons."

Fellow lifters are therefore like "an underground family," says Fields. At meets they are competitors but also cheer each other on. This solidarity is apparent at the high-school powerlifting meets that Howell puts on. "I've had guys from Ithaca and Trumansburg wrapping each other's knees, lending each other their belts, and yelling and encouraging each other. People are just blown away when they see this camaraderie."

Ithaca High School has discontinued its powerlifting program, but teen lifters are still going strong in other cities, such as Binghamton. The potential benefits of weightlifting, even without reaching for the one-rep max, says Howell, are enormous. "You see kids come in unsure of themselves, and then they'll lift

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SAFE Act

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power and another step toward Big Brother government. One local man said the SAFE Act is “a \$36 million unfunded mandate.”

Matt Bishop, a corrections officer who attended the meeting, said that inmates at his facility scoffed when they learned about the new law. Bishop said inmates told him that criminals have no problem obtaining guns and Cuomo's law would do little to alter that fact. The people who are being punished by the law, he said, “are not the criminals, but good people.”

Jamie Arnold, a gun dealer from the Town of Dryden, said that federal, state and county firearms regulations are strict enough as they stand. “New York already has some of the toughest gun laws in America,” Arnold said. “This law has nothing to do with law-abiding citizens, and it's being shoved down our throats.”

A Lansing woman said that, until recently, she questioned the need for gun ownership. But in the last year, she said, “I tried to educate myself about firearms” and was trained in the use of a handgun for self-defense.

County Legislator Peter Stein (D-Town of Ithaca) said the public turnout was unprecedented in his four years on the county board.

Local lawmakers at the meeting conceded to not being familiar with more than an overview of the SAFE Act. Tompkins County Sheriff Ken Lansing and County Attorney Jonathan Wood briefed the committee on the law following the public comment period. However, the crowd had mostly dispersed by then.

While the law has bipartisan support among many district attorneys in the state, conservative lawmakers are taking an active lead in striking it down.

Democrats hold the majority in the Tompkins County Legislature; three of the 15 members are Republicans. However, Brian Robison (R-Groton) is chair of the Public Safety Committee. Robison has lamented that there wasn't enough discussion on the matter in the State Legislature and that county lawmakers are now confronted with the debate.

Robison was on vacation and could not attend the March 11 meeting.

Any resolution for or against the law would have to be submitted to the county legislature as a whole. Lawmakers would most likely send any such measure back to the Public Safety Committee for review. The next meeting of the legislature is Tuesday, March 19, at 5:30 p.m.

Clerks

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clear to the governor that this is an important fund to preserve.

Everything from town board minutes to fire department records must be kept and made accessible by the public. New York State requires this, as does the federal government. The town clerks and others are concerned about the loss of these dedicated funds because FOIL (Freedom Of Information Law) requests are impossible if there are no records available. Records are also bulky and some towns hope to purchase the technology needed to scan their records, store them digitally and to change formats if necessary. It requires money to do this and without

grants proper records storage may be out of the reach of some towns.

Grocery

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Petito says, maintaining an air of gratitude toward those in the community who have consistently shown their support. Recently, a painter from England, who happened to be in town last September, offered to volunteer his time and paint a mural on the west side of the building. Additionally, a local artist volunteered to touch up the mural on the east side of the store.

Ruth Coluccio and her daughter Alison live on Cascadilla Street, a few blocks away from the store. They say they walk to the grocery store about three times a week. “It has the feel of a local farmer's market with a touch of fanciness to it; it has everything we need,” Alison says. “We're looking forward to riding our bikes here in the spring.”

And for customers who aren't finding everything they need, there's a suggestion book located at the information desk. So far, customers have asked for items such as bulk nuts, uncured bacon, taco seasonings, kefir, Annie's salad dressing, dark chocolate M&M's, Netflix, seaweed, smoked salmon, phyllo dough, tea light candles, a variety of hummus, grass-fed beef and free-range chicken.

“We'll do whatever we can to get these items. We are currently working with a nutritionist at Cornell Cooperative Extension so that we can offer vegetarian sandwiches and meals,” says Petito. The store's grand opening, an event that will kick off a month of specials, is scheduled for the last week of April or the first week of May.

Weightlifters

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more weight than ever before. They suddenly feel better about themselves, and that carries over into the rest of their lives. Because they no longer need to prove themselves, they save showing their strength and aggression for the weight room,” he says.

The IPA powerlifting meet will take place at Ultimate Athletics on March 23 starting at 10 a.m. For more information, see www.ipa-power.com.

Fifty Shades

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moded, but offensive? In *Great and Powerful*, we see Oscar learn that becoming a man isn't about being great and powerful at all, but instead something very basic, yet ultimately more fulfilling. It's a story that the current generation of young males, who are disconnected and restive and falling behind their sisters in virtually every measure of educational achievement, need to hear.

Not that kids need to be consciously aware of any of this. Refreshingly, Raimi (*Evil Dead*, *Army of Darkness*, *Drag Me to Hell*) eschews cynical Dreamworks-style triangulation between adults and kids. There's no smug double entendre in the script by Mitchell Kapner and David Lindsay-Abaire, no knowing cultural references meant to bemuse hipsters and sail over the heads of children (aside from allusions to the 1939 movie, of course). This a kid's movie that is happy to be just that. And that's not nothing.



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