

Building Momentum

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Elk Rapids senior Thais Grays earned 10th place at the state competition in the men's 165-pound class last season after squatting 315-pounds. Grays, and his fellow Elk Rapids teammates, will be hosting a five-team lifting competition on Saturday, Jan. 18. Courtesy photo

Upcoming competition to showcase growth, strength of regional powerlifting

ELK RAPIDS – Although the sport of powerlifting is not new within the state of Michigan, it's still a relatively new concept in northern Michigan.

The sport, however, has seen promising growth throughout the area in recent years. On Saturday, Jan. 18, the sport will be on display in the Elk Rapids gymnasium, as the Elk Rapids High School Powerlifting Team is playing host to the 'Pounds For Pennies' benefit powerlifting competition.

Along with Elk Rapids, an open invitation to the competition for interested lifters has been extended to four area schools. Those schools are Kingsley, Kalkaska, Mancelona and East Jordan. Proceeds from the event will benefit the Father Fred Foundation and the ERHS powerlifting squad. Earnings will be split, 50/50.

The idea of the competition was conceived by Elk Rapids High School principal and powerlifting coach

Mike Travis. "Because our team has grown, and we have more experience as a team, we needed to do a couple of things," Travis said.

"We wanted to try and host our own small event, but, more importantly, we needed to raise some revenue, and decided to partner with the Father Fred Foundation. In addition, I wanted our kids to have the chance to test themselves and knock the rust off before we head to Shepherd on Jan. 25 to start the official season."

Travis, who is in his third year coaching the sport, was a competitive power lifter on and off for roughly 20 years, from 1991-2011. He is pleased with the growth of the sport, and hopes events like this will continue to give it a boost, much like it received last year when state finals were held at Traverse City West.

"The sport of powerlifting is definitely growing in the nation, state and northern Michigan," Travis explained. "Tim Wooer's efforts to host the MHSPLA State Finals at TC West last March gave the region a huge economic push, but more importantly, it really did a lot for exposing the sport in northern Michigan. Powerlifting and the MHSPLA have been going strong for 10 or 15 years in central and southern Michigan."

Travis hopes that anyone even remotely interested in the sport will show up for the Jan. 18 event in Elk Rapids. He believes that there are many benefits to getting involved in powerlifting.

"The benefits of the sport are almost too many to mention," Travis said. "But, development of character traits, like strong work ethic and goal setting are some of the benefits. Testing and pushing oneself also helps to build self-esteem, especially when growth and success occur. Students that participate learn to be more organized and goal-oriented in their daily lives."

Powerlifting is becoming a popular sport at ERHS, and they've seen gains in participation with each season. In the 2011-12 season the team had 14 lifters on the roster. Last year there were 19 students on the squad, and this season the Elks are boasting nearly 30 lifters. This is the first time that ERHS has hosted a competition, so Travis noted that they're taking it slow by inviting only four local and interested schools.

"I know that these schools have budding powerlifting programs, as well as scholar-athletes with serious interest in strength training," Travis noted. "This competition will be a good primer for those lifters that will be starting the MHSPLA competition season in the next few weeks. We encourage students to participate," he concluded. "Together, we're building muscles and building lives."

Cost for the event is \$10 per lifter, which can be paid at check-in. Registration is from 1-1:45 p.m., with a rules meeting at 2 p.m. Lifting begins at 2:30 p.m. Pre-registration for the event is recommended. To pre-register or obtain further information, email Mike Travis at mtravis@erschools.com. To learn more about the Father Fred Foundation, visit www.fatherfredfoundation.com. A gold and silver medal will be awarded in all weight classes in all three divisions.

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