

Traverse City Record-Eagle

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Diverse field participates in powerlifting state championships

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--- — The gym at Traverse City West became perhaps the biggest and most watched workout room in the state on Saturday.

TC West hosted the 2013 powerlifting state championships, bringing more than 600 competitors from across the state to northern Michigan for the annual event.

Think about every stereotype you can imagine for weightlifting — and then crush it. While there were a handful of “gym rats” with massive biceps and freakish physiques, they were hardly the norm. With the event breaking athletes into weight classes and tallying their best squat, bench press and dead lift, there was a place for the biggest high schooler to the smallest.

Saturday’s competition was truly for every shape, size and gender. Yes, gender. Think weightlifting is only for the boys? Think again.

Emily Estep is the perfect example. At first glance, you wouldn’t tab the 4-foot-10 Onaway senior as a powerlifter. But that’s what she is. And after Saturday, you can more specifically call her a state champion powerlifter.

Estep won the 132-pound weight class with a squat of 230 pounds, a bench press of 130 pounds and a dead lift of 275 pounds.

“I’ve actually been really working for that,” Estep said. “This was my third year doing it. As a sophomore I was third and as a junior I took sixth place. So I was really hoping this would be the year.”

In past years, Estep said the girls would lift in the state finals on Friday, while the boys went on Saturday. This year, they were all in the same room, which made for a packed house at TC West.

“It was crazy to see everyone in the state who qualified,” Estep said. “We get to come together and share this. It was so different from anything else, because it’s just you. You get to show up and show off what you’ve worked for.”

Make no mistake; weightlifting is hardly Estep’s bread and butter. She’s an all-stater in softball and earned plenty of honors in volleyball, basketball cross country and track. She attributes her success to the work she puts in the weightroom, thanks to a high-intensity conditioning class she takes at Onaway.

“It’s been crucial for her,” Onaway girls basketball coach Mary Mix said. “In her case, more than the strength, it’s the durability. That’s how she lasts for all of these seasons. Her biggest injury was this year when she rolled her ankle. It cost her a quarter (of game time).”

Estep isn’t alone in using weightlifting to help in other sports. Fenton’s Crystal Krupp won her second state championship on Saturday. The 155-pounder had a banner day with state-record lifts in squat (330), bench (165), dead lift (410) and total weight (905). Now, she’ll turn her attention to playing soccer and track.

“Weightlifting is a great way to get in shape for any sport,” Krupp said. “During the year, I do it about three days a week. But when seasons come around, you have to buckle down and get serious about it.”

For Estep, Saturday’s event was also a rare opportunity to compete as an individual. Typically, she puts more emphasis on participating as a member of a team. Need proof? She’s qualified for the track and field state finals nine times as an individual, but has never gone to the state meet because it’s the same day as softball districts.

“(Powerlifting) is my only individual sport, so it’s cool to see where you stand,” Estep said.

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