

Starting Strength

The 2011 National Weightlifting Championships

by

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The 2011 Weightlifting Nationals were held the weekend of July 15, 2011 in Council Bluffs, Iowa. An obscure location and major flooding were not enough to keep the strongest weightlifters in the United States away from Council Bluffs. First, the main question on everyone's mind was, why Council Bluffs? Rumors were flying left and right when Council Bluffs was awarded the bid over Cincinnati and Shreveport. In the end Council Bluffs came through and proved to be a competent choice by the USAW board of directors. Except for the few challenges outlined below, most of the emails I received after the competition were pretty positive and a good time was had by most the athletes and coaches in attendance. Anytime the United States weightlifting community gathers, old acquaintances are rekindled and new friendships are spawned. Hats off to all the volunteers and meet organizers who were responsible for the success of this event.

The message boards lit up all over the internet about the major disappointment with the webcast. The first concern was that only one day of the three-day event was going to be shown. The second concern was that the webcast ended before the start of the 85kg. weight class on Saturday night. Everyone was looking forward to the 85kg. class as it featured America's best lifter, Kendrick Farris. According to the USAW, their hands were tied concerning the webcast. The United States Olympic Committee was responsible for the webcast only being aired on Saturday. Apparently they enforced an agreement with USAW that gave them the rights to webcast Pam Am and Olympic qualifier events. The problem was that the USOC had only budgeted for one day of coverage, so weightlifting fans from coast to coast had to settle for one day of coverage. After consulting with USAW, the webcast was scheduled for a set time to begin and a set time to end on Saturday. Needless to say, the meet did not run as scheduled and the webcast ended before the 85kg. class started. Weightlifting fans were stuck in front of their computers watching a blank screen. The bottom line is the USOC was responsible for the webcast only being shown one day and USAW was responsible for the men's 85 kilo class not being shown. Giving credit where credit is due, what I saw of the webcast here in Maui, Hawaii was pretty much uninterrupted and the quality was exceptional.

This year the USAW lowered the qualifying totals for the nationals. The reason for lowering the qualifying totals was to draw more participants to the event. This goal was accomplished as the event drew over 200 competitors. Even though the number of competitors was up, the quality of lifting was not exciting. The margin of victory in several weight classes showed that the depth of quality lifters is

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still not there. The Junior Worlds were held a week before the nationals and this resulted in several of our junior lifters not competing. This contributed to the lack of depth, because several of our current junior squad members are very capable of competing with the top senior lifters.

Another major concern showing up on all the weightlifting message boards was the quality of the officiating. Most complaints centered on the inconsistency of the calls and the interpretation of the press-out rule. The bombout rate seemed high for this event, and many felt that the inconsistent officiating, and the ridges and bumps in the platform, contributed to the high rate. There is no excuse for inconsistent officiating within the same weight class. Some of our best lifters went home with no total and their tails between their legs. Consistent officiating in our sport is a must. Sport is sport, and controversial calls are part of sport. But I cannot remember hearing so many complaints about plain and simple *bad calls*. I have the utmost respect for the volunteer officials in our sport and I realize it is a tough job; however, the rules are pretty cut and dried. Hopefully our federation will look into this and come up with a solution to ensure that this travesty does not happen again. We cannot afford to lose any athletes, and inconsistent officiating makes the sport look bad, discourages our athletes, and opens us up to accusations of corruption and incompetence.

Below is a brief description and the results of the individual weight classes. I compared our lifters to the first place finishers of last year's World and Pan American Championships. The Olympic Games are right around the corner. The upcoming Pan Am and World Championships are qualifier meets for Olympic slots. It is important that our lifters do well at these events. Our results in these events will determine the representation of the USA at the upcoming Olympics. This article only covers the men's division.

56kg. Class

The 56kg. class had 5 participants. Absent from the contest was Darren Barnes, who totaled 230 at the Junior Worlds and is the current senior record holder in this class. Michael Graber won the class with a 179kg. total, second place went to Anthony Hernandez with 177kg., and third place went to Jared Youmans with 167kg. This is a highly competitive class internationally. Jingbiao Wu won this class with a total of 292kg. at last year's World Championships. Sergio Alvarez Boulet from Cuba won the Pan Am Championships with a total of 267kg. Michael Graber's total of 179 would have placed him 31st at last year's World Championships and 14th at last year's Pan Am Championships.

The absolute American records in this class are held by Albert Hood and Chris LeRoux. Albert snatched 112.5 and Chris clean and jerked 137.5. Albert Hood holds the absolute total record at 242.5. It is also appropriate to mention Chuck Vinci who totaled 240 in the two lifts (107.5/132.5) at the 1960 Rome Olympics, out of a three-lift total of 345, to win the Gold Medal. Chuck was our last Olympic Champion 51 years ago.

The great news in this class is that current American record holder Darren Barnes is still a junior and has a lot of potential. It will just be a matter of time before Darren surpasses the absolute American records and starts making an impact on the international scene. Darren is one of the future stars in our sport and we can look forward to big results from him in the next quad.

62kg. Class

The 62kg. class had 13 participants. Absent from this class was Darren's brother Darrel Barnes who totaled 247kg. at the Junior Worlds. Kyle Yamauchi from Team Hawaii won this class with a 237kg. total. Second place went to Nghiep Dinh with 227kg., and third place went to Ryan Borges who totaled 206kg. This class saw the first casualty of the men's competition when crowd favorite and

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Go Heavy poster Sean Hutchinson bombed in the clean and jerk after snatching 115 kg., leading the class by 8kg. Sean failed on his opening clean and jerk of 135kg. three times. Nobody plans to bomb out; it is part of the sport. Bill Starr would often say “Show me a lifter who has never bombed out and I will show you a lifter who has never performed up to his full potential.” Sean is a good guy and trains hard, he will be heard from again, and I expect him to be challenging the top of this class at this year’s American Open.

Un Guk Kim won this class at last year’s World Championships with a 320kg. total. Kyle Yamauchi’s 237kg. total would have placed him 32nd at last year’s World Championships. Lazaro Maikel Ruiz Gasso of Cuba won the Pan American Championships last year with a total of 298kg. Kyle’s 237kg. total would have placed him 9th at that meet.

69kg. Class

The 69kg class had 15 participants. Caleb Williams of Coffee’s Gym won it with a 283kg. total. Caleb made a clutch clean and jerk on his third attempt to out-distance Derrick Johnson by 2kg. Not only is Derrick a good lifter himself, he is also the coach of the two junior phenoms Darren and Darrel Barnes. Third place went to Ian Droze who made a third attempt snatch of 116kg. after two misses with 115kg. to remain in the competition. Ian totaled 262kg. This is another class we lag behind internationally – Hui Liao from China won the World Championships in this class last year with a total of 358kg. Caleb’s 283kg. total would have placed him 22nd at last year’s Worlds. Edwin Mosquera of Colombia won last year’s Pan American Championships with a 315kg. total. Caleb’s 283kg. total would have placed him 7th at that meet.

77kg. Class

The 77kg. Class had 18 participants. Chad Vaughn currently owns this class in America; he made 5 out of 6 attempts and finished 49kg. ahead of his nearest competitor. Chad totaled 335kg. and just missed setting an American Record with his attempt at a 191kg. clean and jerk. Second place went to Mike Cerbus with a 286kg. total. Rounding out third place was Adam Beytin with a total of 275kg. This class had 4 lifters who failed to total.

Tigran Martirosyan won last year’s World Championships with a total of 373kg. At last year’s Worlds Chad totaled 319kg. and finished 20th. His national total of 335kg. marks an improvement of 16kg. from last year’s Worlds. This year’s total would move him up to 12th place at last year’s Worlds. Chad is one of the bright spots in American Weightlifting. Hopefully he will continue to improve between now and the World Championships. One of Tommy Kono’s pet peeves is that our American lifters become satisfied with just making the World Team. They show little improvement between the Nationals and the Worlds. Chad has set himself up to make great strides on the international platform. I am reminded of Joe Dube, our last world champion, who at the 1969 nationals did 435, 320 and 440 lbs. in the Superheavyweight class. Several months later at the World Championships he did 446, 357.5 and 467.50 lbs. to win the gold medal. This was a massive 75lb. improvement. It can be done. Chad’s 335 total would have won a gold medal at last year’s Pan Am Championships. Last year’s winner Alexander Andica of Colombia totaled 330kg.

85kg. Class

The 85kg. class had 15 participants. This class was won by the best lifter of the meet and CrossFit spokesperson Kendrick Farris. Kendrick did not let his supporters down and just missed an American Record clean and jerk of 204kg. Kendrick totaled 356kg. and finished 26kg. ahead of second

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place finisher Zach Krych who totaled 330kg. Third place went to Frankie Murray with a 295kg. total. Kendrick was 6kg. off his winning 362kg. total at last year's Pan American Championships.

The 85kg. class had 5 athletes who bombed out or withdrew, most notably Matt Bruce who a lot of people expected to push Kendrick in the snatch. Matt snatched 142kg. before missing 150 twice and then he withdrew from the competition. Absent from the class was the fast rising star Mike Nackoul who totaled 327kg. at the Junior World Championships and finished in 7th place. Mike is a bright prospect for the 2016 Olympics and demonstrated his ability to perform well on the international platform. He made a clutch 3rd attempt clean and jerk of 186kg. to win the "B" session at the Junior Worlds this year.

Kendrick Farris continues to dominate this class, and is the USA's best chance to medal at the upcoming Olympics. More importantly, Kendrick also continues to amaze his fans with training lifts that are knocking on the door of the current World records. Perhaps his reported 300kg. deadlift is a factor. With a little bit of luck and lots of hard work the national anthem could be playing at the 2012 Olympics in the 85kg. class if Kendrick continues to improve. Adrian Zielinski of Poland won last year's World Championships with a 383kg. total. Kendrick's 356kg. total would have gotten him 11th place at last year's World Championships.

94kg. Class

The 94kg. class had 15 participants. Jon North was the star of this class, nailing a third attempt 160kg. snatch. Jon ran into some challenges in the clean and jerk and came back to make a gutsy 186kg. on his 3rd attempt to take the title. Jon totaled 346kg. and finished ahead of Phil Sabatini who totaled 333kg. Third place was claimed by Coard Wilkes with 327kg. Travis Cooper took gold in the clean and jerk with a very easy 3rd attempt of 187kg.

Alexandr Ivanov won last year's World Championships with a total of 403kg. Jon's 346kg. total would have gotten him 31st place in the highly competitive 94kg. class at that meet. The 94kg. class was one of the biggest classes at last year's Worlds and had 45 competitors. Wilmer Torres won last year's Pan American Championships with a total of 376kg. Jon's 346kg. total would have tied him for third place at that meet. Absent from the class was Jared Fleming who totaled 351kg. at the Junior World Championships to take 7th place for the USA. Jared is knocking on the door of Sam Maxwell's absolute junior American clean and jerk record of 200kg. Maxwell's 200kg. is one of the USA's most impressive and established junior records.

The 94kg. is one of the most dynamic classes in American Weightlifting. A real sleeper and absent from this class is the young star Ian Wilson. Ian finished second at the Youth World Championships and recently finished 14th at the Junior Worlds. Ian is one of the few Americans who knows how to attack the weights. Ian is one of those guys who go out to chew the bar in half on each and every attempt. Former American junior superstar Norik Vardanyan is trying to earn a spot on the highly competitive Armenian Olympic Team. Norik grew up in America and dominated the Junior ranks in American Weightlifting. Unfortunately, in my opinion, USAW mismanaged Norik's development and under-utilized his father's talents. Too bad for the USA - Norik has talent. Even though Norik is not lifting for the USA any longer, he still has a huge fan base here in America. A lot of people, myself included, look forward to supporting Norik on his climb to Mount Olympus.

105kg. Class

The 105kg. class had 17 participants. Donny Shankle won the class and totaled 359kg. Donny gave everyone a scare when he missed his opening attempt snatch of 156kg. Donny came through

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like a champion and showed his platform experience when he nailed his second attempt at 156kg. Finishing second was Donovan Ford who found himself trailing Shankle by only one kilo in the snatch after he made 155kg. on his second attempt. Donovan called for 158 for his third attempt snatch and had he made this lift he would have pulled ahead of Shankle by 2kg. going into the clean and jerk. Yasha Kahn who finished in third place overall made a 153kg. snatch on his second attempt. Yasha also attempted 158kg. on his third snatch and had he made that he would have moved into first place after the snatch. At the end of the snatch the standings were very close with only 3kg. separating third from first place. During the past couple of weeks Donny had been putting up some pretty heavy lifts on You Tube. He opened up the clean and jerks with 197kg. and started after all the other competitors in his class had used their three attempts. After sewing up the win with an easy 197kg. Donny called for 203kg. on his second attempt and made an identical success. On his third attempt he called for 210kg., but the weight did not stay in the air for him this day. Although the official selection for the USA World Team has not been made yet, in all probability Donny's 359kg. total should be enough for him to make it.

Seven out of the 17 participants failed to total. As mentioned earlier, a lot of grumbling was going on about the platform having ridges on it and being not exactly flat. After reviewing the results there seemed to be a high number of first attempts missed, and the condition of the platform may have played a part in this unusual statistic.

Marcin Dolega of Poland won last year's World Championships with a total of 415kg. Donny's 359 total would have placed him 22nd at last year's Worlds. Lazero Lopez of Cuba won last year's Pan American Championships with a total of 388kg. Shankle's 359kg. total is a one kilo improvement over his last year's total of 358kg. and this would have placed Donny third at last year's Pan Americans.

+105kg. Class

The +105kg. class had 15 competitors. Traditionally the +105 class is the most anticipated class at the nationals. Pat Mendes was the winner in the class and out-totaled his nearest competitor by 21kg. Pat snatched 177kg. on his third attempt and cleaned and push jerked 212kg. Both weights were seamlessly easy. Pat has been recovering from some nagging injuries, and it is very apparent he is capable of some big results. His 389 total should qualify him for the 2011 Pan Am Games and the 2011 World Championships. This will be the first time Pat steps on the international platform and will give him a chance to show the world who he is. He has stated his goal is to medal at the upcoming Olympic Games. The upcoming World Championships will give Pat the opportunity to take a huge step in that direction. The USA has had a history of some pretty talented Superheavyweights: Anderson, Schemanski, Bednarski, Dube, Patera, Martinez and Hamman. At the rate Pat is going he will join this group of American strong men and become a serious threat on the International platform.

Behdad Salimikordasiabi of Iran won last year's +105 class at the World Championships with a 453kg. total. Pat's 389kg. total would have placed him 16th at last year's Worlds. Julio Caesar Arteaga won last year's Pan Am Championship with a 389kg. total. Pat's 389 total would have tied Arteaga for first place. No doubt Pat will do some serious damage at this year's Pan Ams, and he is the odds-on favorite to bring a gold medal home for team USA.

It is very important that the USAW send our best men's team to both the Pan American and World Championships. We will need top performances from our athletes to have a shot at getting more than one token Olympic slot at the 2012 Games. There were some bright spots here and there at this year's nationals. As you can see from this report team USA is still lagging behind the rest of

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the world in overall performance. We have lost any advantage we used to have in the Pan American Championships. The South American countries continue to improve and are literally leaving us in the dust. Team USA's performance continues to remain stagnant while the progress of the South American countries continues. For the sport to survive in the USA it is obvious that we have to start producing better weightlifters and higher totals. As it looks right now, we will be very fortunate to have one men's and one's women's slot in the upcoming Olympics unless things change dramatically. It appears as though the International Weightlifting Federation is content on going forward with or without the USA participating in the sport at the Olympic level. The latest rule changes put in place by the IWF have made it very difficult for the USA to obtain any Olympic slots.

As this hand plays out, it will be very interesting to see how many officials the USAW sends to the Olympics to manage one or two athletes. I know there are people out there who are trying to make things better. But it is very important that we do not confuse activity with results. The only measurement that counts is the amount of weight lifted in competitions. This number does not seem to be going up in USA Weightlifting. There are only two sound ways to improve the sport of weightlifting in this country. The first is that we get really lucky and the 1-in-300 million genetic freak shows up and stumbles his/her way to the top. The second way is to develop a grassroots system combined with a fast-track program and a logical feeder program that would support the development of world-class professional weightlifters. The second sounds better to me, because it provides a way to actually do something instead of merely waiting for something to happen.

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