

SPORTS & OUTDOORS



Wyatt Sanford spots Dylan Quade squatting.



Megan Welshons spots Nataly Milbradt on the bench as Lisa Anderson watches.

AITKIN DOES THE HEAVY LIFTING

Success in athletics is closely linked to strength training and Aitkin athletic program makes commitment to improve weight room

If there is such a thing as a good problem, the Aitkin athletic department has found one: strength training. Strength training has captivated the attention of nearly 30 multiple sport athletes who work out three mornings a week.

"When we began the program last summer we had five kids involved. With each passing week the numbers continue to expand. At this point we have more kids than equipment," said football coach Tom Sanford.

Lifting is an important part of the girls' basketball program and the baseball program too.

Therein lies the problem.

"Sometimes I wait for about a half hour before I get a chance to squat and clean because there are only three stations," said Calvin Welle, an eighth grade student at Aitkin High School.

"But we keep coming in anyway and try to get through as many lifts as we can because we really saw it help us in basketball," added David Sanbeck, also an eighth grade student. "It is the main reason we did so well."

"Their efforts in the weight room have made such a difference on the court," said Coach Walt Sauerbrei of the eighth grade basketball squad. "The boys played with a confidence and energy that I believe they gained in the weight room. They got every loose basketball and out-rebounded their opponents on both ends of the court."

"The kids and their parents have made quite a commitment to this program," said volunteer supervisor Ann Kukowski about the program that begins at 6:50 each Monday, Wednesday, and Friday morning. "It is awesome to see everyone's dedication

Community can help

Donations can be made to the Aitkin Quarterbacks Club. Write weight room on the memo blank. Mail donations in care of Quarterbacks Club, PO Box 211, Aitkin, Minn., 56431.

and watch the boys reap the benefits of their hard work. Lifting is catching on and it will be nice to see more equipment added so the kids are able to complete their workouts. I'd hate to see the kids stop coming in because they are not able to accomplish what they set out to do."

The addition of equipment will solve this problem.

Varsity basketball coach Rob Williams has witnessed the positive effects of strength training in the girls' program as well.

"Over the past two seasons, we have made our strength and speed training a much more important component to both our in-season and off-season programs. The girls are excited about getting in the weight room to become better, stronger athletes. I don't think that it is a coincidence that we are not only experiencing more success in the win column, but both physically and mentally our girls feel stronger and often wear down their opponents at key moments late in the game," Williams said.

"The weight room does many positive things for athletes and non-athletes," added baseball coach Jeremy Janzen. "It teaches discipline, work ethic and commitment - all things that people need throughout life."



Aitkin boys who lift every Monday, Wednesday and Friday include (front) Jacob Kukowski, Kade Hopperstad, Alex Kukowski, Darek Rono, Zak Peterson, Nick Smith, Tom Peterson, Dylan Quade, Wyatt Sanford, (back) Logan Cluff, Jack Kuppich, Calvin Welle, Sam Peterson, David Sanbeck, Caleb Curtiss, Zack Simonson, Jeb Sanford, Hunter Sanford, Clayton Richardson and Brett Harris. Not pictured are Hunter Miller, Hunter Westerlund, Garrett Westerlund, Jake Westerlund, Nathan Hagestuen and Jesse Henline.

Legendary coach to speak in Aitkin

Athletes and parents are encouraged to attend at First Lutheran March 14

Area athletes and parents will have the opportunity to hear nationally renowned speaker and coach, Ron Stolski, address the importance of strength training in athletes. There is no charge for the event that begins at First Lutheran Church in Aitkin at 7 p.m. March 14. The public is welcome to attend.

Stolski, the winningest coach in Minnesota football, addressed over 20 Aitkin athletes at a Lift-a-Thon in Brainerd February 27.

"We invited these kids today so they could see what they are capable of down the road," said Stolski. Stolski, who has won over 300 games at the varsity level in his tenure, says that the Brainerd program was built on strength.

"As our former defensive coordinator Steve Nunnink used to say, 'There is no substitute for strength and no excuse for not having it because strength is under our control,'" Stolski said.

His message is one of team building through dedication to hard work and commitment to each other.



Young athletes Kade Hopperstad, Gus Sanford and Garrett Westerlund visit with Ron Stolski at the Brainerd Lift-a-Thon.

Volunteers give weight room a face lift

Quarterback's Club initiates fundraising effort

According to Chet Stevenson, the strength coordinator for the Brainerd athletic department, it is important for lifters to be dedicated and consistent.

"The dedication is evident," said Stevenson of the Aitkin athletes who utilize the weight room.

Stevenson, a retired physical education instructor who still coaches varsity football and track in Brainerd, travels the country speaking about strength training as well as facilitating improvements to weight rooms for school districts.

"Strength training is the common thread in athletics," said Stevenson. "Schools need to establish a program that meets the needs of their athletes and can be implemented into the existing facility. A common program is crucial in a school the size of Aitkin where so many students are multiple sport athletes. Lifting different programs leads to confusion - not just for the kids, but for their muscle groups. With the addition of some key pieces of equipment and a school-wide program, the consistency will come," added

Stevenson.

An effective program will increase the core strength of an athlete through running, stretching, agility work and lifting. In Aitkin, coaches have also implemented injury prevention exercises.

"The squat and clean are the two major lifts for athletes because they include the ankle, knee and hip," said Stevenson. "Our goal is to create more stations for these lifts."

Currently, the Aitkin weight room has just three squat and bench stations and only one place to clean.

"Our program requires three sets of five or more repetitions and 14 different lifts," said Sanford. "Unfortunately, we do not have the needed equipment. This creates a lag for lifters who need to complete their workouts."

Athletic Director Cathy Hughes has spearheaded an effort to improve the weight room. Stevenson agreed to volunteer his time to consult with Hughes about changes that will foster the facility. After careful consideration, Hughes and Stevenson put together a pro-

posal.

By reconfiguring the current equipment, enough space was made available for three additional squat and bench stations as well as six additional places to clean. Seven adults and over 20 students volunteered their time on March 2 and moved equipment.

"We have created a better training opportunity for our athletes," said Hughes. "We have a strength room upstairs that houses free weights and a com-

plete circuit training experience available in our lower facility."

The Aitkin Quarterbacks Club volunteered to lead fundraising efforts for the improvement of the facility.

"Our community follows athletics as well as any community state-wide, we love watching our student-athletes perform but to continuously compete at the next level it is a must to have this addition to our school," Janzen concluded.



Kalvin Welle spots Brett Harris power cleaning.



Nearly 30 volunteers helped reorganize the weight room at AHS March 2. Above - John Welle and Alex Kukowski assemble a tower.