

walking DEADLIFT

Appearances are deceiving for powerlifter whose intense focus extends to other areas

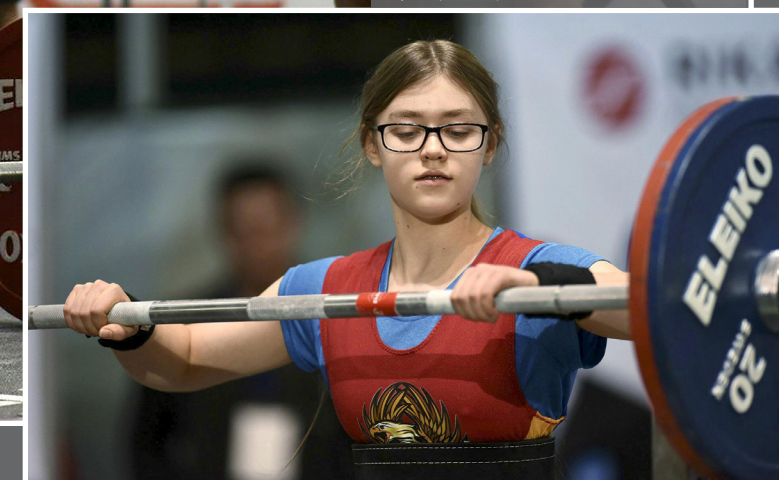
heavy lifting

Benching 143.3 pounds in the opening lift, sophomore Emily Gardner finishes with a 160-pound bench press (right). In the squat competition, Gardner won the gold medal for Team USA with a lift of 281.1 pounds. Lena Sjoel of Norway finished second, and Valeriia Vlosova from Russia finished third in the competition (below).



girl power

At the Classic Powerlifting 2015 World Championship in Salo, Finland, on June 8, sophomore Emily Gardner deadlifts 270.1 pounds (left). Gardner opened the competition with a 253.53-pound squat (below).



Sparkling blue eyes hidden partially behind the frames of glasses and dark blond hair falling down her back were the first two things one noticed when they saw her walking in the hallways. But unknown to most of the school's population was the fact that sophomore Emily Gardner held multiple official and unofficial records in squatting and was able to lift 270 pounds, over twice her weight and four-and-a-half times over what the average woman in the U.S. is able to lift without training.

"Powerlifting is what everyone thinks when you say, 'Oh, I powerlift,' and they immediately think of bodybuilding, which is very different than powerlifting," Gardner said. "Powerlifting is all about personal strength, and bodybuilding is about physique and stuff like that. So people don't really think that girls would be into powerlifting, and they'd think that I'd be all beefy, but you go into [the gym] and there's this woman who benches 300 pounds, but she looks just like a regular mom."

Several deciding factors allowed Gardner to achieve the status of Deadlift World Champion, including her serious, reserved personality and the time she devoted to the sport over the past three years.

"I've been told that I'm kind of obsessive, so I tend to focus on one thing. But powerlifting, unlike some of the sports here [at Westlake], it doesn't have to be your whole world. Since you're working with max numbers, the little things matter," Gardner said. "If you have one foot slightly forward or you aren't sitting neutrally, it can affect your lifting

ability. I just think it shows more about dedication."

During the time when she wasn't at the gym, Gardner was also a part of the all-girls robotics team, which exposed her to two very different and prominent aspects of Westlake and the rest of the community.

"[Lifting] definitely changed my perception on the kind of sporty people and the jocks, so it's opened me to different people because you have the athletic people in lifting and all the geeky people in robotics. It's kind of cool to see all of them," Gardner said. "There are a lot of people at the gym who are from all different walks of life, like lawyers and doctors, and so it's really neat to be open to everyone."

While Gardner enjoyed participating in the sport for herself as a hobby, her coach ultimately gave her the ability to work for the title of champion and helped make her into who she was as a person.

"What I like is that whenever I, personally, do well, I'm really proud of myself, but then my coach would come over and give me a hug, and he's all excited and happy," Gardner said. "Seeing him that happy kind of rubs off on me."

Lifting for Gardner created an environment where she was able to focus only on herself and her own mental strength, a place where she could truly succeed.

"It's nice because you're only fighting against yourself. You go in and just do what you can and accept it. It doesn't matter how other people do. For you, you know you had a good day or you know that you did the best you could, and that's enough," Gardner said. "That's all that really matters."