

Weightlifters compete in Keystone Games at York Barbell

The Keystone Games' weightlifting competition was one stop on the way to bigger goals for some competitors.

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Jeisah Deibler, 20, of Quarryville lifted a combined 234 kilos at the Keystone State Games weightlifting competition at York Barbell on Saturday. (Daily Record/Sunday News -- Jason Plotkin)

York, PA - Mike Nackoul watched the opening ceremony of the Olympics at a restaurant in York on Friday night, alongside his coach and a few fellow weightlifters. As athletes paraded across the TV screen, Nackoul couldn't help but wonder if he might get to do the same someday -- maybe four years from now, when the summer Olympics land in Rio de Janeiro.

Nackoul, 21, is one of the United States' top college-aged Olympic weightlifters. The Pittsburgh-area native placed seventh in his weight class at the World Junior Championships in 2011, and harbors dreams of making it to his sport's biggest stage.

On Saturday, he settled for a spot on the platform at the famous York Barbell, which hosted the



Seventy-six year old Bruce Spiegelberg of Lancaster competed at the Keystone State Games weightlifting competition at York Barbell on Saturday. Spiegelberg began powerlifting at age 60 but shifted his attention to Olympic-style weightlifting more recently. (Daily Record/Sunday News -- Jason Plotkin)

Keystone Games weightlifting competition. The event drew dozens of male and female competitors of varying ages and ability levels -- from 17-year-old novices to experienced lifters in their 60s and 70s. Athletes attempted two Olympic-style lifts -- the snatch and the clean and jerk.

Nackoul's presence drew considerable attention from those present. He flew back from Colorado Springs -- where he was training at the U.S. Olympic complex -- last Monday and drove to York on Friday.

"It's been a long week," Nackoul said with a laugh afterward.

Still, he didn't disappoint those in the audience, many of whom snapped photos and filmed his lifts with cell phone cameras. Nackoul set three consecutive state records in his three snatch attempts -- a move that involves lifting a barbell from the ground to above one's head in a single, quick motion. His last lift set a new personal record of 148 kilograms (326 pounds).

Later, he cleared 180 kilograms (396 pounds) in the clean and jerk.

Nackoul, who competes in the 85 kilogram weight class, began Olympic weightlifting when he was 12 or 13 growing up in Canonsburg. "Just playing around," he said. "I kind of fell in love with it."

He has



Sewar AbuNuwar of Pittsburgh competed at the Keystone State Games weightlifting competition at York Barbell on Saturday. (Daily Record/Sunday News -- Jason Plotkin)

since won schoolboy-age national titles and placed himself on an exclusive list of Olympic hopefuls. Nackoul will be 25 by the Rio de Janeiro games, which is right around the age at which a lifter his size typically peaks.

Nackoul is also a rising senior at M.I.T., where he studies mechanical engineering.

Saturday's event was not limited to elite-level competitors, however. Many see weightlifting as another means to stay fit or test their own limits.

Bruce Spiegelberg, 76, made the short drive to York Barbell from his home in Mount Nebo. Spiegelberg began powerlifting at age 60, but shifted his attention to Olympic-style weightlifting more recently. He has a coach and hopes to compete in three competitions this year.

"Weightlifting is one of the best fitness activities for people my age," said Spiegelberg, who is also a prostate cancer survivor. "When people think of exercise, they only think of something genteel. Bicycling or running. They always think of aerobic exercise, and they neglect the strength."

For others, like Nackoul, the goals are more concrete.

He will get an up-close look at the Olympics this week -- he's flying to London on Wednesday, and will watch a few of the weightlifting sessions there.

A sneak peak, Nackoul hopes, into what his own future might hold.

"It's what I work for," he said of making the Olympics. "It's a long ways away and a lot of work ahead."

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