ESSEX MIDDLE SCHOOL (EMS), a school for grades 6–8 in Essex, VT, is home to the North-East Regional Training for USA Weightlifting. From its humble beginnings, the 1,460-sq ft room has grown to be equipped with 7 platforms and 4 men’s and 2 women’s Eleiko bars. The room also has enough lightweight bars (AlumaLite) for every platform to start off any beginner wanting to learn how to do weightlifting.

Every one of the 500+ students who attends EMS goes through a general body-building program as part of their physical education program. A plan to include the hang power clean to the program will be initiated this year to identify possible candidates for weightlifting.

After school, the program really gets going, as 30 or more children come in to learn weightlifting. Beginners start right after school until an “activity bus” returns the children home (1425–1510 hours). More advanced level lifters come in after 1510 hours to start their lifting. Several students from the local high school travel the 4 mi. to lift in the facility. Although other athletes from surrounding districts are invited to join, the present population comes strictly from the town of Essex.

The school administration has been very supportive of the program. They see the importance of strength training as a means of lifelong fitness. They see the interest and success the program has achieved. Last year, the EMS girls’ 16 and under team was the Nation’s Second Best at the National Junior Weightlifting Championships.

A small amount of the money to support the program has come from the school budget. Another equal amount has been through fund-raisers and grants. It is hoped that with the growth of the program, more interest will be found from other sources to support the program.

The beginners are initiated into the program with lessons on how to do the lifts from the USA’s Weightlifting Club Coach Text, plus some “extras” the director has come up with in learning proper technique. The snatch is usually taught first, followed by the clean and jerk (Figures 1–5). From there, the group follows a 40-workout script before moving to the advanced group.

For the advanced lifters, the program is formulated from the classical periodization model for competition. The lifters go through a period of more general strength conditioning, followed by a specific strength-conditioning cycle. An early competition cycle will be followed by a peak phase targeted for the big meet for that individual. All advanced lifters are individually assessed to meet their needs. Unloading cycles are usually found to coincide with holidays, time when big exams are eminent, important academic occurrences are present, or before a meet.

Upper-level intensities during workouts vary according to the developmental and training age of the lifter. Recent studies have ascertained that younger, less skilled lifters would benefit from intensities no higher than 75% of their maximum. More advanced, better skilled lifters can be better stimulated with weights >80% of their maximum for 1 repetition. Children at Essex Middle School lift no higher than 75%, whereas the high schoolers who have remained in the program are allowed to move up in their workout intensities.

The main theme is that technique will never be compromised. Children are educated on the technical mastery of the classical lifts. A point of clarification is that less efficient lifting techniques yield more weight early on. Their larger muscles have generally
been left dormant. These same muscles have the potential for much greater weights lifted when developed. This development needs time to occur.

A word about the prepubescent child: Many of our younger trainers have yet to have circulating androgens being produced in their bodies. If the main intensities (about 98% of the total volume) are kept in the 75% or below range, if the supervision and discipline are always at maximum, and if technical mastery is the number 1 priority in training your youngsters, then nothing but development will come from training. Strength is the most trainable (albeit not as high in older trainers) physical attribute for this age group.

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