



Sydney McWilliams and Kendra Young have turned themselves into legitimate state-level weightlifters – and have the medals to prove it!

# Girl Power at Leesburg High

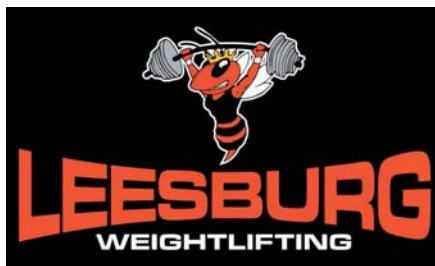
A powerful program for strong women

BY **COACH JOSH BOYER**

At Leesburg High School I teach weight training and also coach and run the strength and conditioning programs for several sports. Whether it is in a classroom setting or in our workouts after school, BFS principles play an important role in the success of those who truly invest in the weightroom or, as we call it, *The Iron Jungle*.

My proudest accomplishment is in helping to build our girls weightlifting program. Weightlifting is recognized as a sport through the Florida High School Athletic Association, and Leesburg High has participated in the program for the past five years. Last season was our most successful ever – we finished in the top 10 in the state finals and produced our first state medalist in our history.

While incorporating mottoes such as “Don’t Be Average” (courtesy of



my college quarterback coach), I pride myself in using workouts designed to produce results in all athletes, male and female. One of our shirts from a couple of years ago states, “There are NO boys or girls in the weightroom, ONLY ATHLETES!” This slogan couldn’t be truer in the way our female athletes approach the weightroom.

My personal philosophy is to treat student-athletes as simply athletes, irrespective of gender. They all train on the same lifts, the same set-and-rep schemes – the same everything. However, I have

found that female athletes generally pick up body position and alignment more quickly compared to their male counterparts.

In our program, seniors Sydney McWilliams and Kendra Young have embraced the concepts of the BFS Six Absolutes and have turned themselves into legitimate state-level weightlifters. They have been in the program since their freshman year and have made certain competitors remember them once the competition is over.

Sydney has a regular-season career record of 24-3 (two of those losses were in her freshman year in a lighter weight class), and Kendra has a regular-season career record of 25-2 (one of those losses was in her freshman year when her own upperclassman teammate lifted in the same weight class as Kendra, and

the other came against the eventual state champion last season).

Sydney is a three-time sectional qualifier, which in Florida is a meet away from State, and a two-time District 6 sub-sectional champion in the 129-pound class; she earned her first state qualification last season as a junior, finishing 13th in the state and learning some valuable lessons at the state finals. Sydney is now a Top 129 lifter in the entire state. Her best lifts include a 145-pound bench press (with a pause), a 145 clean and jerk, a 150 clean, a 225 parallel back squat (yes, parallel), a 190 front squat and a 250 hex bar deadlift.

Kendra is also a three-time sectional qualifier, two-time District 6 sub-sectional champion in the 154-pound class (losing the 139-pound sub-sectional championship to a teammate her freshman year), and a two-time state qualifier in the 154-pound class, finishing eighth in state her sophomore year and third place last season. Kendra has a 175 bench (185 with no pause), a 175 clean and jerk, a 295 parallel back squat, a 225 front squat and a 300 hex bar deadlift. Now in her senior year, Kendra is one of the top weightlifters in the entire state across all weight classes.

One of our graduates from last season, Madison Carmichael, finished fourth in the FHSAA state finals. In its short, four-year history, our program finished in the top 10 in the state finals and brought home our first two state medalists.

As for the future, both Kendra and Sydney will take their abilities into USAW (USA Weightlifting) club competitions. After high school, both plan to attend a local college and continue competing on the USAW level. They will be joined by Cheyenne Hunnewell and Kailey Stephens in taking their successes outside the high school level into USAW club competition. We are glad to be able to take the special nature of what we've built in our girls program and continue it on the club level. Our club isn't as large as our high school team, but we will continue to develop this program as we have our Leesburg High School girls weightlifting program.

Our girls weightlifting program is stronger than ever. Currently we are riding a 34-meet, regular-season winning streak into this upcoming season, and we have developed lifters ready to keep this program performing at state-caliber level. We will fill all 10 weight classes with quality lifters, most of whom are seasoned competitors with impressive numbers.

Our veteran group will be paired with a smaller rookie group who will be able to develop without the pressure of having to be dominant lifters at this time. Our lifters include veterans Hailey Smith, Marah Rhone, Valerica Nails, Nastasia Johnson, Kendall Caudill, Julie Bitsios, Katrina Lanier, Cheyenne Hunnewell, Deja Taylor, Jessica Jackson, Mckenzie Bennett, Kailey Stephens and

Courtney Rabun, as well as newcomers Kalyn Trull, Morgan Rhone, Kassidy Boliek, Leann Holappa, Kayla Lacey, Taylor Johnson, Lexus Green and Emma Harris. I am particularly proud of our veteran group for taking the program very seriously and being pioneers in creating a legacy for our high school.

Many of our lifters are multi-sport student-athletes, and those who have been participating in the strength and conditioning program have seen their hard work pay off in other sports. On the weightlifting team, we have female student-athletes who play volleyball and softball and compete on the track and field team. Quite a few girls from the weightlifting program play other sports, and the girls weightlifting team spends a lot of time with the girls basketball program in the Iron Jungle.

All the athletes I train in the weightroom learn the BFS Six Absolutes, and they understand that although we may play different sports, our goals in the weightroom remain consistent. Coach Mark Oates, the girls basketball coach, has been a huge advocate for female athletes training in the weightroom. Coach Marcel Thomas, the boys basketball coach, also understands the importance of the weightroom. Coach Oates and Thomas have entrusted me with the physical development of their basketball players during the off-season. The BFS ideal of unification has proven



The strength developed in the weightroom carries through to performance in other sports. Shown are the Leesburg High School girls basketball team (after winning the district title) and the girls weightlifting team.

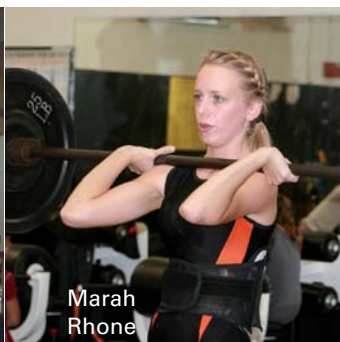




Madison Carmichael



Kendra Young



Marah Rhone



Sydney McWilliams

The clean and jerk is part of a statewide high school weightlifting program in Florida.

to be the only way to run a successful strength and conditioning program.

At Leesburg High School, all our athletes speak the same weightroom language. If I correct a body position through restating one of the BFS Six Absolutes, they all know immediately what needs to be corrected. Our athletes power clean the same progressions, squat to parallel or below, and work all the lifts together.

I spend a considerable amount of time reading research articles and studies, and I relay information to our athletes so they can have a deeper knowledge about what I'm asking them to do instead of having them do it just because Coach says so. Our kids understand philosophies such as the importance of proper depth to their

squat in order to ensure proper quad-to-hamstring strength ratios.

Our girls are not average by any means, and they aren't inferior to any male counterpart. I don't train high school boys and girls; I train *athletes*. I treat the girls the same as I treat the boys, and the research I've read reiterates what we have practiced all along – that male and female athletes should be trained the same.

Our girls do understand that they are more prone to ACL issues than their male counterparts. They take their training very seriously and are careful about knee-to-toe alignment and maintaining a tall posture; they have the coaching points down so well that they self-correct before the chance of injury really ever exists. We aren't bulletproof,

of course – we still get strains and soreness – but we don't experience any serious injuries during our training sessions.

In girls weightlifting we work some serious weights that are very impressive in regard to pound-for-pound ratios. Our athletes are able to lift these weights with confidence because they have a solid handle on keeping their bodies safe through practicing the BFS Six Absolutes in every single rep.

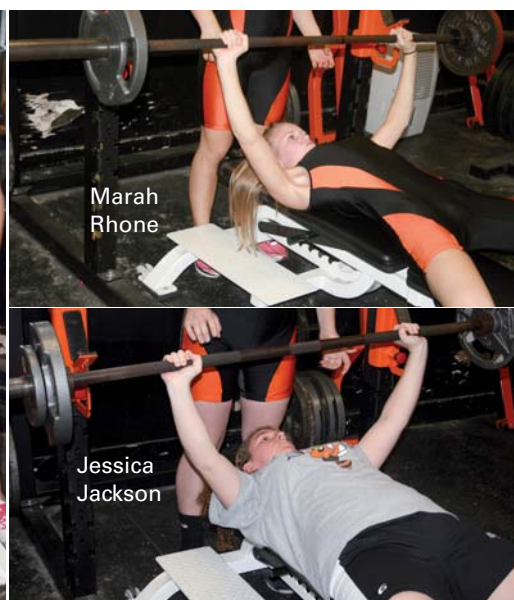
As our motto states, we don't train boys or girls in the weightroom; we train athletes. Our athletic programs have compiled a lot of wins, but even more important is that those who invest in the Leesburg Iron Jungle are successful in so many more ways than just wins and losses. **BFS**



Valerica Nails



Sydney McWilliams



Marah Rhone

Jessica Jackson

The second lift in the Florida weightlifting program is the bench press; it is performed without assistive gear, and the athletes must pause with the bar on the chest.

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