

Kelly winning the 2004 School Age Nationals, one of her many titles.

America's Strongest Girl

Weightlifter Kelly Lynch is proving that there's more to life than sports, even if you are the best

BY KIM GOSS

Kelly Lynch is a typical teenager who likes to hang out with friends, go to movies and listen to music. She comes from a good family, is involved in many school activities, and is an honor student who is looking forward to a rewarding career in nursing. Other than that, there's nothing much special about Kelly Lynch — except, perhaps, for the fact that she's also the strongest teenager in the country.

Kelly is a senior at Blue Valley Northwest High School in Overland Park, Kansas. It's a relatively small suburb of Kansas City, with approximately 120,000 residents, but it has big-city support for its promising athletes. And just how good a weightlifter is Kelly Lynch?

Kelly has clean and jerked 249 pounds, approximately 100 pounds over her bodyweight, and snatched 190 pounds. Twice she has placed

in the top 10 in the Junior World Championships, reserved for the best 20-year-old-and-under lifters in the world, and this year she was the only American to win her class at the Junior Pan American Championships in Cali, Columbia. She is unquestionably one of our best hopes for a medal in the Olympics.

Like Brother, Like Sister

The first weightlifter in the Lynch family was Kelly's brother, Kevin Jr., who started when he was 12. Kevin Sr. had heard about a Russian weightlifting coach, Boris Urman, who was living in a nearby community and training athletes in his basement. Kevin thought that weight training might be good for his son, a multi-sport athlete, although he admits that at first he had reservations about starting his son at such a young age with Olympic-style weightlifting.

"I was just sure that you weren't supposed to lift heavy weights until you were 16, so I checked with our pediatrician," says Kevin. "This doctor said the lifting would be OK as long as he's supervised, and that most injuries to kids happen when nobody is watching and they are playing around. I still didn't believe him, so I went to two other pediatric groups, looking for somebody to confirm my belief that kids shouldn't lift until they're 16, but they told me it wasn't harmful and it wouldn't stunt their growth or any of the other old wives' tales."

After Kevin Jr. had trained with Boris for a year, Kelly started tagging along to watch the workouts. Since kindergarten Kelly has participated in volleyball, baseball, softball, track and field, Irish dance and gymnastics. Kevin thought that having Kelly work with Boris would help her excel at these other activities, and she agreed to give it

a try – although she admits that she was afraid of getting muscle-bound “and looking like Arnold Schwarzenegger.”

At first, Kelly had a difficult time understanding Boris’ English, as it was not his first language. “When he talked, I had no idea what he was saying, so I was actually a little frightened,” says Kelly. “But then I got to know him, and I learned how to understand what he was saying.” Soon she decided to try some lifting and was pleased with her initial results. “The weight training definitely helped, making me stronger, faster and more flexible. It gave me a lot more confidence – I used to be really shy and quiet.”

Boris recalls that at first he was not all that impressed with Kelly’s overall coordination, and he admits he was giving most of his attention to her brother. “But she continued to train and became much better,” says Boris. Kevin says those initial workouts contained a lot of



The Lynch Family: Kelly, Kevin Jr., Theresa and Kevin Sr.

bodybuilding-type movements to build a base of general muscle conditioning, but eventually the focus for Kelly became the Olympic lifts, the snatch

and the clean and jerk.

If a weightlifter is to have a future on the international level, Boris says, they have to start young, as Kelly had. “The world champions in juniors become the world

champions in seniors, and you are only young once. My coaching style is



Prior to focusing on weightlifting, Kelly participated in dance and many other sports.

FEATURE STORY

to start by sending young children first to gymnastics, then by age 8 or 9 start with Olympic lifting – but be certain to have a special coach who knows how to coach kids with safety. A high-quality coach who knows what they are doing.”

“Boris is the old-school Russian-type coach who builds the athlete first

“My fondest memories in lifting were in Colombia – it was really exciting to hear the National Anthem played for me.”

– Kelly Lynch

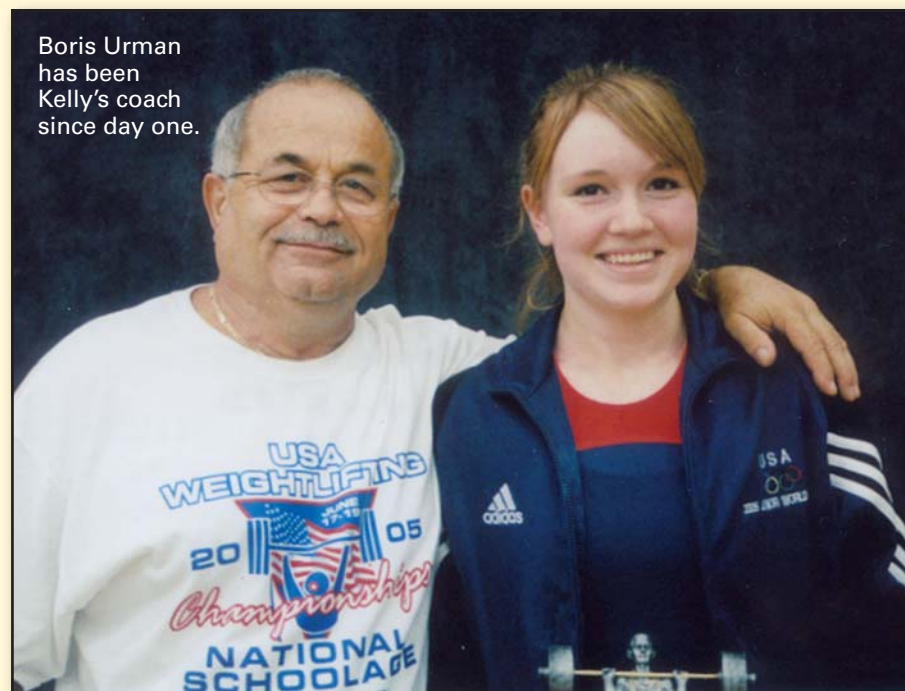
and then finds the best sport for him or her to play,” says Kevin. When he started with Kevin Jr. and Kelly, he built them up with a lot of assistance exercises. I read a lot of stuff about how the Bulgarian weightlifters train, just doing the lifts and the squat, but Boris does a lot of assistance exercises such as

push presses and pulls.” Such preparation, says Kelly’s dad, might explain why she has had few injuries, none of them serious.

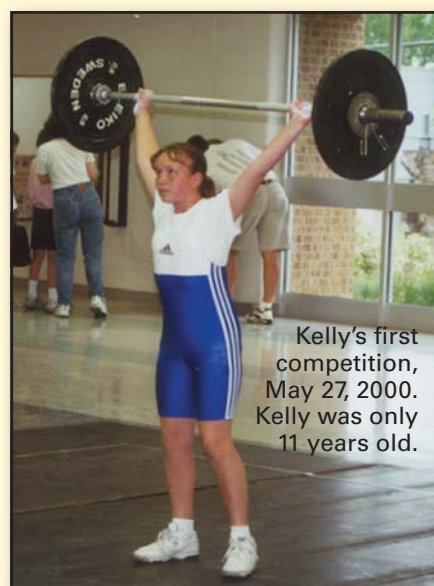
Kelly says that the technique of the lifts didn’t come easy for her. “It can be really frustrating at first when you’re trying to learn the basic technique, but once you get it, then it clicks – you just have to make it past that point.” Kevin says that Kelly started lifting maximum weights at age 12, but he wasn’t concerned. “At the time, Kelly’s max wasn’t heavy enough to really hurt her, and Boris would only let her max if her technique was good. Whenever she did anything wrong, like pulling with her arms too much, Boris would make her go back to the lighter weights.”

If you ask Boris, one of the biggest problems with US lifters is allowing the weights to crash on them in the bottom position, resulting in stress that he believes can cause injury and has led many top lifters to early retirement. Says Boris, “Lifters must meet the weights properly and be smooth, like a dancer.”

Kevin Jr. continued to improve and



Boris Urman has been Kelly's coach since day one.



Kelly's first competition, May 27, 2000. Kelly was only 11 years old.

was soon entering competitions, eventually winning several School Age (age 17 and under) National competitions, but in high school he lost interest and focused on his academics. As for Kelly, at first she had no interest whatsoever in competing in the sport. “I really, really did not want to do it because I thought it would be like girls wrestling or girls playing football – that it was a “guy sport” and not something I wanted to do.” But when she saw one of her brother’s competitions, she gained a different perspective and decided to compete.

Kelly applied herself seriously to Boris’ training. “At the beginning it was just pretty much nonchalant – just “learn the lifts” – and as things progressed, it got more and more demanding.” Kelly says that Boris’ style might be considered “harsh,” but Boris explains that he doesn’t give compliments that are not earned. “I tell the truth – I don’t like the style of coaching I often see in this country that is to keep kids busy and give compliments.”

Stepping Up to the Platform

Kelly’s first major competition was the AAU Junior Olympics in May of

2000. In the 117-pound bodyweight division, Kelly snatched 55 pounds and clean and jerked 83 pounds. She tied for first place but lost because she weighed more than the other top girl in her class. Kevin says that after that, Kelly was usually winning competitions by 25 pounds or more.

By 2004 she was so good that she went to Junior Worlds, placing ninth with a 160 snatch and 215 clean and jerk. The following year she repeated that placing but lifted 174 and 227. Her training environment also improved considerably, as Boris was able to move into a 3,000-square-foot facility and train many other lifters, some full-time lifters and some multi-sport athletes. Kevin also took some weightlifting courses, and he helps out as an assistant as his schedule permits.

In 2006 Kelly's biggest competition was the Junior Pan American Championships in Cali, Colombia. Kelly moved up a bodyweight class, as the US Team coaches thought she'd have a better chance at a medal; it was a good move, as she made 181 and 238 to win the only gold medal for the US team. "My fondest memories in lifting were in Colombia – it was really exciting to hear the National Anthem played for me."

Later in the year she moved back down to her normal class and broke all her School Age American records and broke the Junior (age 20 and under) American record in the clean and jerk. Her performance qualified her for this year's Junior Worlds. She is train-

(Steve Fauer Photography)



Kelly lifting 249 pounds in the clean and jerk, one of her many Schoolage American records. She has also snatched 190 pounds.

ing hard, recently front squatting 308 pounds and back squatting 352 pounds. Based upon her current training, she expects to make 198 in the snatch and 260 to 264 in the clean and jerk. After that, she is looking to make the Senior Worlds team and earn a spot in the Olympics.

An Uplifting Future

A typical day for Kelly, a high school senior, is to "get up at 6:00 a.m., go to school, eat a turkey sandwich, work out for two hours, then do homework." She holds a 4.33 GPA and is involved in many school clubs and activities. One program has her mentoring freshmen, and last year her honor society club was involved with a project that enabled the school to send more than 200 care packages to soldiers in Iraq. "We got some nice e-mails back from the troops, telling us how much they appreciated our efforts," says Kelly.

After graduation, Kelly plans to move to Colorado Springs, Colorado, where she will be a resident athlete at the Olympic Training Center. "I can't wait – I've been counting down the days until I would move to Colorado since I was a freshman." Kevin says Kelly's new coach will be Bob Morris but hopes that Boris may still be able to be involved in her training.

In Colorado Springs Kelly will be attending the University of Colorado at an extension school, majoring in nursing. USA Weightlifting doesn't allow resident athletes to attend school full-time, but Kevin says Kelly has

already earned 32 college credit hours in high school, and she will be able to enroll in summer school, so she won't fall too far behind her classmates. Eventually Kelly hopes to follow the career path of her cousin Megan, who is a nurse-anesthesiologist.

Asked what she likes most about weightlifting, Kelly says that she likes the fact that it allows her to be the one to determine her level of accomplishment. "I like that weightlifting is an individual sport, so if I mess up, it's my fault and I'm not cutting down a whole team. I don't want to depend upon other people for my success." Kevin points out that the sport of weightlifting has been a very positive part of his daughter's life. "Kelly has been able to travel all over the country and to many parts of the world, and it's been great for her confidence and self-esteem. Weightlifting has helped her develop a strong identity." **BS**



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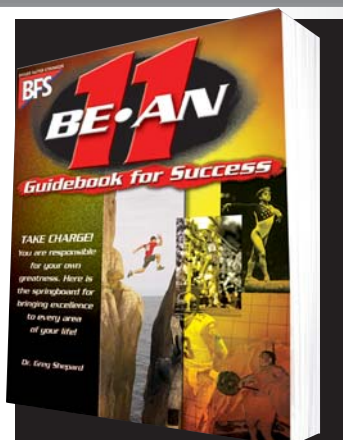
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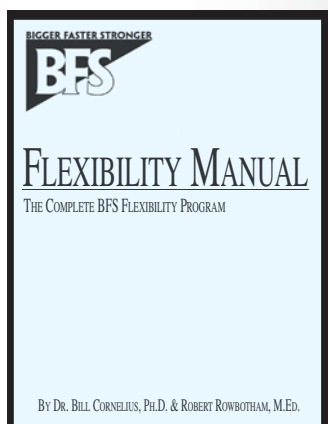


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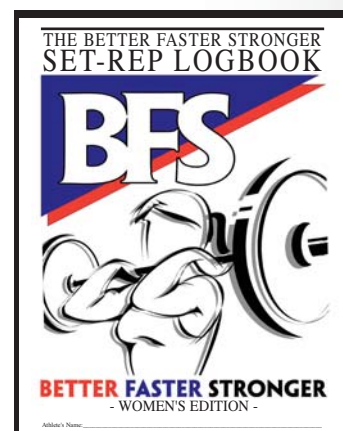


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