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Two Westfield girls attend Olympic Training Center

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CHARLESTON -- Westfield sisters Kari and Kierstyn Davis have returned from the week long, all expenses paid training Rudy Sablo 2016 Olympic Development Weightlifting Camp at the United States' Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs.

Both girls represent the Charleston Parks and Recreation Department Weightlifting Club.

Kari, age 15, was making her second trip to the OTC, while her sister Kierstyn, age 14, was making her first trip. Lifters were chosen based off their performances at national meets, primarily the National Schoolage Weightlifting Championships in Springfield, Mo.

The camp brought together approximately seven each of the top male and female lifters in the country ages 13-15. The girls actually spent New Year's Eve at the OTC. The Charleston Parks and Recreation Weightlifting Club was the only club with more than one girl attending. The funds for the camp were provided by USA Weightlifting, the National Governing Body for Olympic weightlifting in the U.S., with funds and housing provided by the United States Olympic Committee.

"I really enjoyed the trip and the chance to get to know some of the other lifters better," Kierstyn Davis said. "I also felt like I learned a lot. We sometimes trained twice a day and watched films and video of ourselves and other lifters. Tourists from all over the US came by to tour the OTC and would stop by and watch us lift. It was quite an experience."

The trip climaxed an eventful year for Kari Davis. In March she won the National Junior Weightlifting Championships for lifters age 20 and under in Chicago. She was the youngest national champion there. She later won the National Schoolage Championships in Springfield, Mo., in June in the 14-15 age group.

She then was selected to compete in the Pan American 13-15 year age group Weightlifting Championships in Leon, Mexico, in August. Kari was the No. 1 ranked lifter on the USA girls' team.

She lived up to her ranking and was the only USA lifter, male or female, to win a gold medal there. She then finished off her season with a third place finish at the American Open Weightlifting Championships in Birmingham, Ala., in December. The lifters who beat her were in their 20s.

"I enjoyed spending time at the camp with several of the others who went to Mexico with me," Kari said. "I have spent a few weeks at the OTC so I am sort of getting to where I know my way around there. Kierstyn and I also enjoyed the chance to watch other top USA athletes in other sports who live in or train at the OTC. It was quite an honor for two girls from Westfield to be here and represent our club and our town."

The two lifters don't have much of a break. Their next competition is the National Junior Weightlifting Championships in Chattanooga, Tenn., the second weekend in February.

Kari Davis expects to face some very tough competition there as she defends the title she won last year. That meet will also be a qualifier for several international meets later in the year. Kierstyn Davis has also qualified, and will compete again as she did last year.

Kari has a chance to compete in international competition either in Colombia or Peru this year. She hopes to make the team which will compete at the World Junior Weightlifting Championships in Cali, Colombia, this coming June.

Only seven lifters total aged 20 and under from the US from the seven weight classes will qualify to compete and represent the US.

Marty Schnorf, coach of the Charleston Parks and Recreation Department Weightlifting Club, said that being selected for the camp is quite an honor.

"Anytime someone selects a handful or so of girls to fly to an Olympic Development Camp like this, and pay all of their airfare and meals and housing for a week, and fly in staff to work with them, it is quite an honor," Schnorf said.

Kari and Kierstyn are the daughters of Mark and Karen Davis.

"Mark has been doing more of the coaching lately and deserves credit for that," Schnorf said.

As an interesting footnote, Schnorf mentioned that Rudy Sablo, for whom the camp was named, was an interesting figure.

"I knew Rudy well," he said. "Rudy was a trainer for the Tuskegee Airmen in WWII. He was also a retired fireman in New York City, who died fairly recently. "

"When the 9/11 attacks occurred, Rudy, who had long ago retired from the fire department, and who still lived in NYC, donned one of his old uniforms and proceeded to Ground Zero. Some of the younger firemen at the scene, who had only seen the old uniform in decades old pictures, saw a figure approaching with a uniform from the past and covered with dust to the point he was almost white. More than one fireman was quoted as saying that they thought Rudy was an apparition a ghost from the past returned."

He is now a member of the United States Weightlifting Hall of Fame, as is former Charleston Resident Curt White. The girls go to see plaques honoring both of them in the weightroom at the OTC.

Anyone in the area is interested in joining the club should contact the rec department. or e-mail charlestonweightliftingclub@yahoo.com or contact Mark Davis or Schnorf.