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Westfield's Davis wins Pan Am gold

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WESTFIELD -- After those plane flights, waits and hot bus rides, Kari Davis opposing weightlifters became the real trouble.

"I was actually a little nervous knowing that the girls had been doing better than I expected," the 16-year-old Westfield lifter said. "But then Marty (Schnorf) came over to me and said 'you have a good chance' and there was not stopping me from there."

Obviously not.

In competition where the 165-pound weight division had the lead change hands on nine different lifts, the 16-year-old from Westfield emerged as the overall gold medal winner in last week's Pan American Weightlifting Championships for ages 17-and-under.

The meet was in Moyobamba, Peru, attracted lifters from more 10 Pan American countries and was the biggest accomplishment yet for Davis, who of nine United States lifters going to the games was the only one to take a gold medal.

"It was certainly the biggest win in the most important and exciting competition of my life," Davis said. "The competition was very close and every lift was critical. One missed lift could have cost me not only the gold but any medal at all.

"But I am used to the pressure. Marty (Schnorf) and my dad (Mark) put pressure on me every workout. So, I am used to that. I just wish my dad had been able to go along with me but he broke his leg severely in late July and was unable to travel."

At least her father avoided the rigorous trip to Peru where flights from Indianapolis to Miami and to Peru and then another flight were followed by another hurdle.

"We had a four-hour unbelievable bus ride non-air-conditioned," Schnorf said. "There was not always water and hot water was a luxury. That trip down there was probably one of the most exhausting anyone has ever been through in their life."

Davis was the resilient 16-year-old, however.

"I had enough rest," she said.

Apparently so.

With her father getting news from his wife via cell phone and Schnorf of the Charleston Parks & Recreation Department Weightlifting Club coaching the U.S. team, Davis came through when needed for the gold medal in the clean-and-jerk, the bronze in the snatch and most importantly the gold in the combined lifts.

She took first place in the 165-pound class with a total of 183 kilograms combining her lifts in the snatch and clean and jerk. Venezuelan and Mexican lifters both totaled 182, with the Venezuelan winning second by virtue of being the lighter lifter.

This tops the list of Davis' championships at the Pan American Championships for girls 15-and-under last year in Leon, Mexico, and the 15-and-under championships in 2006 in Colorado Springs, Colo.

The 17-and-under Pan Am title was closely contested.

"Kari made 79 kilograms. (174 pounds) in the snatch and missed 81 kilograms," Schnorf said. "Seventy-nine won the bronze; 81 would have been gold. In the clean-and-jerk Kari opened with 96

(211 pounds.) and went into first. The Mexican girl did 98 and she was in first. Then the Venezuelan missed 99 and repeated and made it. She was now in first."

"Kari took 100 for a success and now she was in first again. The Mexican followed with a good 102 and she now led. All three had one lift left. The Venezuelan took 103 for another good lift and now was in first with Kari third. I called for 104 for her third which would put her in first with the Mexican having one lift left. Kari made a solid lift with 104 (229 pounds) and now it was all down to the Mexican. If she made her lift she won and if she missed she was third. She missed the lift Kari just made and Kari won the gold."

This made for a happy ending to a summer in which Davis' father had his injury.

"Although my dad, who helps coach me, wasn't there, my mother was on the cell phone with him when I lifted," Davis said. "He could hear the shouts and knew I made the lift. It was extremely exciting and I wish he had been able to be there."

She joined those who have had success through Schnorf's coaching.

"It is a great honor to represent one's school or town in basketball, volleyball, band or other activity," Schnorf said. "However, to wear the USA uniform and represent one's country on foreign soil is an honor one can never forget. I was selected to hand out the medals to the overall winners of Kari's class. I had the honor of placing the gold medal around her neck and standing near the podium as they played the 'Star Spangled Banner' to honor the USA and Kari's victory. That made the time and money I have invested worthwhile.

"The United States, USA Weightlifting, the Charleston Recreation Department Weightlifting Club, her parents, and Westfield, Illinois, should all be proud of Kari. I certainly am. This was a big win. Kari's performance on and off the platform brought credit to everyone."

Davis considered the trip an eye-opening experience.

"It really makes one appreciate everything we have back in the USA," Davis said. "Many things we take for granted here just are not there where we traveled. We saw mostly dirt roads, many homes with no electricity in the country, and the average person clearly didn't have a car or a washer or dryer or air conditioning. The people were very friendly and nice to us though, although you could sense some envied all that we had in the USA and take for granted."

Also a shot putter and discus thrower for Casey-Westfield High School's track team, Davis is looking to even bigger things in lifting.

"I'm going to try to make the Junior Worlds next year and to win Junior nationals," she said. "I'll take a week off and then get back to hard-core training."

The ultimate goal is the 2012 and 2016 Olympics.

This meet was funded entirely by USA Weightlifting with funds donated by Werk-San Barbell. Both Davis and Schnorf thanked Werk-San Barbell and Joe Delago and Leo Totten, owners and president of the company. Davis and Schnorf also said that they wish they could find other lifters who wanted to travel and compete on the highest level with them.

Those who like to know more about the club should contact the Charleston Parks and Recreation Department, Mark Davis, or e-mail charlestonweightliftingclub@yahoo.com. The Web site is charlestonweightliftingclub.com. The club is open to all ages and all area residents with no charge to join.