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Sawyer's third leads good showing by local lifters

ORLANDO, Fla. -- Three lifters from the Charleston Parks and Rec. Dept. Weightlifting Club traveled to Orlando, Fla., this past weekend to compete in the USA Weightlifting National Junior Championships, and all set personal records.

This meet was open to all lifters ages 20 and under who had made the high qualifying totals. This meet was hosted by Charleston in 2003.

Mattoon's Jenny Sawyer, age 13, lifted in the 137-pound class. She weighed in 4 1/2 pounds under the class limit and was the youngest girl by two years in her class and one of only 5 13 year olds in the whole meet.

Competing in one of the toughest classes, with at least five of the 12 girls having lifted in international competition, Sawyer finished third and won the bronze medal for the total and for the snatch. She made lifts of 148 pounds in the snatch and 187 in the clean and jerk. The snatch equaled her personal best and the jerk and total were records for her.

In finishing third, Sawyer beat out a friend who is a freshman in college who attends Northern Michigan University on a weightlifting scholarship.

Marty Schnorf, who coaches the local club, said that "a coach from New Mexico State University, which has a club there, asked where Jenny was going to go to college. I told him that she was only in the eighth grade and hadn't really thought about that yet."

Kari Davis, age 13, lifted in the heavyweight class. She is from Westfield and has only been lifting about 5 months. She was the youngest lifter in her class and finished third in the snatch and fifth overall. She made lifts of 148 pounds in the snatch and 171 pounds in the clean and jerk. She was two years younger than any other lifter in her class. The snatch and total were personal records for her.

Mitchell Sawyer, age 15, finished seventh out of 13 in the 187 pounds class. He was both the youngest and the lightest in his weight class. He made lifts of 220 pounds in the snatch and 308 pounds in the clean and jerk. The clean-and-jerk and total were records for Mitchell.

"Overall, the performance by our lifters was extremely good," coach Schnorf said. "All three lifters set personal records and finished higher than I expected. It was one of the best meets our club has had in recent years."

"Jenny has moved up three weight classes in the last 15 months. She lifted against older girls and women and competed very well. People were impressed with her. She held her own with some top lifters."

"Kari has probably been training for a shorter time than anyone at the meet. She competed well and handled the pressure very well. I expect big improvement out of her over the next year as she gets more experience."

"Mitchell Sawyer exceeded my expectations more than anyone. Some of his competitors were 25 years older and 10 14 pounds heavier. He made personal records and should lift much more when he fills out in the weight class."

The next major competition for the club will be the National Schoolage Championships in Detroit, Mich., in June.

"That will be a big one," Schnorf said. "I expect Jenny and Kari to win there. I expect Jenny to win the Best Lifter award that she has won the last two years. I expect Jenny and Kari to qualify for the United States Schoolage Pan American Championships for lifters ages 13-15. That meet will be in Colorado Springs, Col., in August at the Olympic Training Center. I think they may also get selected to attend a training camp at the Olympic Training Center. All expenses will be paid by USA Weightlifting and the United States Olympic Committee."

It would be Jenny's 4th trip to the Olympic Training Center and Kari's first.

"Mitchell is in a fight to qualify for the U.S. 16- and 17-year-old team which will compete in the Pan American 16- and 17-year-old championships to be held in Cali, Colombia, later this year," Schnorf said. "If he can improve each of his lifts by at least 510 kilograms in the next three months he has a good shot at making that team."