

# **Middle School Athletes and Weight Training**

*Is Weight Training Safe For Middle School Athletes?*

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Word Count: 1,016  
December 15, 2010

When the words weight training, strength training, or weight lifting are mentioned usually the first things that comes into most people's mind are massive, over-muscled men. What people usually do not think of is Middle School athletes becoming stronger and faster. Weight training for teens is becoming more popular as middle school sports are getting more competitive. Is weight training safe for middle school athletes?

### **The History of weight training**

“That which is used develops, and that which is not used wastes away”. Resistance training can be documented as far back as Ancient Greece. Even the mighty mythological Hercules used resistance training under direct supervision of his tutor and coach, Chiron. Resistance training is beneficial to the body by making muscles work harder than they are used to, there for making the muscles stronger and larger (The History of Weight Training). If one of the strongest men in mythological history used resistance training, would it be safe middle school students to use resistance training?

As well as the Ancient Greeks, a 5,000 year old Chinese text tells us about prospective soldiers having to pass lifting tests. The weights that they would lift would usually be stones; later they would lift dumbbells. Dumbbell is an odd word that it comes from the practice of removing clappers from bells, so that they are soundless while they are being lifted (“The History of Weight Lifting”).

In the 1896 Summer Olympics, Weightlifting was recognized as an official sport. In 1920 Weightlifting became a regular event in the Olympics. There were three standard lifts, the press (later eliminated), the snatch, and the clean and jerk. In 1932 there were five different weight classes. In the 2012 Olympics, there will be eight weight classes for men, and seven weight classes for women (“The History of Weight Lifting”).

Weight training is not just beneficial for athletes; it is also used for all types of men and women. It offers many benefits, such as increased muscle strength, enhanced muscle tone, better flexibility and balance, and the prevention of joint and muscle injury. Weight training decreases the risk of cardio-vascular disease or a stroke. Most importantly, weight training is proven to be effective in building endurance, allowing your body to work harder for a longer time.

On the flip side, children and teenagers have growth plates at the end of most of their bones. A growth plate regulates the size and shape of the bones. In children and teenagers the growth plate is the last part of the bones to become developed. When the growth plate has not completely hardened, it is very vulnerable to fractures, which can cause problems like unequal bone growth. Unless there is damage to your growth plate while weight training, then there will be no growth defects (Strength Training and Nutrition Strategies). People are fearful for their children getting hurt in the weight room. There have even been stories of people dying in the weight room. This may be true, but when children get hurt, there is no supervision, and or the child was “over-doing-himself”.

### **What the Experts Say**

While trying to find out if weight training is safe for middle schoolers, there were several interviews conducted by James Pittinger, with different Athletic Directors, Assistant Athletic Directors, and some Strength and Conditioning Coaches. Most of the interviewees had a similar response that weight training was safe only with direct supervision, light weight, and many repetitions. There were also some responses that were not expected.

Of the ten different schools that were sent a questionnaire, eight of the schools were private and two of the schools were public schools. The two public schools, Etowah High School and ET Booth Middle School, were sent the form but, did not reply. An interview form was sent

to Kris Palmerton from Pace Academy, and was not returned. While talking to Varsity Football Coach Ben Williamson, about the controversial topic, he told me that he would send me links to articles on line. One of the articles was on Kris Palmerton, the Strength and Conditioning Coach at Pace Academy. The information on article almost answered the questionnaire word for word. Although the interview form was never returned an interview form from Kris, His thoughts on weight training at the middle school age were expressed in this article.

All of the interviewees promoted weight training for middle school athletes. In middle school, most of the focus is directed on proper technique, not muscle building. The priority is to introduce them to the machines and the concept of strength training with proper technique. The athletic directors agreed that to be safe for the athlete's bodies, low weight and repetitions of fifteen to twenty with proper technique would be acceptable. The coaches agreed that it is important to learn the fundamentals before the athletes lift a lot of weight.

When athletes weight train they have improved confidence on the field (Dorsey). The athletes gain flexibility and solid technique that will help in high school when weight training becomes more involved with school sports. Coaches and athletic directors also have noticed improved focus on academics and increased body awareness.

Some prospective of Weight Training included light weight and high repetitions, while some schools do not have the facilities or instructors. In middle school, there should be high stress on proper technique, and learning fundamentals. Weight training is safe for middle school athletes only with light weight and high amounts of repetitions. Any time there is a Middle school athlete or any middle school student in the weight room there should be an adult supervisor.

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