

Essentials of Youth Weightlifting: Steph Morris Q&A



Stephanie J. Morris is a Lecturer in Strength and Conditioning at Cardiff Metropolitan University, where she is also currently undertaking her PhD in the development of youth weightlifting. Steph is a BWL level 1 accredited Weightlifting coach and accredited strength and conditioning coach with both the UK Strength and Conditioning Association (UKSCA) and the National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA) and leads the strength and conditioning programme for Welsh Rowing, working predominantly with their GB start athletes. Steph also coaches in the Youth Physical Development Centre based at Cardiff Metropolitan University.

How did you develop an interest in youth strength and conditioning?

I think if you study or work at Cardiff Metropolitan University it is hard not to develop an interest in youth S&C when you are surrounded by leading researchers within the field such as Rhodri (Lloyd). It is not just the research either that interests me, I have a passion for coaching young athletes and seeing the positive effect S&C can have on not only their performance but also their health and wellbeing.

What would you say to anyone who is sceptical about young people taking part in weightlifting?

Provided young individuals receive appropriate instruction and logical progressions based on technical proficiency, participation in weightlifting is actually shown to be pretty low risk compared to other sports. There is a substantial body of reliable evidence advocating weightlifting as safe and beneficial for children and adolescents which should hopefully, overtime, dispel these misconceptions and concerns around young athletes lifting weights.

What is a common mistake that you see in youth strength and conditioning?

I couldn't pick one so I have listed my top two....

- 1) Technique needs to be prioritised over load and unfortunately this isn't always the case.
- 2) In sport, we often become very outcome driven and this is reflected in the praise we give young athletes. However, when coaching young individuals, we need to remember to promote task-involved goals and ensure effort is praised equally, if not more so, than task outcome.

If you had a magic wand, what would you do to help improve the practice of weightlifting in the UK?

Provide young individuals with more, good quality exposure to weightlifting. Too often I think coaching young athletes is seen a stepping stone or progression to coaching senior or higher-level teams, whereas I would argue this is one of the most important stages and we should have more coaches with an understanding of the unique requirements of youth athletes within these coaching roles.

What advice would you give to a weightlifting coach who is working with young athletes?

Buy-in and enjoyment is key. Don't become too driven by short-term performance success, long-term participation should be the priority. Likewise, encourage participation in other sports too for well-rounded development.

Quick fire questions

If you could have the answer to one question, what would it be?

Sorry not very philosophical... How much can animals understand us and each other?

If you had 15 minutes to train, what would you do?

Hang cleans.

If you could change one weightlifting rule, what would it be?

Is it weird to say none? I think they all serve their purpose!

If you could meet any sportsperson, who would it be?

It's probably not great to say but I am really poor at following professional sport. I would have to say Harry Kane, and I would take my other half, it would make his year!

If you could go back in time, what day/period would you go back to?

Palaeolithic period (as a cave man).