

Hrithik Reddy: The importance of community in weightlifting.



We caught up with the Goose Squad Captain, Hrithik Reddy, on how he built an unlikely community within UK Weightlifting.

Across the UK, an increasing number of weightlifters are joining the Goose Squad...But what exactly is the Goose Squad? It isn't a formal club, nor is it one particular place or setting, yet it is a rich pocket of community within the UK weightlifting sphere. To understand it more, we must begin with the Goose Squad's founder, Hrithik.

Hrithik Reddy, often nicknamed 'H' or 'Captain Goose' by his peers is an American-born Indian who grew up in Germany and came to the UK for university. Hrithik used to be a badminton player, but after stopping in 2018, joined his university's barbell society. This led him to the world of CrossFit, but after discovering that "weightlifting was the best bit", he focussed his efforts on that.

Hrithik currently trains at Bounce Gym in London and is coached by Benedict Millson and has 18 weightlifting competitions under his belt.

When asked what his favourite thing about Weightlifting was, Hrithik said "Weightlifting is such a blend of brute force and fluid motion. It's such a technical sport, and people can become obsessed with it, dedicating years to the pursuit of progress. There is something to learn, something to improve, no matter how good you are or how decorated you are. Because of that, everyone is in the same boat, and it is so impressive when anyone, literally anyone, lifts a bar over their head in a snatch. It's also a sport where a person who has lifted for a week can enter a competition and happen to be in the same group as an Olympian, which is always such a cool thing to think about.

And because it's so impressive for anyone to lift a barbell overhead, you form these connections with people and encourage each other to a point where you see each other on a regular basis, or interact with others on social media because they are cool, and form these connections with people who you have not really met before, but you feel like you know them because of what you see. That's what my favourite thing is... the community web that is formed."

When pressed to describe exactly what Goose Squad is, Hrithik commented it is "community-driven passion project" where he aims to "connect people together and

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make the world a smaller place. I want people to feel like an elite athlete, where people will know who you are, no matter how experienced you are. I essentially wanted to make a supportive community where if you are away from home and need someone to train with, you can, because some goose thing connected you to someone, and you can then become friends.

I also slowly started to realise that I wanted to support up-and-coming athletes as well and make them feel like elite athletes, and showcase how cool they and others are.”

Hrithik never set out to build the community that he has. In his words, the Goose Squad started as “nothing but a jokey thing”. One day, he stumbled across some goose pin badges online and bought them for his friends at the gym. That is when the Goose Squad was born.

As time went on, Hrithik distributed more and more pin badges, inviting more people onto the ‘squad’. As word spread, Hrithik found people coming to him, asking to become involved. As the squad developed, Hrithik started showcasing the squad members on Instagram, “as a way of making the community interact with each other and showcase to the void of Instagram, how cool people are.”

“Slowly but surely, those people started to interact with each other because of it. I realised what I had done and started to try and make more people get involved, selling shirts, collaborating with people to spread the word of being nice to each other, eventually getting to the point it is at now.”

We asked Hrithik how important he thinks community is within the sport of Weightlifting. He commented “I think community is the most important part of weightlifting. At a base and elite levels, everyone knows everyone to an extent or knows someone who knows someone. There are the elite lifters like Emily, Jess, Ramiro, etc, and then there are heroes, Ed, Holly, TOthebar, Tara. The community of weightlifting is what makes our sport what it is, and the fact that the elite, the heroes, you and I can all interact with each other without much effort is why it's the best. I, for example, live in London, and I go to my gym where everyone celebrates each other, no matter how small the achievement is. It's a friendly environment, but I know that if I ever happen to end up in, for example, the northeast, I happen to know Steve from North Tyneside, and trust that, because of the community we have in weightlifting, I will have the same experience I have at my gym and feel at home. You don't get that safe feeling much in other sports; you can't just go to other clubs and train together, with the people you are “competing” against. We are all in this together, lifting these unbelievably heavy circles on sticks. We know what it's like, and it makes it easier to relate and interact and support each other and be in awe of the people who lift heavier circles.”

Recently, the Goose Squad Instagram page has announced the launch of ‘Project

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Zeus', which includes the launch of merchandise to support the sponsorship of a group of weightlifting.

"Project Zeus is an idea I have had for some time, where I wanted to directly support athletes, especially young up and coming ones. Growing up I used to see ads with my favourite athletes promoting or being sponsored by companies, and I always wondered how they got them, and how cool it would be to one day be sponsored. I realised that I was not the only person who had that dream, and most people who do sports want that too. So, through the shirt sales and the collaboration with Callum from CJC Gains, we were able to save some money and use it to pay for the competition entries for the foreseeable future for 4 amazing lifters, Ben Redlich, Harry Hewitt Smith (can't have Ben without Harry), Millie Lerwill, and Josh Smith. These 4 athletes are supported for competition entry and also get to have some additional support and advice from others involved in Project Zeus. Most recently, we did a sports psychology workshop for them, and I want to do some more stuff like that for them in the future."

When asked on his vision for the Goose Squad, Hrithik said "I want to make Goose Squad more of a mentality, where everyone is a goose, being silly and having fun doing a sport, any sport. I also want it to continue to develop into a big community where people treat it as a town square, unconditionally supporting everyone's achievements, no matter how big or small, sporting or life."

"On a more physical (I guess) note, I want to continue to support athletes and make merchandise to support them (Project Zeus merch coming soon) and collaborate with other cool communities and spread that Goose Squad Mentality more and more, making a seemingly difficult world easier."

From pin badges distributed to his friends, to being able to support athletes through partnerships, Hrithik has managed to build up a positive community in the UK and British Weight Lifting would like to congratulate both him and the Goose Squad members for demonstrating the values of teamwork, friendship and community development which underpin both the sports of Weightlifting and Para Powerlifting.

