

Sneeze powers through with powerlifting

Alin Culliver

Inside the steady rhythm of clanging weights and focused silence, Lionel Sneeze, an Alternative Curriculum Program (ACP) paraprofessional, running back coach and powerlifting coach at Omaha North encourages his powerlifters to never give up.

Sneeze moves through the weight room with purpose, his presence being constant, offering guidance and encouragement as athletes push their limits.

Powerlifting at Omaha North has become more than just an extracurricular activity; it serves as a space where student athletes can find structure, accountability, and a sense of belonging.

Sneeze became the assistant coach of powerlifting at the start of last year, under Coach Michael Lathan.

Now at the start of the 2025-2026 school year, Coach Lathan has passed the leadership role down to Lionel Sneeze to become the new powerlifting head coach.

“Lathan passed it down to me knowing that I would be able to make an impact and make this team better,” said Sneeze.

Under Sneeze’s leadership, the weight room has evolved into an environment focused on growth, discipline, and mental toughness.

Sneeze emphasizes proper technique, patience, and safety, believing long-term progress matters more than quick results. Under his direction, multiple lifters have reached personal bests and earned recognition at regional competitions.

“Yet medals are never the main focus because I don’t want them to be chasing trophies, but instead to be chasing consistency,” said Sneeze.

His passion for powerlifting first began in high school after transferring schools in Louisiana. What once felt unfamiliar quickly became something meaningful.

“I competed in high school, and I fell in love with the sport my junior year, at first it was different, but then it grew on me,” said Sneeze.

That early experience shaped how he approaches coaching today. He describes his philosophy as balanced but firm.

“My coaching style is loving, but disciplined, because I try to instill in my lifters that you have to stay on the right path if you want to be successful in the future,” said Sneeze.

Beyond building physical strength, Sneeze focuses on teaching life lessons that extend far past the weight room to help athletes develop resilience and determination.

“Roads in life won’t be easy, and you have to keep pushing and fighting through whatever situation you’re in,” said Sneeze.

He believes the struggles athletes face under the bar prepare them for challenges they will encounter later in life.

When training becomes demanding, Sneeze makes motivation personal, where he conducts pep talks as well as sitting down with the athletes and genuinely talks to them.

“Sometimes we forget how it felt when we were their age, since we didn’t always have someone to talk to, so I try to be that person for them,” said Sneeze.

This connection and approach have helped athletes stay committed during tough stretches of the season.

Preparing lifters for competitions, Sneeze emphasizes above all else.

“This sport is 99 percent metal and one percent strength,” he said. “If you go in confident, you will give yourself a real chance to succeed.”

To keep athletes healthy, he carefully balances intensity with recovery, incorporating deload weeks, stretching, and yoga into training plans to reduce injury risk.

“You can’t perform your best if your body isn’t taken care of,” said Sneeze.

Beyond athletic performance, Sneeze prioritizes supporting his athletes as individuals. He believes that small gestures and consistent encouragement can have a lasting impact.

“The little things often mean more than people think,” Sneeze said.

One of his most meaningful moments did not come from a victory, but instead from togetherness.

“Seeing kids from different cultures and backgrounds come together as one team, that’s something I will always cherish,” said Sneeze.

For those new to powerlifting, Sneeze encourages patience and confidence. “Don’t be afraid to start,” he said. “It takes time. It’s like art, and you are the artist, which means you get to decide what you want to create.”

With unwavering leadership and heartfelt commitment, Sneeze motivates athletes to believe in themselves, embrace the grind, and apply the lessons learned under the bar to life beyond the weight room.

At Omaha North, his impact goes beyond strength training, developing disciplined and confident individuals, one rep at a time.