Headline: United Under the Bar
Deck: The Elkhorn Powerlifting team is stronger as one

His arms are shaking as he is battling to complete his final rep. The bar feels like it is glued to the ground beneath his lifting shoes. His coach watches him attentively. State was only a couple weeks away, and he needed at least two sets of one on his max weight.

Since the early 1960s, powerlifting has been an organized sport as a split from Olympic weightlifting. The sport was introduced to Elkhorn sometime in the 2023-2024 school year. The powerlifting team competes in a handful of different gyms, and practices every week.

Powerlifting has three main lifts; they compete in Squat, Bench Press, and Deadlift, but they dive into each lift on different practice days. Following these main lifts during practice, they do some accessory work to strengthen or target specific muscles.

Powerlifting has many great things about it, but senior powerlifter Barrett Holmquist has a unique favorite.

“My favorite part of powerlifting is the competitions because the atmosphere is always great and everyone is screaming at you when you are lifting,” Holmquist said.

A good atmosphere is very important when lifting because it can help people get a lift up when they are struggling and boost their confidence. The atmosphere is not only good at competitions, but it also extends to practices. “Screaming” serves as a great source of motivation; people cheer for their teammates during practice and in a competition setting.

“The culture in powerlifting is very supportive, and no matter what level of a lifter you are, everyone welcomes you and pushes you to do your best,” senior powerlifter Autumn Dixon said.

Powerlifting is also a sport that acquires a lot of attention. People tend to watch closely during both meets and practices, which could add to the pressure to do well. But with attention also comes support.

“There is no one there against you,” Dixon said. “They just want you to do your best. Knowing that everyone is there supporting you is helpful.”

The support from anyone watching can help get lifters out of their own heads, often reminding them they are stronger than they think. Powerlifting coach Kyle Nadrchal, with a background in powerlifting, saw an opportunity to bring it into Elkhorn.

“I had a student at Elkhorn North that was getting started in powerlifting, and when he heard I wanted to start a team, he spread the word,” Nadrchal said. “I had a post put in the bulletin and with word of mouth, it has continued to grow each year.”

Nadrchal encourages the team to do their best, while also providing instruction for each lift and accessory. There is plenty that keeps him motivated when coaching.

“I spent close to 20 years of my life competing in strength sports, primarily powerlifting, and I will forever have a love for the sport,” Nadrchal said. “I wanted to give back and hopefully help some kids find a new passion.”

Elkhorn has had many members excel in this newer program, as Dixon won her weight class in her first competition and placed fourth at state. Holmquist placed fourth in the state tournament last year, and placed third this year. A powerlifter from Elkhorn North, Dakota Courtwright, placed first in her weight class and best lifter overall at the state competition this year, setting new records for bench and deadlift as well.

Unlike most sports, powerlifting does not name captains, however some athletes still take initiative and step up, with one in particular standing out.

“Barrett Holmquist is one of the biggest leaders on the team because he always stays positive through all the ups and downs,” senior powerlifter Brayden Durant said.

Everyone has a different story of how they chose to do powerlifting, and Dixon shared that it was not exactly what she planned to do, yet she does not regret it.

“Honestly, my parents wanted me to do it because I am in CrossFit and we do a lot of similar lifts to powerlifters,” Dixon said. “They really wanted me to branch out and try something new.”

Powerlifting is an emerging sport for Elkhorn schools, and it allows the opportunity to meet many new people. Powerlifting is also notorious for improving self motivation and perseverance.

People are often able to recognize their own ability and strength that they may not have been aware of. Growing stronger is a huge aspect to powerlifting, and the friendships people make within the sport often help others progress. All three Elkhorn schools have lifters on the team, with a total of 25 consistent lifters between each school.

However, despite coming from different schools, they still share a good culture and work together to compete and practice.

“I get to push myself past my limits,” Dixon said. “I really want to see what I am capable of, and I feel powerlifting is a good way to test your determination.”