

SUBURBANITE
SPORTS

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Strong men raise weights, funds

LaViola Foundation is beneficiary | Page 40

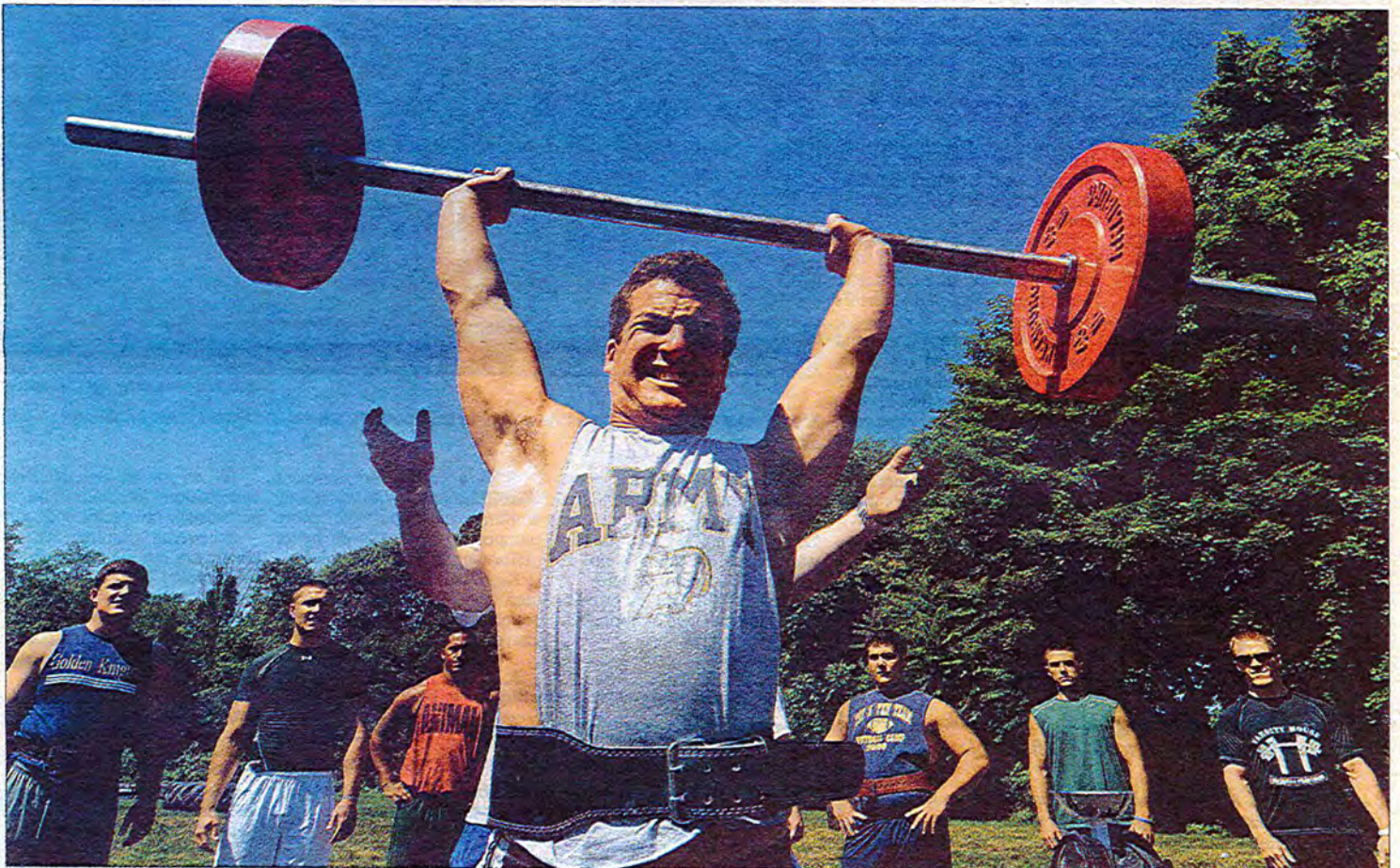


PHOTO BY DAVID BERGELAND/THE RECORD

Ray Donnelly of Old Tappan hoists a barbell overhead during the clean and press competition of the Strongman Challenge at the Varsity House.

SPORTS

STRONGMAN CHALLENGE

Kulcsar, Reilly repeat as competition winners

Jong-Min Youn earns the junior varsity prize in the strength test

BY J.C. BAUMULLER
Sports Editor

OLD TAPPAN — “This is awesome,” Varsity House General Manager Dan Goodman said as he watched the strong men competing. “We have double the attendance and double the participation this year. It totally exceeded our expectations. I could not ask for more.”

Goodman was talking about the Second Annual Strongman Competition held last month which benefitted the Michael LaViola Foundation to the tune of nearly \$6,500.

Muscular guys competed in a variety of events meant to test strength of the heartiest of souls.

“This is a good workout and it is helping a good cause,” said Old

Tappan heavyweight Mike Shannon, who will wrestle for Wilkes University in the fall.

THE REAL WINNER

The winners of the Junior Varsity, Varsity and College/Professional categories each received a battle axe as a prize. The real winner, however, was the foundation. It is named for a NV/Old Tappan 2007 graduate, who died of pediatric sarcoma, a rare form of cancer, a couple of months before his 21st birthday.

LaViola was a football player for the Golden Knights, as well as a Varsity House regular. The foundation raises funds for cancer research and provides scholarships for two NVOT graduating seniors.

“We took the negative aspect that Mike went through and turned it around to a positive to help other people,” said Michael’s dad, Mike LaViola.

“Mike was big into lifting and working out,” added his mom, Mary. “This [competition] reminds me of Michael doing this. It’s nice to continue his memory and earn funds for the foundation. It’s good for the soul and heart.”

Many of the competitors have trained at Varsity House for years.



PHOTO BY DAVID BERGELAND/THE RECORD

Fred Shaka of Closter flips a tire weighing 550 pounds during the Strongman Challenge at Varsity House.

“I’ve been coming here for two or three years,” said recent Pascack Valley High School grad Corey Kaiser. “They help you a lot with explosive stuff. It’s not all speed stuff; it’s more power.”

Kaiser will utilize his prowess on the football field at Springfield College in the fall.

“It’s a good environment [here],” he said. “With everybody working out you get more pumped. You want to do better performing in front of people.”

Ray Donnelly, who just graduated from Northern Valley/Old Tappan is going to play at Rowan University in the fall.

“When you lift here, it’s like a competition,” he said. “You are not working on specific body parts — its overall training. It’s not always fun, but the guys push you [to improve].”

One competitor that is not a regular at Varsity House is eighth grader Jeremy Birns of Alpine, who along with his friend Spencer Josephs, took part in the event.

“Our family is friends with the LaViolas and my mom told me

Strongest Men

■ JUNIOR VARSITY:

Jong-Min Youn

■ VARSITY:

Mike Reilly

■ COLLEGE/PROFESSIONAL:

Chris Kulcsar

CHALLENGE

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about the event,” Birns said. “I don’t work out a lot but I had a lot of fun. Some parts were hard, but I had a good time. It’s all about raising money.”

‘GREAT SENSE OF HUMOR’

A number of athletes that were on hand were friends of Michael LaViola and they had tales to tell about his wit.

“He loved to have a good time,” said John Tringali. “He was always telling jokes in the locker room. He had a great sense of humor; he was full of one-liners and zingers.”

Justin Krapels remembered that he used to make his football teammates laugh and he did not always care when or where he cracked them up.

“He made us laugh during gassers,” Krapels said of the wind-sprints that every football player knows. “Here you are trying to breathe and he’s making you laugh. He had a lot of heart.”

It was that heart that is the main reason some of his former teammates remember him.

“He had the same attitude about everything,” said Chris Kenneally. “He never gave up. He put himself second, never first. That’s why we are here to support him now.” “He loved football, he loved sports, he loved the competition,” said Anthony Macho. “He loved having fun and he let everyone have a good time doing everything.”

TOUGH EVENTS

Most of the participants were having a good time even though it was strenuous to perform some of the events. They were lifting logs and keys, dragging sleds and flipping tires. Then there was the truck pull.

Jordan Migliore, a 295-pound lineman who played for NV/Demarest a few years ago, thought he might have an advantage over the competition in this event.

“I’m a lot closer to the weight of the truck than they are,” he joked.

He was right as he and 270-pound Kyle Elliott of Cresskill were the only two to pull the 10,000-pound truck the entire length of the course.

“It takes a lot out of you, but it’s fun,” said Elliott. “Once the momentum stops, it’s over.”

“I asked them if they are going to use a tractor or a fire truck next year,” Migliore said. “Someone said an airplane, but I think that’s over the top.”

Finally it was time to crown the winners and hand out the axes.

Jong-Min Youn copped the junior varsity award, beating out Clavin Cho and Skyler Dennerlein. He played on the freshman football team at NV/Demarest where the team had a winning season.

“It was hard work and effort,” he said of the competition. “I worked hard with my friends and had fun. I am going to hang this [battle ax] on my wall.”

‘TWO-PEATERS’

Mike Reilly and Chris Kulcsar, winners of the varsity and col-

lege/professional prizes, respectively, also won last year’s strongman challenge.

Reilly topped Pascack Valley linebacker Yamir Ortiz and his Golden Knights teammate Peter Alsharif.

“It feels really good,” he said. “It’s more like you are having fun. You are competing and being with your friends all day. It’s nice to do in the off season to get ready. I was huffing and puffing.”

Kulcsar beat out Migliore and Elliott to keep his crown for a sec-

ond year.

“Beating Migs and Kyle was definitely tough,” he said. “Everybody is an amazing athlete. Kyle went from quarterback to defensive tackle and Migs works hard every day. It’s a huge accomplishment to beat these great athletes. The training we do at Varsity House pays off. It’s an enjoyable event and it helps the LaViola Foundation.”

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