



The Iron Maidens of Brooklyn

Find out how the women's only powerlifting competition in Brooklyn came together

March 17, 2015

By Diana Kelly

Margie Lempert was a coach and trainer at [CrossFit](#) South Brooklyn (CFSB) who wanted to share her interest in powerlifting and barbell training with more women in the community. "I saw a need for us to give women particular focus with barbell training so I started teaching mini workshops with novice and intermediate curriculum, providing smaller groups of women refined techniques."

She founded the Iron Maiden Raw Open event on February 28th at CrossFit South Brooklyn to foster interest in the sport of powerlifting and barbell training. "There are almost no other all-women powerlifting meets in the country," she says. "We want to start doing this competition annually, expand the sponsorship, and have more attention on the event."

After competing in some USA Powerlifting (USAPL) meets herself, Lempert decided to create an in-house women's only powerlifting meet for her CFSB gym members in 2011. Twenty women competed and they had coaches acting as judges. "I think all of us were completely shocked by what an electric experience it was with incredible energy!" So Lempert started to do those competitions biennially for gym members where the women would compete in different weight classes, winners received prizes, and they'd have a little party afterwards.

This year, the Iron Maidens Raw Open was open to other women in the community outside of the gym members, and 60 competitors signed up in less than a week. "My goal for this event was to give women an opportunity to see what a competition is like so if they enjoy it and have fun they might want to try more powerlifting competitions," says Lempert. It was modeled after a USAPL meet and all of the judges were Starting Strength Certified coaches.

For most of the 55 women participating this was their first [lifting competition](#). The event had 11 local sponsors donate prizes for the participants, including a full outfit from Lululemon Athletica for the winners.

“I used to be scared to put weight on the bar while lifting but I got over it,” says Jess Fox, winner of the “Dames” class, who was introduced to barbell training by her husband a few years ago.

Encouraged by her husband to try [CrossFit](#), Fox took a foundation’s course at CrossFit South Brooklyn in 2009. “I loved CrossFit and started to go consistently. I got stronger and lost my fear of weights.” Fox says she watched the evolution of the Iron Maidens’ event and participated three times as an athlete since 2011. “It’s a great opportunity for women to test their limits in a safe environment. Everyone was very supportive and excited for one another’s each individual accomplishment,” she says. Including women from other gyms brought a different level of competition and social engagement to the event, while still maintaining a friendly environment, she says. “I’d love for women to know that it’s not scary to train with weights, it’s about handling the weights at your level. Don’t be intimidated by it. It’s safe, it’s fun and you might surprise yourself!”

Winner of the “Broads” category, Serene Khader says she got into powerlifting through CrossFit South Brooklyn and credits the sport for showing her how much she loves lifting weights. “The Iron Maidens event was an incredibly powerful experience,” she says. “This showed what women can do when they push their bodies and it was great to be in a group of women who were focusing on what their bodies could do instead of what they looked like.”

This was Khader’s first powerlifting competition and she says she’s looking forward to competing again. “I’ve become a serious evangelist about lifting! The feeling of discovering you’re stronger than you thought you were is so empowering.”

First place winners were:

(Squat/Bench Press/Deadlift)

Pixies (125lbs and under): Jessie Brown 220/130/290

Ladies (126-140lbs): Katie Harper 235/125/295

Dames (140-155lbs): Jess Fox 285/150/330

Broads (over 155): Serene Khader 320/140/345

Learn more about [CrossFit South Brooklyn](#) here.