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## Weight-lifters to lift for charity

BY DANIEL URIA - SOUTH FLORIDA NEWS SERVICE

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Matthew Kunkle, 29, demonstrates one of the lifts participants will attempt in Saturday's competition. All proceeds will go to Special Olympics Florida-Miami-Dade County.

Matthew Kunkle's idea to use his passion for weightlifting as a means to raise money for a cause began in high school, when his powerlifting team organized a "liftathon" to help his school pay for athletics.

"Lifting weights was always a positive outlet for me," he said. "So it's really easy for me to connect that with doing something like this to impact somebody else positively."

Now, Kunkle, 29, is resurrecting this concept in a new event: Miami Might, a weightlifting competition to raise money and awareness for Special Olympics Florida-Miami-Dade County. The event will take place at 10 a.m. on Saturday at Elite U fitness training in Coconut Grove.

Miami Might will feature five different types of powerlifting events split into two categories: full power, which includes squat, bench and deadlift, and push/pull, featuring strict overhead press and deadlift.

Prizes will be given to the top three competitors in each weight class as well as the person who lifts the most overall weight.

Participants are encouraged to seek sponsors willing to pledge a dollar amount for each pound they lift throughout the competition to go toward Special Olympics Florida-Miami-Dade County.

Erin Kozlowski, a vice president at the Special Olympics Florida-Miami-Dade County, said it costs \$350 per athlete, per year for the program to provide services for its more than 3,800 athletes.

Special Olympics does not charge the athletes or their families to participate, so the organization depends on events like Miami Might for funding.

“Events like these are amazing, and they’re probably what every single charity hopes to be able to have year round,” she said. “And we’re just incredibly fortunate to be receiving the support.”

Elite U owner Nick Soto is excited to have the chance to bring more attention to Special Olympics.

“I’m glad we had the opportunity to host this and hopefully bring more awareness,” he said. “I don’t think there’s enough awareness for the Special Olympics in South Florida and all the programs that they have and what they do for these kids.”

Elisa Reyes, who will be participating on Saturday, agrees and said “powerlifting” is representative of the struggles of special needs athletes.

“It’s like they’re power lifting this life,” she said. “A lot of the things that are normal for us are very difficult for them.”

Kunkle became inspired to support the cause after witnessing the determination of Special Olympics athletes as a volunteer with the program while stationed in California during his time in the Navy.

“Just to get somebody to go to the gym some times is like twisting somebody’s arm,” he said. “And these athletes overcome so many obstacles to do what they do. I feel inspired by that. I’m motivated by that, and I think more people need to be more aware about that.”

Along with the money raised from the participant’s sponsors, direct donations to Special Olympics Florida-Miami-Dade County will also be accepted on the day of the event.

Raffle tickets can also be purchased in order to win fitness supplements, t-shirts and other

items from sponsors such as COCO5 coconut water.

Kunkle hopes the event will be a success and would like to organize others under the name Miami Might to benefit additional organizations.

“It doesn’t necessarily have to do with lifting weights or being strong, but having the strength or the might to help somebody else out,” he said.

## IF YOU GO

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What: Miami Might fundraiser for Special Olympics Miami

Where: Elite U Fitness Academy, 3075 SW 28th St

When: Weigh-ins: 8 a.m. to 9:30 a.m.’ competition begins at 10 a.m. on Nov. 8

Cost: \$15 entry fee for competitors, free for spectators

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