

Relentless 2016 Raises Over \$208k for HopeKids Part 1

Jul 11, 2016

Relentless 2016 was held at the Valley Christian Church in Rosemount, Minnesota, from July 8 to 9, 2016 and raised over \$208,000 for the HopeKids program. Pretty cool! A great program that many have followed on Facebook and other social media. Now, we look forward to the next Relentless meet – right?

Those of us who have experienced the Relentless program, because it is an experience, are forever changed. How? I know we have all tried our best to describe it in video, pictures or words and have fallen short. I have no illusions that this article will somehow convey the depth of emotion that extends well beyond the weekend and, as it is described by the athletes, families, volunteers and the stronger children, as a 24/7/365 service.



To be blunt, it cannot be adequately described or conveyed without participating in the experience. Everyone I have met that have attended the first time describes it as a ‘life changing event.’ It is not about Jeff Frank nailing a 1218 lb squat like it was getting up from a chair, or Matt Houser killing a 914 lb bench press, or American War Hero Omar Avila performing an outstanding 633 lb deadlift, lifters pushing through injuries – not for the ego of the lift, but to give the kids a show – the Friday impromptu ghost hunt, wheelchair race, tiaras seen throughout the town... It was getting up from successfully completing a national record bench, shaking hands and knocking fists with the strongest people in the world, the children, including a smile and high five from ‘Kate the Great,’ and realizing the feat of strength meant nothing. The energy from the children, families and everyone else meant everything.



I have literally watched as the strongest of the strong have broken down in tears, of loss and of joy, have honored children and families who are dealing with issues we cannot imagine, and entertain hundreds of children for days through sheer creativity. Everyone brings some part of themselves to a Relentless meet – from the ‘Women of Relentless’ creating the ‘Traps and Tiaras’ program, lifters and volunteers dressing up as super heroes and Disney characters, cooking and baking, shields of strength and so many other countless ways of fundraising or support.



The first Relentless meet was born in 2010 to provide support for the co-owner of Southside Bully gym, Reverend Garth Heckman, who was fighting a second bout of cancer. It was conceived by Mike Hamilton and organized along with Scott Nutter who launched it in March, 2011, to an audience of over 400 who raised funds in support of Garth. Garth went on to defeat cancer. In the meantime, a grassroots effort came into being by the lifters to both continue and expand the program.



In 2012, Relentless Minnesota partnered with HopeKids, a not for profit which supports children with life-threatening illness and their families through events, activities and community support. It was a risk bringing some of the roughest, toughest powerlifters together with these children, many of whom are viewed as fragile. Who knew what would happen.

Who knew?...



What happened was the development of a community where powerlifters and other athletes seek a spot in the program, fundraising that, as was stated by Josh Taylor, President of HopeKids on July 9, 2016, almost completely

funds a chapter of HopeKids for an entire year. On August 6, 2016, 'POWER UP Against Cancer' (<http://facebook.com/POWERUPAgainstCancer>) will launch as a sister HopeKids fundraiser in Arizona.



In 2012, Relentless Detroit kicked off in a partnership between Detroit Barbell and Kirby Church and created the 'Relentless Detroit Foundation,' which raises funds, awareness and support for families with children diagnosed with life threatening illness. Both Relentless MN and Relentless Detroit work closely together in the sharing of ideas and ensuring the integrity of the events.



Each year the funds increase for the charities and the events become larger and more exciting for all involved – \$100s of thousands raised to support families and children, a community of like-minded strength athletes, families and children, and a little faith.



If that was the end of the story, it would be kind of cool and the program may just survive. However, the bonds created between the athletes, children and their families have become unshakeable, partly due to the expansion of the program to include Team Hope. This program pairs up an individual athlete with a child and, by extension, the family where the athlete represents the child as part of their lifting experience. The Athletes cheer, share, and, in a great many cases, become part of the family experiencing the pain and joy that goes along with each situation.

And there is loss.

Loss when a child loses their battle, or the loss of one of the Relentless community. It hits everyone in the organization and the grief is real. In 2015, one of the Relentless children from Detroit, Connor Bint, wanted to compete in Relentless to give back. Connor had terminal brain cancer and, instead of allowing it to beat him, went about living one of the fullest lives someone can live, all in a short period of time.

Doctors reported that Connor would not live to see Relentless Detroit, which is held later in the year than Relentless Minnesota, so it was decided to provide a spot at Relentless MN. He was a rock star! He raised funds and participated as one of the athletes. Unfortunately, the doctors were right and the loss was felt by the Relentless family and so many others.



In 2016, one of the biggest hits was the sudden and unexpected loss of Dean Bennett on January 14, 2016. Dean of Atomic Barbell, was the primary announcer, a strong supporter and a cornerstone of the Relentless Minnesota program. His goal was to deadlift 350 lbs at the 2016 Relentless. After a slideshow dedication to Dean, Shaun Kopplin performed the honorary lift in his memory. There was not a dry eye to be seen.

There is victory.

The community has come together time and again to provide support, assistance, and often a place to stay when times get tough for children, families and even other Relentless athletes. We've had a few that have come back from life-threatening illnesses and even fight cancer and win. The victories have been countless.

The good news is that there has not been defeat.



In this year's program we had over 160 lifters over a Friday and Saturday competing under the UPA (<http://UPAPower.com>) banner. There is nothing like having a group of kids and families sitting on the edge of the stage cheering on every lifter and celebrating every lift, whether it is hit or missed. The spirit is huge and I really don't think anyone cared whether they did exceptionally well – so long as the children were excited. And they were, regardless of the weight on the bar.



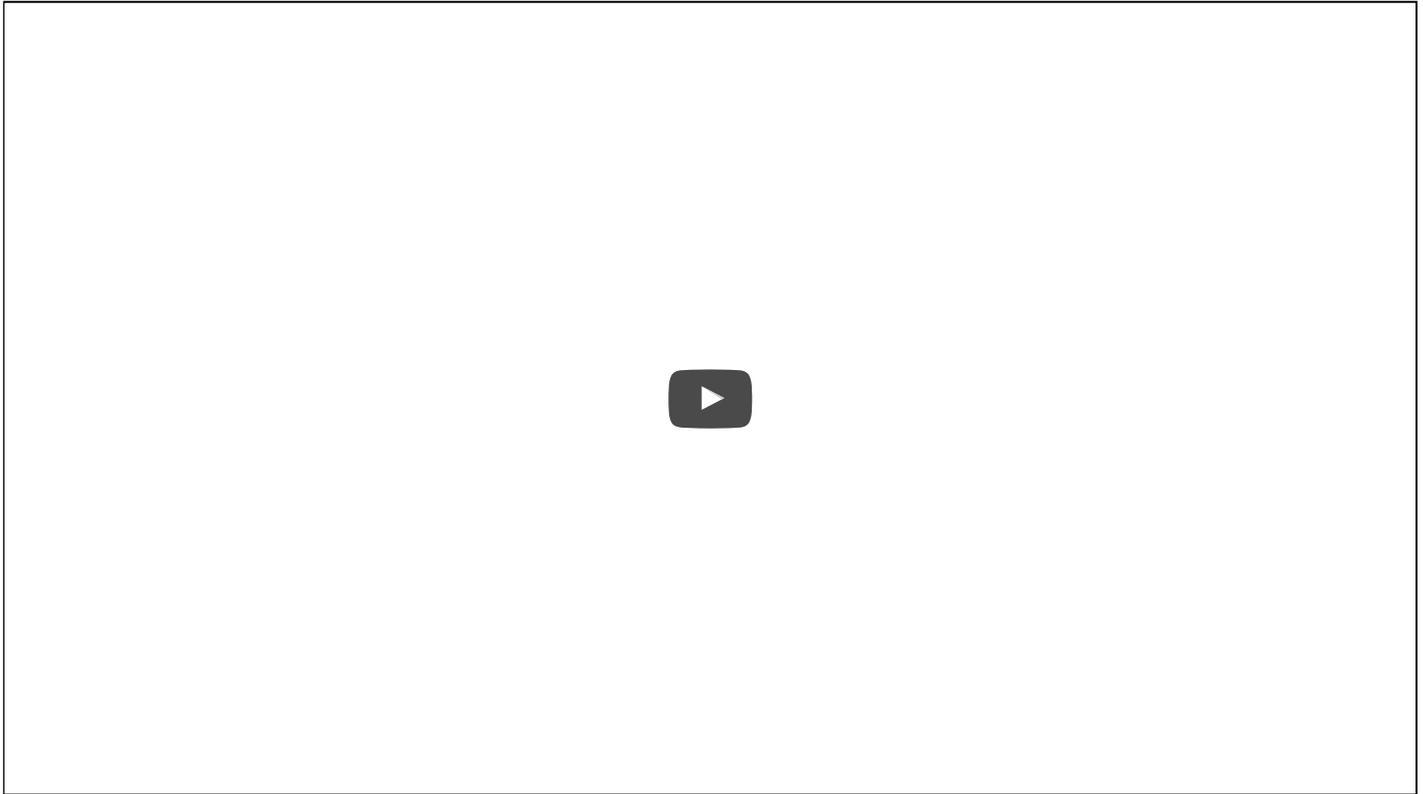
Don't get me wrong, the big lifts were awesome and awe-inspiring. The misses and bombs were frustrating – but the lifters were all, every one, professional.



With all of the negativity that has been going on social media and the news media, it was powerful to turn on Facebook and just see post after post of positive flow from Relentless. Smiling faces of children who are experiencing issues most of us will never have to face, but have a brief respite on the small island of positive thought. This weekend, with problems occurring nation-wide, Relentless brought some light in the shadows of life.

To understand Relentless a little more, check out a few of the videos on <http://RelentlessPowerlifting.com/Relentless-info/> or search the Relentless Detroit and Minnesota pages on Facebook. There is a constant flow of information and news related to this grass-roots and life-changing event.

The best description can be found on YouTube:



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