

# Dubuque Senior student, powerlifter driven to make a difference

Trevor Mensen

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Trevor Mensen doesn't just lift weights; he lifts spirits.

The 16-year-old powerlifter from Dubuque spent this past weekend competing at Relentless, an invite-only powerlifting meet in Rosemount, Minn. All proceeds from the annual event go to benefit HopeKids, a charitable organization that provides support to children with life-threatening illnesses and their families.

Mensen competed in the squat, bench-press and deadlift events in the Full Power category. Cheering him on were dozens of children battling life-threatening illnesses; children carrying heavy weights of their own.

"The kids are absolutely wonderful to talk to," Mensen said. "They're so much fun when they're spry and energetic, and you just love seeing them with that awesome attitude."

This year's Relentless meet raised more than \$208,000, an amount event organizers say is enough to fund one chapter of HopeKids for an entire year.

Mensen says his passion for working with special needs children can be traced back to a personal bond he formed a few years ago with the young son of a family friend.

"He had a condition they hadn't really seen before, and he was kind of my little buddy," Mensen said. "I used to hang out with him quite a bit, and (the child's mother) said, 'Hey, I'm on the board for AYSO, how would you like to come out and work with a lot more kids like this?'"

Since then, Trevor has spent the last three summers volunteering as a referee for AYSO's VIP program, which provides a complete soccer experience for children and adults with physical and mental disabilities.

"We make sure all the kids have lots of fun," Mensen said. "We put them in uniforms and give them medals every year. It's a lot of fun."

Mensen, who will begin his senior year at Dubuque Senior High School this fall, says he's enjoyed his volunteer and benefit work so much, he'd like to make a career out of helping others.

"My long-term plan is to either become a registered nurse, or a physical therapist," said Mensen, who recently started a job as a certified nurse aide. "I'm interested in working with kids who have birth defects or some sort of disability that might keep them from physically becoming active."

The Relentless meet in Minnesota not only raised a good chunk of money for a good cause; it also raised the level of competition for Mensen, who has participated in the sport of powerlifting for about three years. But for Mensen, it's about more than growing muscle; it's about growing hope.

The uplift is just as important as the lifting.

"It's rewarding," Mensen said. "The smallest thing like taking pictures with the kids or giving them a high-five after each lift — it makes you feel just as good as the kids do. It gives them something to keep fighting for and it gives them hope, so it gives you hope, too.

"It really makes a difference. The little things really count."

