

Raising the bar

We spoke to two autistic adults who feel passionately that Olympic weightlifting is a sport that's well-suited to people on the autism spectrum, whether done competitively or not. They told us how they got into it and why they think it's so brilliant.

WEIGHTLIFTER MARTYN RILEY was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome at the age of 30 in 2014. All three of his sons are also on the autism spectrum, and one of them, 13-year-old Kobain, is learning to weightlift too.

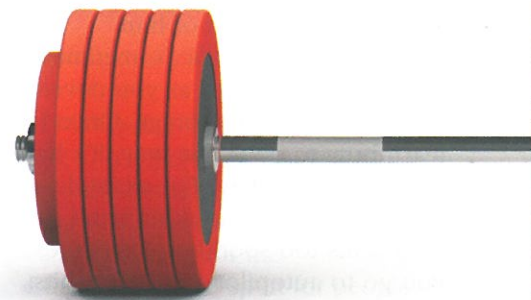
I've been involved in Olympic weightlifting for nearly twenty years, have won multiple titles and medals in my region and nationally, and I'm a

national referee and a qualified coach.

My 13-year-old son, Kobain, got a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder in 2011. I've been coaching him in weightlifting for the past three years. Despite being more affected in his development and learning than me, Kobain is an undefeated three-time British development champion and has been able to integrate well into the team of young lifters he trains with.

Because he's doing so well, the first time Kobain loses will be hard. I'm trying to prepare him by reminding him to try his hardest and do his best – because you can't do better than your best. But it's inevitable – everyone loses one day. The first time I lost I felt like quitting. But I didn't.

I got into the sport when I was 14. I was at the local pool and I heard



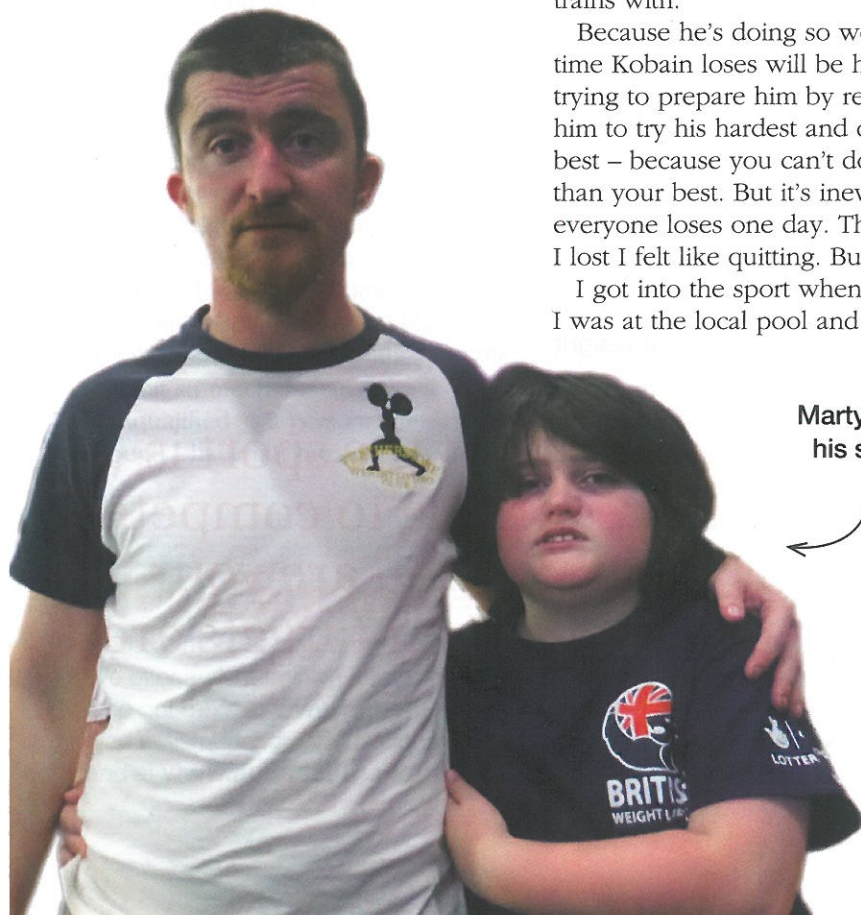
some banging around – so went downstairs to see what it was. I found one of my friends doing some weightlifting and I had a go there and then.

After that, I got fixated and I started training three times a week. I'm quite a competitive person. What I like about the sport is that you are aiming to compete against yourself. You are your own opponent. Your targets are your own targets. It's so structured, disciplined and it allows you to take out aggression.

When I find things hard, rather than kicking off I channel my aggression into the bar. It helps me let off steam. Even though it's an individual sport, you have a team supporting you. You have your coach and your team mates. But it's ultimately you against the bar. I liked winning trophies too!

I have competed a lot over the years but I now run a kids' club in Featherstone, the village where we live. I love seeing kids achieve and giving back – I get such a buzz out of seeing their smiles when they achieve something.

I train Kobain and other club kids. It's nice watching them support each other and warm up together at competitions. I'm lucky that Kobain and I have the same interests. →



Martyn coaches his son Kobain