

Youth Hammer Throwing Questions

The following are questions posed to Pal Nemeth, the director of the Szombathely, Hungary Hammer Training Center, by Harold Connolly at the 2003 International Hammer Seminar in Szombathely.

1. What is the average age of boys and of girls when they begin training and competing in the hammer throw?

I start my hammer throwers when they are about 10 to 12 years old. It is important to start the kids out this early to pick out the ones who have the natural talent to throw hammer. Getting the kids at this age allows them to learn the technique early, as well as prevents other sports from taking the talented athletes.

2. Approximately how many boys and girls ages 14 to 17 years of age are training and competing in the hammer throw and how many 13 years of age and younger?

I work with anywhere from 40 to 50 athletes. This year, 28 were under 17. Twelve of them are now 14 to 17 years of age, and currently I am working with 6 thirteen-year-olds.

3. At what age is resistance training/weightlifting introduced into their hammer throw training?

At first we just focus on hammer throwing when the kids first learn to throw. However, an intermediate strength level is necessary to throw the hammer. Standard strength training along with the use of medicine balls help the young kids throw the hammer. Weightlifting is introduced to the kids when they are 13 - 14 years old.

4. Is there and national system for training youth hammer throwers?

In the past there has not been a national system for training youth the hammer throw. That's one thing I have been working on. We have our new system in for one and a half years now, and we hope it's going to bring us some good results.

5. What are the different weight hammers used by youth 17 years of age and younger in competitions and training?

The 10-12 year-olds throw 2 kg hammers, the 13-14 year-olds 3 kg, 15 year olds 4 kg, and the 16-17 year-olds throw 5 kg hammers.

6. What is the optimum age for youth to begin hammer throw training?

It's hard to answer this question because it all depends on the athlete's determination, and how much he/she loves the sport. It is also easier to train an athlete who has participated in other sports before trying to throw the hammer. If we receive a child who has never participated in another sport (like soccer or other ball games) then it is much harder for them to learn the hammer throw. We are looking for so called "hammer maniacs." If for any reason the athlete happens to miss practice for one day, without good reason, then missing practice is on their conscience. It's really important for the kids to have a good work ethic. One thing that is excellent about our program is that we are able to have the youth and juniors compete right alongside the world's best throwers. The older athletes motivate the 11 and 12-year-old kids.

7. What are the average strength levels and speed performances for boys and girls 16 to 17 years of age in the following activities?
- A. The two-hand power clean with barbell to the shoulders.
 - B. The two-handed overhead snatch with barbell.
 - C. The 30 m sprint from a crouch start.
 - D. The triple jump from the standing position.
 - E. The vertical jump from a standing position.

It's hard to give you a direct answer to this question. I find cleans, jerks, and snatches to be a very important part in hammer throwing. For a 17-year-old hammer thrower, I expect a power clean and jerk of 80 to 100 kilos, about the same weight for the snatch. I find the power clean to be an essential part in hammer throwing. A 17 year old should be able to clean anywhere from 100 to 140 kilos. We don't really time the 30m. The triple jump ranges from 8 to 9 meters approximately for a 17-year-old. I just started testing the vertical jump last year. A good vertical jump would be approximately 70 cm. It's hard to compare the athletes because some of them start their training 2 or 3 years before the other ones.

8. What is the average length of time it takes to develop a 17-year-old boy and girl to become a world-class hammer thrower?

It takes a good 4 to 5 years to get a 17-year-old to the World Youth Championships' final. The athlete would have to start training when he/she is no older than 13-years. However, it all depends on the individual.

9. In the very beginning stage of coaching a youngster in the hammer throw what implements are used to begin the teaching process? A broom, stick, shorter and/or lighter

hammers, exercise balls, etc.?

There are many things that are used to teach the hammer throw. Everything that is required to teach the movements are listed here.

10. In teaching the various technical movements of the hammer throw with the hammer, what is the order in which they are introduced? The winds, turns (1 turn at the time or as a sequence of turns), the release?

The thing I find the most important is the release. After the athlete has learned how to turn properly, the release is critical to master. I find it pointless if an athlete can execute the turns properly but cannot release the hammer properly. I can't emphasize the importance of the quality of the release. A proper release should be with two feet on the ground and in an upward direction. I try to teach the kids to stay in the ring on every throw in practice. This is to prepare them for the competition. If they foul in practice, they are likely to foul in a competition. With the added pressure of competition, the athlete will be nervous enough anyway.