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On the Junior Classes of the Highland Games:

In 2024 the Empire Throwing Club officially opened several of its events to the Junior class. We believe that the Junior class is part of a healthy pipeline for the long-term prosperity of the sport. Through it, we aim to foster young athletes' connection to strength sports, Scottish heritage, and the camaraderie of the Highland Games community.

Prior to welcoming the Junior class to the field, we surveyed athletic directors from around the country to gain a better understanding of the junior class norms, such as they are. During this fact-finding we found two key takeaways:

1. There is very little consistency in the Junior classes from place to place. Different games use different implements, age groupings, etc. The nearest we found to a consensus or standardization of practice are the implements recorded for "Junior World Records" for boys and girls under age 18 by [Clan Bacon](#). Many people would claim to do it the "right way" but no one can really agree on what that is.
2. Most of the ADs surveyed believe that the implements used for world record keeping are too light for junior boys, and do not adequately progress and prepare them for competition as amateur or lightweight adults. Many ADs do utilize heavier implements for boys at their local games, though these vary widely.

In 2024, E.T.C. ultimately decided to follow suit with most of our Northeast neighbors and use the Junior weights defined by Clan Bacon for boys and girls. After a handful of competitions, we noticed that while these weights seem appropriate for the girls, our local junior boys were quickly out-growing them. Like many other event organizers around the country, we question the rationale of having big, strong, teenage boys throw an 8-lb open stone when they would normally throw a 12-lb shotput in track and field, or the wisdom of giving the same boy a 21-lb heavy weight as a 17 year old, only to graduate to a 28-lb light weight and a 56-lb heavy weight when he turns 18. These implements simply don't provide the opportunities to grow and progress that young athletes need to join the ranks of the adult amateur classes. As many more experienced ADs noted, this can lead to discouragement and dropout.

At the same time, there is a hesitation to break away from these Junior weights as there are records on the books. Unfortunately, requests to have these records updated sometimes go

unanswered. Also, while score-reporting websites offer well-defined rankings based on standardized implements within classes and up-to-date comparisons against accurate world records, none of these databases offer the same standardization or fidelity to the Junior classes due to the wide degree of variance that exists. See this document from HeavyAthlete.com titled "[Why no Junior Class](#)".

Because of the issues outlined above, and the absence of a scoring database that standardizes junior implements for ranking purposes, the Empire Throwing Club has opted to shift to a heavier set of implements for Junior boys for all of our competitions which host Junior classes. Following such models as USATF and Highland Games Junior girls who throw the women's masters weights, we will adopt the men's Sr. Masters weights as the standard for Junior boys moving forward, starting with the 2025 NYS Championship at the Thistle Day Highland Games. At the AD's discretion an athlete may be allowed to raise or lower their heavy weights as an *exception* to ensure safety, learning, and meaningful progression. This selection of weights has already been used for Junior boys at the NYS championship for several years.

	Braemar Stone	Open Stone	H. Weight	L. Weight	H. Hammer	L. Hammer	Sheaf	WOB
Junior Boys " <i>The Webster</i> "	16	12	35	21	16	12	12	35
Junior Girls " <i>The Bacon</i> "	13	8	21	14	16	12	10	21

We aim to:

- Standardize these weights as the Junior boys implements for all NYS Championships moving forward
- Support this change by adopting these weights for our non-championship games
- Encourage other games to adopt these weights for Junior boys by hosting accurate, up-to-date state records for boys and girls on www.EmpireThrowingClub.com/Records

We believe that this change will better prepare young throwers to advance to the adult classes, and keep the "heavy" in heavy athletics. We also believe this change creates new opportunities for junior athletes to be recognized for their accomplishments.

Adherence to tradition is what sets our sport apart from the rest. At the same time, there is room to adjust and evolve in healthy ways that will advance the sport. We believe that supporting the Junior classes is essential for the highland games to survive and thrive. While many organizations hesitate to welcome Juniors to the field, or hold on to outdated practices that prevent growth, we are working to build the next generation of the sport on solid footing, and working with other regional athletic directors to do the same.

~Mac Dillman
Founder - Director
Empire Throwing Club