

Lifting 101 is in session at East Hampton Gym

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Tyler Brenneman is at home on the lacrosse field and made enough of an impression on college scouts during his time at East Hampton High School to earn a spot on the University of Notre Dame lacrosse team. Which, in turn, meant he had to start getting familiar with a place that has been largely unknown to him—the weight room.

To have an impact on the powerhouse Division I team—and play alongside his older brother, Zach—Brenneman says he knew he'd have to not only show up to South Bend with skills but also strength.

That's where Chris Cosich came in.

The personal trainer and fitness director at the East Hampton Gym has been working with Brenneman and several other standout athletes for several years, giving them the bodies to go along with the athletic prowess that has—or hopefully will—earn them spots on big time college teams. Cosich's specialty is strength training and weight lifting and he has both the resume and physique to prove it. Cosich was a college football player whose career was cut short by injury but the self-professed “gym rat” has multiple certifications in both personal training and nutrition and has also spent time as a competitive body builder. Cosich is well known within the East Hampton community and trains both men and women of all ages and physical ability levels, helping them set and reach personal fitness goals. But he says he finds working with young athletes particularly rewarding, for several reasons.

“My motivation was that I simply like working with kids,” Cosich said last week. “Especially young athletes. They tend to be more motivated. They also look to older people as mentors and it's important to me to be a mentor.”

Many high school athletes are familiar with the weight room, particularly if they play football, but according to Cosich, plenty of schools fall short when it comes to providing the right amount of guidance in the strength training arena. Cosich said he experienced that shortcoming firsthand as a high school athlete and it made the transition to college even more difficult. For high school athletes who aspire to make a college team and for those who have already committed to schools and will be leaving in the fall, Cosich provides guidance and training in the type of weight lifting exercises that the athletes will become familiar with once they get to their respective schools and are expected to maintain a certain level of fitness.

“I'm teaching these kids multi-joint compound movements,” Cosich explained, saying those movements include the bench press, dead lifts and squats, among others. “This is what they'll come in contact with in college.”

Cosich says that strength training is a key element for anyone who wants to be healthier and in better physical condition, but it's absolutely essential for collegiate athletes who want to see success. And he says that, contrary to what some people believe, athletes can start weight lifting at a young age.

“The American Medical Association recognizes that you can start strength training as young as 10 if you're under supervision,” Cosich said. “A stronger athlete is a better athlete. If you take two kids with similar abilities and make one of them stronger, he will be better and also more resilient to injury.”

Most of Cosich's young clients are football or lacrosse players, but he said that athletes in every sport—from golf to baseball and anything in between—stand to benefit from strength training.

Joe Bronzo has been working with Cosich for five years and is his longest standing young athlete client. Bronzo, a Westchester resident who summers in Sagaponack, is a safety on the Division I Boston College football team and found out about Cosich after hearing him speak during a roundtable discussion about youth fitness on National Public Radio. The 19-year-old said that his father was initially wary about weight lifting, believing it would stunt his son's growth, but after they met Cosich and Bronzo started working out with him—and more importantly, seeing positive results—he came around to the idea. Bronzo said that from his first sessions with Cosich, while he was getting ready to enter his sophomore year in high school in Connecticut and join the varsity football team, until now, he has seen great results.

“He was great,” Bronzo said. “I went from not lifting at all to being able to squat 315 points for reps by the time I went back to school for football.”

Bronzo said when he returned to school in the fall, his football coach was impressed, particularly when Bronzo was bench pressing more weight than several seniors.

Bronzo feels that Cosich's guidance is one of several factors that helped him become a Division I football player.

“There are a few people I can credit that to,” he said. “My parents for raising me how they did, my coach for teaching me technique and Chris for strength. If I had not worked out with him, my dad would never have let me lift, or not right away, and I wouldn't have been as far as I was when I came back for my sophomore year. It was a chain of events. Chris taught me how to lift properly and it allows me to work out at home too.”

Brenneman, meanwhile, heard from several people that Cosich would be a good person to seek out in his quest to add muscle and strength before his freshman year at Notre Dame. Brenneman was one of the most talented male athletes at East Hampton during his senior year, playing volleyball, basketball and lacrosse. Skill and athleticism have been his calling cards, but he said he knew that wouldn't be enough at the next level.

“I knew I needed to get stronger and I heard he does good work with college athletes,” Brenneman said last week when asked how he started working with Cosich. “I knew I needed to get stronger and bigger, because I was a little light.”

Brenneman said Cosich certainly didn't take it easy on him, laughingly admitting that the first few sessions “sucked,” but he said the results quickly followed.

“I've definitely gotten stronger,” he said. “I needed to start eating more too.”

Aside from the knowledge he brings to the table, Brenneman said he likes working with Cosich because his overall approach is well-suited to his needs.

“He's a really nice guy and he's all about local kids,” Brenneman said. “He's helped me big time. I wouldn't have known anything about lifting and it would have been embarrassing.”

Cosich finds most of his clients through referrals from other clients and word of mouth. Greg Barton, a defensive end at Washington and Lee University, also works with Cosich. Cosich said he found Barton at the gym, working on the Cybex machines.

“I walked over to him and said, ‘are you playing football? then you need to be over here,’ and I pointed to the free weight area,” Cosich said.

Cosich said he would like to expand his young athlete client base to include female athletes as well as athletes who compete in a wider range of sports outside of football and lacrosse.

“In the community level, I'd like to be the go-to guy for parents who have an athlete that they want to have special attention,” he said. “I can pretty much guarantee that if I have a kid for 12 to 16 weeks and I can address their nutrition, for three days over the week during the course of the summer, I'll deliver a better athlete.”

In the course of that delivery, Cosich says he's having the time of his life.

“I'm a 43-year-old who still thinks he's 18 sometimes,” he said. “I remember those years and I do miss that camaraderie. I want to be a mentor to these kids and show them something I had to learn on the fly. I like to think that I've affected them positively.”