

Dear Members of Minnesota USA Powerlifting,

It is my distinct honor to announce that effective January 1, 2020, [Shannon Murphy and Ken Graack](#) will officially take over as the new co-state chairs for the Minnesota chapter of USA Powerlifting. As I reflect on my tenure as MN state chair over the past 11 years, I walk away feeling proud of what we all have accomplished together. Many reading this were not in the sport back in 2009. Much has changed since then. In 2008, there was a total of two meets in MN (both in the Twin Cities) and 58 members. We finish 2019 with 17 meets and ~770-800 members (final numbers are not in as of this writing). We now have meets all across the state, a high school meet, a collegiate meet, a masters meet, and more than one women's meet. We have had 100-lifter meets that filled in less than 6 minutes. In 2008, MN ranked 24th in the country in terms of members whereas now we continually rank in the top 10. At the 2008 MN state meet, there were 6 females and 45 males (12% females). In 2019, the Women's State meet had 87 lifters compared to 91 lifters in the Men's State meet. Over the past several years, females have consistently made up 41-42% of the MN membership which is among the highest in the nation and above the national average of 35%. All of this would have been unimaginable in 2009.

I cannot take much of the credit for the success we have experienced over the past 11 years. There are two primary factors that interacted with one another, neither of which were my doing. First, all of powerlifting (a sport that was born in the 1960s) has experienced a resurgence in the past 10-12 years - this has taken place across most federations around the world. The sheer numbers (people competing, number of meets, etc.) tell the story. While there are some who yearn for the way that powerlifting used to be, I think most enjoy being a part of the sport as it exists today. I have heard some speculate that the boom can be attributed to a combination of CrossFit, social media, and raw lifting. Though it is impossible to know for sure, my personal opinion is that those three factors played significant roles and acted synergistically to create the landscape we see today. To say we were going to grow dramatically in MN no matter what is not accurate because there was a second major factor involved. The wave could have easily passed us by in MN had it not been for an incredible cast of people who stepped up to become meet directors, referees, other volunteers, and general supporters. These people rose to the occasion, made many sacrifices, and worked together to find a way to accommodate the unprecedented demand for USA Powerlifting's brand of the sport in MN. It was not easy and while many said it was a good problem to have, it was a problem nonetheless. It would probably surprise many to know that, on more than one occasion, a meet almost did not happen or nearly was forced to stop in the middle of the meet due to staffing shortages. There was always a core group of people who worked behind the scenes to pull it off and to do so in a way that was not noticeable to most. So, while I was not responsible for the success, I think I could have done a lot in my role as state chair to screw up a good thing and stifle growth. I tried to identify trends, recognize opportunities and, to a degree, predict the future. Not everyone has agreed with everything I have done over the years but I hope my positive contributions far outnumber any inadvertent negative disservices on my part.

In my role as state chair, I have asked much of many people. There are three people in particular who have helped continuously and tremendously over my tenure (and before) and never said no when I asked for something - and I asked a lot. Jim Cahill has been involved with USAPL/ADFPA since the 1990s as a referee, meet director, and elite lifter. He has invested a huge amount of money in the equipment you see at meets and an incalculable amount of time and effort in running meets or supporting others running meets over the better part of 30 years. To call Jim selfless and passionate about the sport is an understatement. Many reading this have seen Anna White at MN meets over the past 10+ years. As a referee, meet director, and lifter, she has a large skillset that proved invaluable. I always knew I could count on Anna if I needed another referee, or someone to work the score table, or someone to run a meet flawlessly without any oversight needed, or someone to help set up for a meet on a Friday and stay until the job was done (sometimes after midnight). If something had unexpectedly prevented me from carrying out my responsibilities as state chair, Anna could have easily stepped in and taken over. Angela Simons was the MN state chair before me and has a long list of accomplishments and roles within USA Powerlifting going back to the 1990s including many records and World Championship appearances as a lifter, Team USA coach, and international referee. She was the 2017 recipient of the Brother Bennett Award - the highest honor in USA

Powerlifting. In 2008, Angela became the Secretary for USA Powerlifting - a job that has one of the greatest workloads in the entire organization and one she continues to do after more than 10 years (and does it on top of being a full-time math professor). I filled the MN state chair vacancy she left. Angela gave me my state referee exam in 2006 when I first decided to become involved beyond simply being a competitor (a decision I made after a major injury prevented me from competing). Angela and I have been friends ever since. But it goes a lot further than friendship. She has been a teacher and a mentor to me like few others have. To this day, I continue to seek her guidance on difficult issues. I never feel 100% at ease at a powerlifting event (state or national level) unless Angela is there because I know whatever unusual or difficult thing comes up, she will have the solution.

To be the type of state chair I thought I needed to be required some sacrifices. But it was always my choice to make the sacrifices and I do not regret any of it. When I started back in 2009, there was not a lot holding me back from being involved and the workload was very manageable. I had a girlfriend at the time and we had three meets in MN each year for my first three years as state chair so it was not hard to make it all work. However, over time, my family grew. My girlfriend turned into my wife (Rachel); we added one Bichon Frise (Daisy) and then a second Bichon Frise (Lily); we had a baby (Frank) and then a second baby (Isabelle). In that time, three MN meets every year turned into 10 meets and that turned into 15+ meets. In 2019, we had at least one meet in every month and many months had two. Many weeks required 10-20 hours of work on my part in addition to my regular job. In an 8-day stretch in June, 2018, I co-directed Twin Cities Open at the MN Sports Expo on a Saturday, flew to Canada to be a referee at IPF Raw Worlds during the week, and then came back to direct the Med City Raw Open in Rochester on Saturday. While that was hard for me, it was a lot harder for the person who stayed home and took care of our family on top of her full-time job. This is the same person whose workload dramatically increases every time I leave for a meet - the vast majority of which are not near where we live and require me to be gone one or two nights for each event (longer for national meets). While Rachel did not "sign up" for any of this, she has never once tried to dissuade me from serving in the role as state chair and doing it in the way I thought it needed to be done (i.e., attending every single event). I am proud to say that I have not missed a MN USA Powerlifting event since 2006 (87 meets) and I am happy to say that I have chosen to end the streak where it currently stands. It is Rachel who has made the biggest sacrifice - to say she has gone above and beyond would not even be the tip of the iceberg. I am grateful beyond words for the support she gives me - the support she has always given me. One of the first words my 4-year-old son learned to say was "powerlifting." But it was not in the context most would think. Anytime I leave to go somewhere, he asks if I am going to powerlifting. He associates the word powerlifting with me leaving and that is sad to me. When I first started as state chair in 2009, I did not set a specific time limit in terms of how long I planned to serve in the position. I figured that I would "just know" the right time to step away. I had that feeling in early 2019 (several factors were involved) and I am now certain that this is the right time. This is not goodbye and I am not leaving. I will still be at many MN meets and I will continue in my roles at the national level. Many people will probably not even notice a difference.

My leadership style is to surround myself with people better than me and to lead by example and from the front. I believe I have done that here in MN. I was overjoyed when Shannon Murphy and Ken Graack approached me in February and indicated an interest in taking over as co-state chairs after I had announced that I was not running for another term when mine expired at the end of 2019. I was overjoyed because it meant two people better than me would take over and I could not ask for anything more. I have the highest respect for Shannon and Ken as people as well as managers, organizers, and mentors. Their skillsets and their personalities complement one another perfectly and they are the embodiment of the word "team." As someone who took a very hands-on approach to the state chair position, I thought it might be difficult to truly disconnect myself from the decision-making and management aspects of the position. Knowing Shannon and Ken are taking over allows me to completely cut the cord without hesitation because I know it will be a seamless transition and they will do a better job than I did. They will take the long tradition and storied history of our state (going back to MN ADFPA in the 1980s) and build it into something even greater. I hope you will give them as much support as you have always given me as they chart our state's course into the next decade and the next chapter of MN USA Powerlifting.

Sincerely,
Joe Warpeha