

How Westhill's Wonderful Weight Room has Adapted. And Succeeded.

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The Weight Training class at Westhill has become a coveted one for those looking to fulfill their Physical Education credit in a unique way. Many expect the class to be straightforward: push a few barbells and dumbbells around, break a sweat, and then go on about their day.

But like many classes at Westhill, Mr. William “Coach” Kurtz said it has had to adapt in recent years, due to the series of new schedules proposed by the school board since 2022. “It’s hard to stay busy for 96 minutes,” Kurtz said, referring to the length of the class during the third period, “[but the] kids work hard.”

This difficulty is only exacerbated by the fact that, ironically, weightlifting is only half of the war in the class: for every minute one spends moving weight, most spend four to five minutes recovering for their next set. The increase in downtime has bred “foolishness” as Kurtz calls it, but nothing the 20-plus-year veteran coach can’t handle.

From current English Language Learners to committed student-athletes, Kurtz’s students are like a band of misfits he has inherited who all have their individual reasons for being in the highly coveted class: Illia Vasylyk (‘27), a native Ukrainian, works out in hopes of making it onto Westhill’s Boys Volleyball team. Angelina Flores (‘26) uses the weight room to stay in shape for her time in JROTC. Kurtz knows

each one of his students by name.

Students in the class work cooperatively, recommending specific exercises, critiquing their peers’ form, and giving others encouragement during hard sets. All students interviewed say they work out for the positive aura associated with weightlifting and staying healthy, and nowhere is this more apparent than in the weight room itself.

The weight room is a masterclass in stimulating the senses: Upon entering, students are greeted by what appears to be a garage later converted into a gym — lined with iron dumbbells and barbells that look like they haven’t left the school since it first opened. The room is a grungy time capsule of the days before clean-cut commercial gyms, with graffiti strewn across the walls and siding detailing many students’ weightlifting records from decades past, and chalk handprints harkening back to those of the Stone Age.

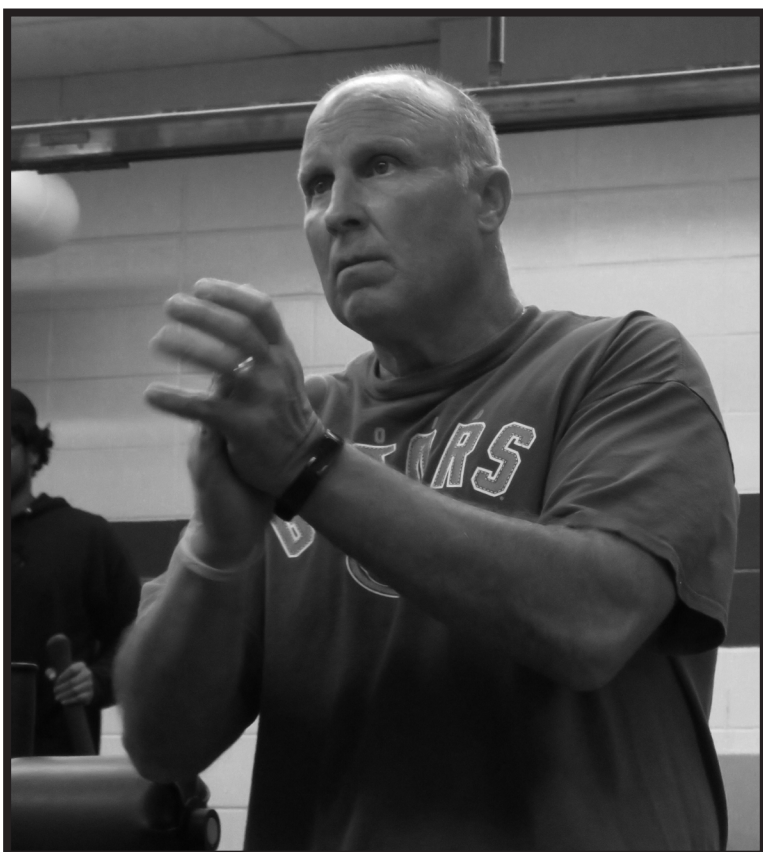
Much like the weight room itself, Kurtz is old school, showing nothing less than tough love. To the students’ dismay, Kurtz holds fast to a strict no-headphones policy forbidding them from listening to their own music. Instead, they listen to the silence of slamming barbells and students screaming as they hit bigger and bigger PRs. To compensate, Fanel Medina-Rodriguez (‘26) is routinely promoted to class DJ, curating a mix of jock jams and reggaeton depending on what side of the weight room Kurtz is



SWEAT Illia Vasylyk (‘27) does dumbbell curls in the corner of the weight room. Photo by Eugene Caibal (‘25)



Ruslyn Lashchik ('26) exercises to stay healthy. Photo by Eugene Caibal ('25)



MR. WILLIAM KURTZ claps inside the weight room to motivate his students. Photo by Eugene Caibal ('25)

on that blares from the PE department's speaker.

His hardline philosophy also extends to footwear: if a student is not wearing the proper shoes, they will sit out for the entirety of the class. Ruslyn Lashchik ('26) and Joshua Orellana ('25), two friends who have the class together alongside Medina-Rodriguez, have both been made to sit out because of Kurtz's policy, but both say they admire Kurtz and understand why it needs to be done.

Though Medina-Rodriguez is routinely made the target of Kurtz's "If you're on the machine, the machine should be

moving" speeches, he had the most praise to say about Kurtz and his motivating work ethic. "He's a good teacher and a good coach," Medina-Rodriguez said. "He'll be on your [expletive]."

He said that he also appreciates Kurtz for his chants and mantras which he uses to get his students moving. Kurtz's signature "Oh yeah" ad-lib had become an inside joke that students had come to echo mockingly at first. But now, they say, they do it genuinely, whether to mimic his aura or just out of sheer respect.

Overall, Medina-Rodriguez said he consid-

ers Kurtz a good supporter and role model, and that he will always be there when his students need help working out. "He'll never let you give up," he said. "Nothing like that."

Kurtz's success, much like the class, speaks for itself: every student interviewed said they'd recommend the class, and that they would take it again if they could. In the words of Kurtz, who most students just call Coach, "Lifting for a lot of our kids will be a lifetime activity, so the sooner they start, the better off they'll be."