

Braycee Fenster didn't know what to expect from herself.

The West Lowndes High School junior had lifted a few weights outside of school, but she had never been part of a team whose primary goal was to build strength for an entire season.

That's why Fenster never would have imagined her first year as a member of West Lowndes High's girls powerlifting team would have been so successful.

"Prior to the season, I don't think I would have been able to qualify for the state meet because I didn't expect too much from myself when I started," Fenster said. "I hadn't really done the lifts, so I didn't know how I was going to do, but I knew I was going to try my best to do what I could."

On Friday, Fenster will join five other competitors in Class 1A's 165-pound weight class at the Mississippi High School Activities Association State Powerlifting meet at Mississippi Coliseum in Jackson. Girls in all classifications will compete Friday, while boys will compete Saturday.

Fenster enters the competition with a 460-pound combined weight total. She said she will try to eclipse her personal-bests in the squat, bench press and dead lift to continue a trend that has seen her deliver some of her best performances late in the season.

"To see I have qualified for the state meet is pretty cool," Fenster said.

Fenster, who also is a member of the school's volleyball team, said West Lowndes High powerlifting coach Michael Thorn encouraged her to come out for the team, which is in its first year. She said she also wanted to take up powerlifting because several of her friends were on the team.

“I knew a little bit about powerlifting because my brother (Brandon Hill, who also advanced to compete at the state meet when he was a student-athlete at West Lowndes High) used to do powerlifting and he went pretty far,” Thorn said. “I thought we were going to do entirely different lifts because before I get into something I like to research what I am going to do.”

Fenster placed second at the regional meet in March at Velma Jackson High to qualify for the state meet. She admitted she was a little nervous, but she said decided to do the best she could do and wound up setting personal-bests in the squat and dead lift.

“I was excited because I didn’t even think I was going to get second,” Fenster said.

Fenster said being part of the powerlifting team has helped her gain confidence and change her mind-set. Prior to joining the team, she said she used to be someone who “put their head down really quickly” when something didn’t go right. Now, she said she is able to keep her head up and shake off mistakes more easily.

“I am proud of how far I have come,” Fenster said.

Fenster also has taken time outside of school to hone her skills. She said she worked with one and two dumb bells to increase her strength so she would have a chance to set PRs as the season progressed. Fenster also has relied on a regimen of 100 pushups a day the last 10 days to improve her strength for bench press.

“I am so proud of her,” said Thorn, who is retiring at the end of the school year. “She is a disciplined, hard-working athlete and a great student. Braycee had not lifted weights until last December and never attended a powerlifting meet until February. She has a great future in any endeavor she chooses.”

Fenster credits her friends for their support throughout the season. She said they have helped her remain calm and maintain a mental approach that enables her to keep things in perspective. Fenster hopes she can get 90 pounds in the bench press at the state meet. She said she plans to start from 165 in the squat and around 200 pounds in the dead lift and to go as high as she can.

“I hope my success encourages more students to get involved with the powerlifting teams,” Fenster said. “We started with so many people and it dwindled down. I hope next year more people and more girls will be inspired to do it and keep with it.”

Fenster will be the only student-athlete representing West Lowndes High. On Friday in Class 4A, junior Delani Clements (105-pound weight class), sophomore Nina Weinstein (165) and seniors Izzy Glasgow (181) and Lacy Goins (242) will represent Caledonia High.

On Saturday in Class 4A, junior Anthony Kilgore (114) will represent Caledonia High, while junior Lalen Atterberry (123) and junior Merrit Moon (165) will represent New Hope High in Class 5A.