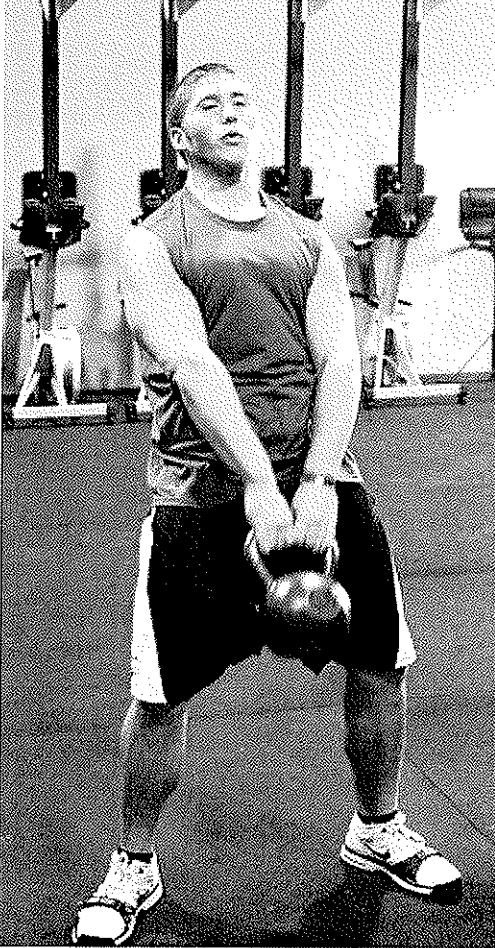


Clarkston graduate makes decision to take the load off

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By Kerri Sandaine of the Tribune

Robbie Johnson says effort to drop 145 pounds changed his life



Robbie Johnson works out several times a week at Gold's Gym in Lewiston, where he runs and...

Robbie Johnson's decision to get in better shape for his last year of high school football turned out to be a life changer.

When the Clarkston student started working out, he weighed 365 pounds and rarely exercised. He didn't think twice about eating fast food or loading his plate.

Now he's a regular at the gym, he runs, he avoids junk food, soda pop and almost never eats out. When he graduates with about 175 of his classmates Saturday, Johnson will be weighing 145 pounds less than he did as a junior.

"I feel a lot better," said the 18-year-old son of Steve and Flo Johnson. "I have more energy. I'm a lot more active. I run every day, and I still do CrossFit three times a week. I think some people think if you're overweight, you can't lose it. What I found is you have to try and you have to want to do it."

Johnson, who works part-time at Lolo Sporting Goods, said his significant weight loss has made everything better and enhanced his life.

"I've noticed girls talk to me more," he said with a grin. "They actually want to have a conversation now."

During football season, the slimmed-down Bantam had a few folks scratching their heads at the Lewiston game. Several Lewiston kids were asking where he was on the field, Johnson recalled. They didn't recognize the new version playing left tackle and defensive tackle.

Johnson learned how to snowboard last winter, a sport he would not have attempted when he was at his heaviest. He is considering trying out for the Eastern Washington University Eagles football squad, hoping to make the team as a walk-on.

When the straight-A student decides to do something, he sticks with it. Johnson is one of seven valedictorians and a captain of the football team. He plans to become a mechanical engineer after getting a degree at EWU.

"I've really liked high school," he said. "I had great teachers. Mr. (Gordon) Glenn was one of my favorites. I think it's important that your teachers are positive and want to teach you something."

Johnson has a lot of friends and wasn't teased or bullied about his weight.

"I'm not one of those dramatic people. I managed to avoid the high school drama."

He discovered the importance of teamwork during football and also developed leadership skills. His take-away lesson is to keep your spirits up, even when the game isn't going your way.

"Your attitude is contagious to everyone else. You have to stay positive, even if you're in a hole or you'll never dig yourself out."

And he learned something else this year. If you want to lose weight or make some other major change in your life, you have to go for it and be willing to do the hard work. There are no magic pills or instant fixes. It takes discipline and commitment, he said.

"Your family can want this for you, but until you want to change, it won't happen," Johnson said.