



[Cheryl Haworth](#)

Often called "the strongest woman in the United States," Cheryl Haworth is a competitive weight lifter who emerged in the late 1990s as a popular icon for women in sports. While still a teenager, she became national champion, junior world champion, and an Olympic medalist.

Cheryl Ann Haworth was born in [Savannah](#) on April 18, 1983, the middle daughter of Sheila and Robert Haworth. Her father, a businessman, and her mother, a nurse, were both athletes and encouraged their daughters to play sports. Haworth, however, was sickly and thin as a toddler and suffered from allergies, ear infections, bronchitis, and pneumonia. After having her tonsils and adenoids removed at age six, she gained weight, and family members and playmates began to notice her unusual strength. She became interested in weight lifting as a way to improve in softball. Haworth was only thirteen when her father took her to the Anderson/Cohen Weightlifting Center in Savannah. The coaches were astonished when she power-cleaned 110 pounds with ease—never had they seen such potential in a female lifter.

Encouraged by her parents and her mentor and coach Michael Cohen, Haworth was soon training two and a half hours a day, five times a week, and competing regularly. By 1998 she was a national champion, the nation's leading female weight lifter, and the youngest lifter (at fifteen) ever to hold senior American records. She qualified for the 1998 world championship team but was too young to compete.

For Haworth 1999 was a banner year, with another national title, a gold medal in the Pan American Games,

a silver medal in the junior world championships, and a fourth place finish at the world championships in Athens, Greece, with a 253-pound snatch and a 303-pound clean-and-jerk lift. At the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games, where women competed in weight lifting for the first time, Haworth had a perfect day with a 275-pound snatch and a 319-pound clean-and-jerk lift at a body weight of 300 pounds, setting five American records and capturing the bronze medal. Further recognition came with several magazine feature stories, a 2001 Women of Courage Award from the National Organization for Women, and a cameo in Howard Schatz's book *Athlete* (2002).



[Cheryl Haworth](#)

Haworth has continued her winning ways, collecting six national titles, a bronze medal at the 2001 Goodwill Games, and two junior world championships. She holds all national records in her class and, after finishing fourth at the 2002 world championships in Warsaw, Poland, was the highest-ranking American weight lifter, male or female. Haworth competed in the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, Greece, but finished in sixth place.

Haworth's appeal, however, extends beyond the sport of weight lifting. A versatile athlete, she can run forty yards in 5.5 seconds, jump 30-inch vertical leaps, and perform front, back, and sideways splits. She is also a talented artist. She graduated from the Savannah Arts Academy in 2001 and studies historic preservation at the [Savannah College of Art and Design](#). Much like legendary Georgia strongman [Paul Anderson](#), with whom she is sometimes compared, Haworth has been an innovator. She seems destined to serve as an enduring role model for women in sports.

Cheryl Haworth (b. 1983)

2000 Sydney Olympics weightlifting competition

Savannah, Ga.

Age: 17

Height: 5'9"

Haworth, a three-time national champion who competes in the women's 75-kg (over 165.25 lbs.) division, holds every U.S. record in her weight class. She began weightlifting at 12, when she went to a gym for softball workouts and noticed Olympic-caliber weightlifters training. Eager to try it herself, she persuaded her parents to let her have a go. It was clear from the start she possessed raw talent and strength.

- 2000** National Championships, 1st
- 2000** National Junior Championships, 1st
- 1999** World Championships, 3rd in Snatch
- 1999** Pan American Games, 1st
- 1999** Junior World Championships, 2nd
- 1999** National Championships, 1st
- 1999** National Junior Championships, 1st
- 1998** National Championships, 1st
- 1998** American Open, 1st

While the Olympic team trials don't officially take place until late July, Haworth is as close to a lock as you can get. Should she make the squad, she will arguably be the best U.S. hope -- male or female -- for an Olympic medal in weightlifting at the Games, where women's weightlifting is making its debut. In addition to her considerable strength, Haworth is also fast, springy and flexible (she can run the 40-yard dash in 5.5 seconds, has a 30-inch vertical leap and can do the splits).



Al Bello/Allsport