



# Melanie Roach

*at a glance...*

## Statistics

- Hometown: Bonney Lake, WA
- Birthdate: Dec 14, 1974
- Weight: 117
- Height: 5'1"

## Athletic Accolades

- 2008 Olympic Team Member
- 2007 Pan Am Games Bronze Medalist
- 8 Time US National Champion
- 2006 Pan Am Championships Bronze Medalist
- 5 Time US World Team Member

## Points of Interest

- First US woman to clean/jerk over double her body weight - currently the only US woman to do so.
- Set new world standard in the clean/jerk in the 53kgs (117lbs) weight class - lifting 113 kgs (250lbs.)
- Holds the longest standing American records in the clean/jerk.
- Broke the snatch and clean/ jerk total American Record at the 2008 Olympic Games.
- Is the mother of four young children, one of whom is autistic, owner/operator of a gymnastics school with over 500 students, wife of WA House of Rep. legislator and a Sunday school teacher.



**Weightlifting**

# Melanie Roach

## *...in depth*

As a young gymnast, Melanie's intense work ethic took her all the way to the WA State High School Championships but an injury sidelined her from the competition. Rehab included her introduction to free weights and soon thereafter a future, and powerful, star was in the making.

Shattering the stereotypical body image of weightlifters, the petite former gymnast quickly made it clear that strong things can come in small packages. In her first competition, the 1994 American Open, she won a bronze medal. In 1996, she began to pursue weightlifting full time, and set her sights on the 2000 Olympic Games. She soon thereafter stunned the weightlifting world by exceeding the world standard in the clean and jerk at the 1998 US National Championships. She had become the #1 ranked US weightlifter and the first American woman in history to clean and jerk more the twice her body weight. She was poised for a 2000 Olympic debut.

Devastatingly, weeks before the Olympic Trials, Melanie suffered a serious back injury. Her Olympic dreams and future in the sport appeared to be over. She picked herself up and moved on. She put her energy into assisting her husband, Dan, in his election to the WA State House of Representatives while opening her own business - Roach Gymnastics, Inc. Her husband is now in the midst of his fourth term, her gymnastics school serves over 500 students and together they have four young children. During this time Melanie still yearned to compete.

In 2005 Melanie decided it's never too late to chase your dreams. She returned to competitive weightlifting. Later that year her son Drew was diagnosed with autism. The resulting emotional and physical challenges of living with autism weighed heavily on Melanie and Dan, but their faith, commitment to each other and ever-growing support group has carried them through.

By March of 2006 she reclaimed her spot on the US National Team and won her 6th US National Championship. She underwent state of the art back surgery, a microdiscectomy, not available years earlier when she left the sport. The result was her 7th US National Championship (2007) and the first time since 2000 that she clean/jerked twice her own body weight. She was back!

In August of 2007 Melanie won the bronze medal at the Pam Am Games in Brazil, officially marking her return to elite international weightlifting. She went on to claim her 8th National Championship in February of 2008, secured her Olympic dream in May at the US Olympic Trials in Atlanta, GA and fulfilled that dream in Beijing setting a new American record and finishing fifth at the Olympic Games.

Melanie's Olympic story captured the attention of the national media. She was named ABC World News Person of the Week, USA Today's Athlete of the Week, profiled in a NY Times Cover story and filmed by NBC's Today Show, CNN, The Associated Press, NBC's Nightly News and countless news, radio and local television broadcasts.





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Weightlifting is the  
easiest part of my day"

The background of the page is a close-up, slightly blurred image of the United States flag, showing the red and white stripes and the blue field with white stars. The flag is draped and appears to be moving, creating a sense of motion and patriotism.

# Beijing Bound

Three powerful and committed women represent the inspirational cross section of U.S. athletes heading to this year's Olympic Games

While hundreds of women will represent the United States at this summer's Olympic Games in Beijing, three in particular caught our eye. That's because the Games are about more than the venue-bound medal chases that will commence on Aug. 8 — they're about the sweat and the sacrifices made by athletes in the months and years leading up to the event. The Olympics have a *gravitas* about them that forces even elite athletes to rearrange their lives in hopes of shining on sport's biggest stage — if only this once — and work, play and family are often forced into the periphery.

These three women have not only managed to find balance in their lives but have achieved excellence along the way. Julie Ertel, who is returning to the Olympics eight years after a crushing last-second loss as captain of the 2000 silver medal-winning U.S. women's water polo team, found her stride in the triathlon and will represent the Stars and Stripes in a second sport — a feat as improbable as it is impressive.

Young Allyson Felix, while attending classes at the University of Southern California, has managed to secure the title of "Fastest Woman on Earth" and will look to cement that billing in just over 20 seconds worth of track time in China.

And the inimitable Melanie Roach — all 5'1" of her — is back on track with USA Weightlifting after a devastating spinal injury in 2000 kept her from qualifying for the Sydney Games. She has managed this comeback, inconceivably, at the age of 33, well past a weightlifter's prime, while running a business and raising three children (one of whom is autistic).

Three women, three amazing stories. *Citius, altius, fortius* — swifter, higher, stronger — has never been quite so inspirational. Let the Games begin!

Photos by Jim Purdum

# Melanie Roach

*The Weightlifter*  
By Karla Dial

For an Olympic weightlifter, two things are essential: a strong foundation and a sense of balance. For Melanie Roach, one of the sport's best bets to go to Beijing this summer in the women's 53-kg (117-pound) weight class, those two concepts take on a whole new meaning.

By all rights, she shouldn't even be here. At 33, she's eight years past the age at which most elite lifters retire — for that matter, eight years past the age at which she *did* retire after a severely herniated disc in her spine ended her run on the Olympic team in 2000. During that layoff she had three children, one of whom is autistic. And rather than leave behind her family (including husband Dan, a fourth-term state representative) and a gymnastics business in Bonney Lake, Washington, to move to Colorado to prep for this May's Olympic trials, she's doing everything it takes to go to Beijing while caring for them full time.

"Is it better than what other athletes have?" she asks, comparing her hectic life at home to that of the somewhat pampered competitors at the Olympic Training Center who eat their six daily meals in a cafeteria instead of shopping and cooking for five. "I don't know, but for me, it's exactly what I need to make me a better athlete. There were a lot of disappointments leading up to the 2000 trials."

Despite claiming the U.S. Championships title in her weight class seven times since 1997 and making the World Team five times, she had never put together a great performance in international competition. "What's different for me now is that my perspective has changed so much," Roach says. "I'm more balanced, having the challenges of raising a family

and running a business, and having an autistic child. Weightlifting is the easiest part of my day."

## UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Roach found weightlifting late, as a 19-year-old, 5'1" gymnast looking to lose the few pounds she had put on in college, and who thought female weightlifters were all burly chicks who looked like they towed cars with their bare hands. But once she stepped foot in coach John Thrush's gym, she saw otherwise. And once she learned proper technique in the snatch and clean and jerk, she was hooked.

"Gymnastics and weightlifting are so close in terms of the [athletic] qualities that are needed, it's just incredible," Thrush says. Olympic-style lifting is about the ability to apply force quickly, so speed, flexibility and all-around athleticism are even more important than brute strength — qualities most gymnasts have in spades. "Every gymnast who doesn't quite make it all the way should consider weightlifting, because she's already prepared for 90% of what we do."

Currently, Roach is the only actively competing American woman to have clean and jerked more than twice her body-weight in competition. In Thailand last September, a little more than a year after undergoing surgery to repair her herniated disc, Roach turned in her best international performance ever at the World

Weightlifting Championships, hoisting 75 kg (174 pounds) in the snatch and 110 kg (243 pounds) in the clean and jerk on the way to making all six of her attempts — something practically unheard of in international competition, Thrush says.

For Roach, the strong foundation and sense of balance she has found come from her family, her faith in God and one very long daily to-do list. "It's about priorities," she says. "It's so hard — sometimes you just want to skip those meals, and the last thing you want to do is read a story to your kids at night. But you accept it and just keep pushing ahead. I know at the end when I'm at the Olympics, I'll have no regrets this time around."

## SNAPSHOT

Melanie Roach  
Sport: Weightlifting  
Age: 33  
Height: 5'1"  
Weight: 117 pounds  
Hometown: Bonney Lake, Washington  
Accomplishments: Seven-time U.S. National Weightlifting champion (1997–2000, 2003, 2006–07); five-time U.S. World Team member (1997–99, 2006–07); two-time Pan American Games bronze medalist (2006–07); 2000 U.S. Olympic team alternate; holds women's 53-kg clean and jerk world record (250 pounds)