

strength and power-based sport is a males-only thing, but the fact is that women can train for strength and power and not give up their femininity. I have two young daughters, and I hope to show them that it is ok to be a strong female, and in being one they can achieve whatever they want. They just have to believe and fight for it."

There is nothing like being in Highland Athletics. It's not just a sport: it's a family of athletes, judges, administrators and other families who spend long days together on the field. They become a part of each others lives, welcoming babies, celebrating engagements and mourning losses. The competition is fierce, but athletes support each other, cheer each other on when they succeed and offer constructive criticism when they fail.

Harrison described it as "a huge brotherhood, unlike many other competitive sports. It is an honor and a privilege to be able to do the things we do."

Allison said, "I remember how I felt my first game - completely terrified as I had never done anything like this before. The girls were so nice and welcoming that what could have easily been a very embarrassing experience turned out to be one of the best."

Kearney appreciates the friendships he has developed because of the games. "Even though the Highland games are a very obscure sport, it takes really well-trained athletes to do well at it. Even after all these years I still think like an athlete, and train hard like an athlete. I think the games have kept me young."

Eric's take is simple: "It's a great time out on the field and if you choose to take a chance training for a fringe strength sport, you will not regret it. There are life long friends to be made and good memories too."

Is a kilt required? Yes. Unlike other modern sports, the kilt "uniform" is as deeply rooted in Scottish history and pride as the sport. Considered a symbol of Jacobite rebellion, the English outlawed kilts in 1746. When the ban was lifted 35 years later, the kilt became a symbol of Scottish pride and wearing a kilt honors that.

The tartan (plaid is the piece of cloth, tartan is the cloth's interwoven pattern) you wear is up to you. There are hundreds of patterns and it's not just about Scottish heritage anymore. The Commonwealth of Virginia has its own tartan as do other countries and causes like breast cancer awareness. If stripes make you look fat, companies like Utilikilts and Sport Kilts have been popularizing kilt wearing making machine washable, solid colored fabrics. Don't let the thought of wearing a kilt (it's **not a skirt!**) scare you off. Kearney or any athlete will tell you, "Chicks dig kilts!"

The Virginia Scottish Games & Festival is September 3-4 at Great Meadow in The Plains, VA. Tickets and festival information is available at www.scottishgames.org. Come to the field and cheer Kearney, Harrison, Eric and Allison on!

The athletes would like to clear up a few misunderstandings about what Highland Athletics is:

Kearney – "Every time I mention that I do highland games, the response is 'Oh yeah, I saw that on TV, where they're using chainsaws.' Highland Games have nothing to do with lumberjack competitions and are much more like a cross between strongman events and track and field."

Harrison – "Unlike many other strength sports, we a very 'clean' sport when it comes to performance-enhancing drugs. Not that it doesn't exist, but there is a very high expectation that everyone is clean."

Allison – "That it's a boy's-only sport. That you have to be a former track and field athlete to compete and do well. That you can be too old to start competing. That it's easy to throw what is basically a tree! That any of the events are easy."



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