

## TRIBUTE TO TOMMY KONO FROM HIS HAWAII TEAMMATES

### Mike Harada

I represent all the Olympic weightlifters from the Nuuanu Y, outer islands, and the mainland. The Nuuanu Y is the Mecca of Olympic weightlifting made famous by Tommy.

I write this with a heavy heart. Tommy was smart, articulate, and a very humble man. To all of us he was a coach, a mentor, a confidant, a friend and a father figure especially to me. He taught us all to be mentally tough not just in competition, but in life. He taught us to leave everything on the platform and never quit no matter how tired or injured we were. No excuses!

Whatever Tommy did, he did big time. Whether it was bench pressing 135 lbs (barbells, not dumbbells) one in each hand, ripping a phone book in half, squatting 365 lbs for 20 reps at a bodyweight of 157 lbs, or blowing up a hot water bottle until it exploded. He always did things in an impressive fashion.

A lot of us lifters knew Tommy for over 40 years. It hasn't been the same at the Y without him the past year. He was a fixture there. The younger generation may not have realized what a legend Tommy was, but for us old-timers just his watchful eye in the room would make us try harder and concentrate on our technique a little more.

When we traveled to major meets everywhere from Japan to Europe, and many places in the US, everyone held him in high esteem. Recently in Tokyo the lifters called him the Godfather of Japanese weightlifting. We were all proud to be able to refer to him as our coach, and we knew it was an effective scare tactic, letting our opponents know we'd been trained by the best.

We'll miss the coffee candy he gave us when we did good lifts, and him saying "It was a fluke! Try it again!" when we made personal records. We'll be thinking of him in early December when we'd be getting our Honolulu Marathon t-shirts from Tommy. Flo, just like you,



Six outstanding Hawaiian weightlifters gather for a group photo on one of the state's spectacular beaches. The most famous three are standing, left to right, and are Pete George, whose platform career very nearly matched Kono's; Kono himself; and pro wrestler and 1948 Olympic silver medalist Harold Sakata who became famous as the James Bond villain, *Oddjob*. The three kneeling men are Richard Tom, Richard Tomita, and Emerick Ishikawa.

I'm sure we all have our collection of marathon t-shirts. It's incredible to think that most of us lifters wouldn't be able to complete a 5k! I'm sure we'll all cherish those t-shirts that much more.

The night before major meets, he'd send an email of encouragement. It would always end with the Japanese word *ganbatte* which in English means "do your best."

On a final and personal note, I just want to say that Tommy has been a part of my life ever since I moved to Hawaii in 1979. Nowadays, I catch myself teaching my daughter some of the things that Tommy taught me, and so I know he'll continue to be a part of my life.

From all us lifters, we want you to know that we'll hold you in our hearts forever. We can't believe you are gone, but we know for sure you'll never be forgotten.

Goodbye Tommy, *ganbatte* Tommy, *ganbatte*!

## TOMMY KONO'S WORLD RECORD PERFORMANCES

When Kono's world records were made:

- 1) Athletes weighed in within one hour of the start of the contest.
- 2) The lifter had to be re-weighed immediately after the lift to see that he was still within the class limit. If he was, then the barbell and all plates were also reweighed to verify that the previous record had been broken by at least one pound.
- 3) Total records were only recognized if at least three countries participated in the contest.

	Date	Contest	Place	BWT	Class	Event	Weight
1	Aug. 26, 1952	Olympics	Helsinki, Finland	148.75	148. 75	Snatch	259.25
2	Aug. 29, 1953	World Championships	Stockholm, Sweden	163.25	165.25	Jerk	371.25
3	Aug. 29, 1953	World Championships	Stockholm, Sweden	163.25	165.25	Total	898.5
4	Oct. 10, 1954	World Championships	Vienna, Austria	173.5	181. 75	Jerk	380
5	Oct. 10, 1954	World Championships	Vienna, Austria	173.5	181.75	Total	958. 75
6	Oct. 17, 1954	Invitational	Lille, France	165	165.25	Press	288. 75
7	Oct. 17, 1954	Invitational	Lille, France	165	165.25	Total	903.5
8	Mar. 15, 1955	Pan Am. Games	Mexico City, Mexico	169.5	181.75	Press	316.5
9	Mar. 15, 1955	Pan Am. Games	Mexico City, Mexico	169.5	181.75	Total	965
10	June 18, 1955	USSR vs USA	Moscow, USSR	164	165.25	Press	292
11	Jan. 20, 1956	Honolulu Champs.	Honolulu, Hawaii	163.75	165.25	Press	293.5
12	Feb. 17, 1956	Oahu Champs.	Honolulu, Hawaii	164	165.25	Press	295.5
13	Mar. 9, 1956	Hawaii Championships	Honolulu, Hawaii	174	181.75	Press	317 .50
14	Sept. 15, 1956	Honolulu Open	Honolulu, Hawaii	183	198.25	Press	322.5
15	Oct. 12, 1956	Honolulu Invitational	Honolulu, Hawaii	178.5	181.75	Jerk	382.5
16	Nov. 26, 1956	Olympics	Melbourne, Australia	178	181. 75	Jerk	386
17	Nov. 26, 1956	Olympics	Melbourne, Australia	178	181.75	Total	986
18	Feb. 21, 1957	Oahu Championships	Honolulu, Hawaii	179.5	181.75	Press	319
19	Mar. 9, 1957	Honolulu Champs.	Honolulu, Hawaii	178.5	181.75	Press	321
20	Sept. 19, 1958	World Championships	Stockholm, Sweden	163.5	165.25	Snatch	294.5
21	Sept. 19, 1958	World Championships	Stockholm, Sweden	163.5	165.25	Total	948
22	Sept. 8, 1960	Olympics	Rome, Italy	164	165.25	Press	308.5
23	Mar. 11, 1961	Moscow Cup	Moscow, USSR	176	181. 75	Press	337.5
24	Mar. 11, 1961	Moscow Cup	Moscow, USSR	176	181.75	Total	1014
25	May. 26, 1961	Hawaii Championships	Honolulu, Hawaii	183.5	198.25	Press	350.5
26	June 17, 1961	Japan Nationals	Tokyo, Japan	180	181. 75	Press	338.5

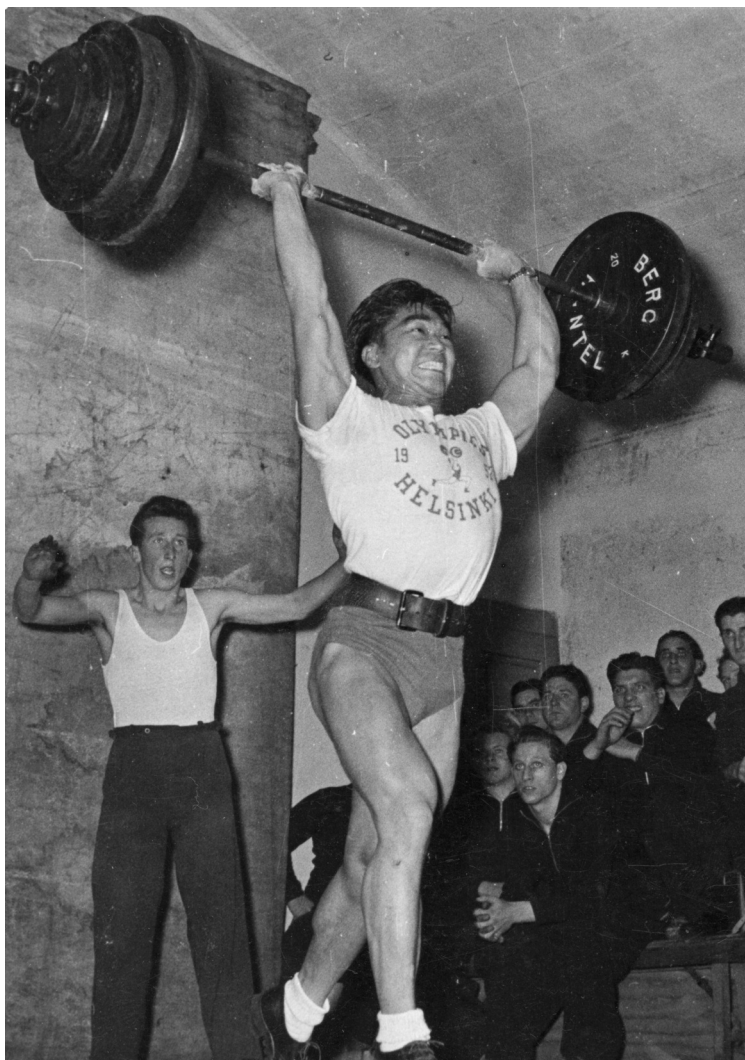
## TOMMY KONO'S RECORD OF ACHIEVEMENT

### MAJOR WEIGHTLIFTING COMPETITIONS

- ♦US Junior National Championship (1952)
- ♦15 US Senior National Championships (1950-1965), 11 firsts, 2 seconds, 1 third
- ♦12 years of international competition (1952-1963)
- ♦3 Olympic Games (1952, 1956 and 1960), 2 gold and 1

silver medals

- ♦9 World Championships (1953-1963) 6 gold, 1 silver, and 1 bronze medals
- ♦3 Pan American Games (1955, 1959 and 1963), 3 gold medals



Following the Olympics in Helsinki, Kono and the American team spent some additional time in Europe. This shot was taken in Ziegelhausen, Germany in September of 1952. On the back of the photo Kono recorded that in an exhibition "with no warmup" he had pressed 220 pounds (100 kilos) for 3 reps, snatched 231 (105 kilos) for 2 reps, and done a "dead hang" clean & jerk of 352 pounds (160 kilos) all at a bodyweight of 155 pounds). No wonder the young man in the back is so excited.

### RECORDS

- ♦26 World Records (Official) in four weight classes (Press-13, Snatch-2, Clean & Jerk-4, Total-7)
- ♦37 American Records (Official)
- ♦7 Olympic Records
- ♦8 Pan Am Records

### PHYSIQUE TITLES

- ♦Mr. Sacramento, 1953
- ♦Mr. Iron Man, 1954
- ♦Mr. World (Roubaix, France), 1954
- ♦Mr. Hawaii, 1955
- ♦Mr. Universe (Munich, West Germany), 1955
- ♦Mr. Universe (Tehran, Iran), 1957
- ♦Mr. Universe (Vienna, Austria), 1961

### AWARDS AND HONORS

- ♦Most Outstanding Athlete of 1952 for the Pacific Association of the AAU
- ♦Rated Greatest Lifter at the 1953 World Championships
- ♦Commendations from Hawaii House of Representatives, 1959
- ♦Honored in a "This Is Your Life" program staged at the Sacramento YMCA, 1960
- ♦Sullivan Award Nominee (1956-1963), voted 2<sup>nd</sup> four times and 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> one time
- ♦Outstanding Senior Nationals Lifter for 1952, 1953, 1955, 1957, 1959, 1961, and 1963
- ♦IWF 25 Years Service Award, 1978
- ♦Voted "Greatest Weightlifter of All Time" in worldwide IWF poll, 1982
- ♦Helms Hall of Fame
- ♦USWF Hall of Fame
- ♦US Olympic Hall of Fame, 1990
- ♦One Hundred Golden Olympians, 1996
- ♦IWF Best Weightlifter of 100 Years Award, 2005

**REFEREE**

- ♦Pan American Games, 1967
- ♦Central American Games, 1966
- ♦Mexican National Championships, 1967 & 1968
- ♦US Senior National Championships, 1972, 1973, 1974, 1975
- ♦International Referee, Category II, 1966
- ♦International Referee, Category I, 1968

**MANAGER**

- ♦Mexican National Team – numerous trips and exhibitions within Mexico, 1966-1968
- ♦West German National Team – numerous training camps within W. Germany and in other European countries, 1969-1972

**COACH**

- ♦National and Olympic Coach for Mexico, (1966-1968)
  - ♦National and Olympic Coach for West Germany, (1969-1972)
  - ♦Olympic Coach for the United States (1976)
  - ♦Women's World Championship Coach for the United States (1987, 1988 and 1989)
  - ♦Attended the First International Coaching Clinic conducted by the IWF in 1971, Spa, Belgium
  - ♦IWF International Coach Title, 1975
  - ♦Conducted coaching clinics in the following countries:
    - Mexico, 1966-1968
    - France, 1970
    - Scotland, 1970
    - West Germany, 1968 – 1972
    - Japan, 1974 – 1975\*
    - New Zealand, 1975\*
    - People's Republic of China (Red China), 1975\*
- \*International Weightlifting Federation Clinics*



**Pete George congratulates Tommy Kono on his new 382.5-pound (173.5 kilos) clean & jerk world record at the Honolulu Open on 26 October 1956. In those days the weights had to be unloaded and publicly weighed before the record was official. From left to right are: Clifford Yae; Tad Fujii; Tommy Kono; Dr. Richard You, Kono's coach and the US Team Physician; Roger Taguchi; Olympic champion Pete George; and Olympian Richard Tom.**

- ♦Distinction of being the only individual to serve as an international professional coach from the United States, seven years (1966 to 1972)

**ADDITIONAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

- ♦US Weightlifting Team Captain and/or Lifter-Official Liaison Person, 1958-1963
- ♦IWF, 15-year Service Medal
- ♦IWF, 25-year Service Medal
- ♦Competed and/or performed in match/exhibitions in over 20 different countries as official representative of the USA: Finland, Sweden, Denmark, W. Germany Poland, USSR, England, France, Austria, Switzerland, Iran, Iraq, Egypt, Afghanistan, India, Burma, Japan, Australia, Hungary, and Brazil.

