

## TRIBUTES TO TOMMY KONO FROM HIS FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES

Compiled by John Fair

**Editors' Note:** The excerpts that follow come from a variety of sources and are listed in alphabetical order based on the author's last name. Some of them are based on interviews conducted by John Fair; others are from: Walter M. Imahara and David E. Meltzer, *Book of Remembrance for Tommy Kono* (Mesa, AZ: 2017); *Denis Reno's Weightlifting Newsletter*; or other websites and publications. If the tribute has been published elsewhere, the source is listed at the top of the entry. Excerpts containing only the name of the person, their hometown, and date, are either from John Fair's interviews or were written specifically for inclusion in this issue. Again, we thank John Fair for his efforts in bringing together such powerful remembrances of the life of Tommy Kono, and we also thank all of you who participated by sharing your memories. The photos are some of our many favorites from the Kono Collection and are in no special order.



West Coast notables in the prime of life. From left to right, Walt Marcyan, Clancy Ross, Bill Pearl, Joan DeMillo, Betty Stern, and Tommy Kono. Although we don't know, we suspect the photo was taken by the renowned photographer Leo Stern.

**Dr. Tamas Ajan—Budapest, Hungary**

**From: Walter M. Imahara and David E. Meltzer,  
*Book of Remembrance for Tommy Kono***

In 2005, Tommy Kono received the title of "Lifter of the Century" from the IWF. Not only was Tommy one of the Greatest of All Times in weightlifting, but he was also the true role model, a man of honour and integrity, as well as a wonderful human being whose friendship always made me proud.

**Kevin Asano—Honolulu, Hawaii**

**From: Walter M. Imahara and David E. Meltzer,  
*Book of Remembrance for Tommy Kono***

I had the pleasure of meeting Tommy for the first time in the summer of 1987. I had just made the Pan American Games team in judo and was visiting Hawaii before my competition. I battled with allergies, eczema, and stress from college and competition. When I went to visit my allergist he offered to introduce me to Tommy. My allergist told me that when Tommy was a child he was sickly and had asthma. Perhaps I could relate to him because of my physical condition. My goal was to make the 1988 Olympic team, but I was under a lot of stress and pressure and needed a fresh perspective on life and competition. As it turned out, this brief encounter with Tommy changed my life for the good.

Tommy shared the mindset that he had when he competed and encouraged me to have the same. He shared that I should compete not only for myself but for the people who supported me. In a sense they were competing alongside of me on the mat. He explained that when you compete for the sake of others you will give your best and not give up. He said that I should compete for the United States, Hawaii, my teammates, my family, and my Japanese-American heritage.

**Clarence Bass—Albuquerque, New Mexico  
Ripped Enterprises, May 2016**

I saw Tommy Kono for the first time at the 1955 National Championship in Cleveland, Ohio; I was a senior in high school. As my father and I walked into the auditorium the first thing we saw was Bob Hoffman at the microphone—and Tommy Kono standing on the side of the stage in a colorful Hawaiian shirt. He was already an Olympic and two-time world champion, so I recognized him immediately. The only other thing I remember is that Bill Pearl won the Mr. America contest.

A half century later we became email friends. I have an inch-thick stack of correspondence. He was a kind and attentive friend. He loved precision in everything from engineering to acrobatics—and of course Olympic weightlifting. It was my honor and pleasure to write commentaries that he used to promote his books.

We'll never see his like again. His was a life splendidly lived from beginning to end.

**Waldemar Baszanowski—Warsaw, Poland  
From: *Denis Reno's Weightlifter's Newsletter*,  
No. 275, (24 January 2003).**

Question by P. K. Mahanand—Who was your model hero in weightlifting?

WB—Tommy Kono. He was such a great lifter, also a very good sportsman and a human being. He was my hero. He won the world championships 8 times. Even when he lost at Rome Olympics, he made no excuses.

**Fyodor Bogdanovsky—St. Petersburg, Russia  
From: *Denis Reno's Weightlifter's Newsletter*,  
No. 300 (13 January 2006).**

Kono works on me like a Python on a rabbit when he looks from the wings.

**Gary Cleveland—Brooklyn Center, Minnesota  
From: *The Avian Movement Advocate*,  
No. 11 (July 1999): 4-5.**

Coming into this match, Tommy Kono had

racked up a string of victories beginning with his first Olympic win in 1952, and had never been defeated in international competition. But on this night, he lost five pounds to Bogdanovsky in the press and fell ten more behind in the snatch. At that point Bob Hoffman, who was announcing, remarked that now Tommy was too far behind and couldn't win. After Bogdanovsky ended with a 363 clean & jerk, it left Kono needing 380.

In 1958 a 380-pound clean & jerk for a middleweight was impossible. Kono held the world record at 372 which he had set five years earlier and world records were always broken by a pound or two. To give some historical perspective, no middleweight would make a 380 clean & jerk in either a World or Olympic championship until six years later, 1964 at the Tokyo Olympics.

At Terpak's insistence, Kono took his first attempt with 352 which went smoothly enough but a long way from 380. Then as the weight on the bar continued to increase, one began to wonder if he was going to take anymore. Bogdanovsky, Jim George, Sheppard, Vorobiev, Emrich and even Bradford were taking their attempts. The weight on the bar had passed the amount that a middleweight could make.

Then, with 380 pounds on the bar, Kono appeared for his second attempt, the most competitive middleweight in the world attempting it and it was nerve wracking to watch. The tension that gripped us all when he began the lift broke quickly when he pulled it just to his thighs—a dead lift.

When he came back for his third I wasn't expecting much. But Kono could captivate an audience and he pulled us in again—and again the tension grew. Standing over the bar, his face had the look of extreme concentration as he must have been waiting for that exact moment that would tell him "Now." Finally he bent over, grasped the bar and began the pull from the floor. I recall a strained groan with the second pull. That's where I expected the lift would end but it didn't—he was diving under it. Then I thought he'll never pull it in but there it was on his shoulders. I was certain he'd never stand up, but he began, very slowly and with extreme effort to rise and at some point near the top we all realized he had just cleaned 380—and that's the most impressive lift I've ever seen.

If the lift had gone easily, popped right onto his chest and he had bounced out of the squat like cork in water it would have seemed less significant, less heroic. The difficulty paired with the occasion intensified the dra-

ma. Yes, he missed the jerk, but that seemed incidental after what we had just seen.

**John Coffee—Marietta, Georgia  
October 2016**

I probably first learned about Tommy Kono in 1958, reading he-man books from the magazine rack and sipping cherry Coke in a drug store in the small, South Georgia town of Eastman.

Obviously, he was the man of the hour. Who would have ever dreamed that someday I would meet this seemingly almost God-like man and even have the honor and the privilege of coaching with him as an assistant on several occasions at international meets? I have many dear remembrances of this great man who, even though he had accomplished great things as an athlete, remained one of the nicest men I ever met.

One of my favorite memories of Tommy goes back to 1988 when I served as his assistant at the 2nd women's worlds in Jakarta, Indonesia. The team had been shopping and was just getting back on the bus, when this little guy with an armload of paintings came onto the bus. Eventually, he approached me as a potential customer for his art. I'm no art connoisseur and I really didn't have room for a framed painting in my luggage, so I politely waved him away.

Tommy evidently saw all this and he comes over and tells me I should buy one of the little guy's paintings, "it could mean he'd be able to feed his family that night." I gave the man a \$20 bill and learned a great lesson about humanity. I still have the painting hanging on the wall at my condo. It's really beautiful, and it was probably the best \$20 I ever spent. Thanks Tommy.

Another favorite anecdote about Tommy is when we were rooming together in Colorado Springs, and we had the women's team getting ready to go to the worlds. There was a karate, judo, or martial arts group that we ran into in the hall. And one of the guys was making some off-color remarks to some of the lifters. They told Kono who told their coach, and the boys had to apologize and all that shit. When we got back to the room Kono says, "You know, they don't know real karate. Real karate com-



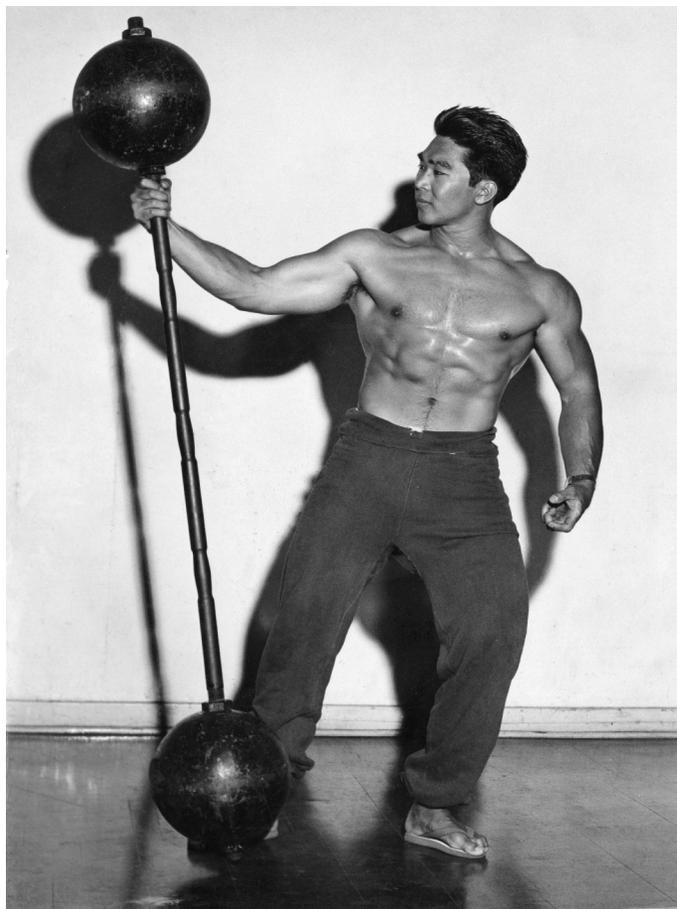
**One of the darkest chapters in US history took place during World War II when more than 120,000 people of Japanese ancestry were forced to leave their homes and go to internment camps for the duration of the war. Tommy's family was relocated to the Tule Lake Segregation Center in northern California, where more than 18,000 people—many of them US citizens—were forced to live in these stark barracks.**

mits suicide." And he wasn't smiling when he said it.

**Howard Cohen—Savannah, Georgia  
18 August 2016**

The passing of Tommy was hard to take for many of us. I have known Tommy for over 60 years. He was a very good friend and also my hero. I competed in the 1956 Nationals and so did Tommy. I was glad that he was there and also glad that he was not in my bodyweight class. I spent a lot of time talking to Tommy and learned a lot from him. First, he trained hard and correct, but the thing that impressed me most was that he felt that 50% was using his mind and always positive. Through the years, I kept in touch with him and followed the many competitions that he competed in. I have read most of the many books that he put out and always learned something each time.

Once in a while I got to see him lift. He was not only a great lifter and probably the best in his time, but he was always willing to talk to other lifters and share his wisdom. Tommy impressed me with his outstanding physique. Most know that he won the Mr. Universe title several times and clearly he was the best built lifter in the world. In that time frame, the AAU controlled all sports,



**Kono had a flair for posing and a fondness for lifting dumbbells and barbells from an earlier time. Here he shows off his body as well what looks to be a Milo barbell.**

including all Mr. Contests. I competed and entered many physique contests and won several including the Mr. Georgia title twice, but like lifting, I was not in the same class as Tommy.

Several years ago, Murray Levin and I went to The Oldtimers Strongman Reunion as did Tommy. We spent a good bit of time with Tommy and I will remember that visit forever. Time passes real fast and knowing that I will never see Tommy again is hard to take.

**David Colon-Arroyo—Puerto Rico**  
**From: Walter M. Imahara and David E. Meltzer,**  
*Book of Remembrance for Tommy Kono*

In his formal lecture at Aguadilla, he stressed the qualities that should describe an ideal lifter, not only from a physical standpoint, but also as a conscientious citizen. His graphics and visuals were very eloquent, as well as

his soothing voice and countenance, inspiring confidence within the small population of eager pupils. May I stress the word “pupils,” for one of Tommy’s greatest attributes was to be a perennial teacher.

His contributions to the sport while an active athlete, although great and deserving to be recognized, fall short of his greater ability to reach the minds of his audience in the educational process. His approach to a crowd was incredible, as his subtle but efficient style could bring the best out of every recipient of his wise words.

Not only did he address the crowd in a fruitful way, he spent valuable time with athletes on a one-to-one basis, answering any question and providing advice that can only come from the best in his field. That’s what Tommy always provided to the world, the best in his field, may it be weightlifting, body building, or just being the best teacher the sport of weights has ever had. May I salute Mr. Tommy Kono as a Master Educator, to be always remembered in the sport of Weightlifting.

**Bob Crist—Hampton, Virginia**  
**11 August 2016**

He was so smart. He was an immediate winner when he took that job over there in Honolulu. He was a Japanese-American, and Hawaii has a great population of people like that. With that national heritage, you know. Tommy was always the perfect gentleman, quiet and well-spoken. What can you say? A man for all seasons. Not original. But it’s true.

**Jan Dellinger—Red Lion, Pennsylvania**  
**From: John Wood, ed., *The Dellinger Files***  
**(Ann Arbor, 77 Publications, 2009), 24-25.**

The company was sending me to some event in which Tommy Kono would also be involved. I mentioned to Grimek that I would probably be seeing Tommy, and that I would say hello to him for John as they were good friends. After telling me to make sure that I did convey his good wishes to Kono, Grimek brought up a memorable (to him) dumbbell pressing duel he once had with the former in the York gym. According to John, the challenge was to rep out in the overhead press with a 100-pound dumbbell in each hand, with the final result being that he managed 17 good ones to Kono’s 16. Little did I

suspect that I was being set up, when he also told me to ask Kono if he remembered the occasion.

This was my first face-to-face contact with Tommy Kono, so he asked me how everyone was at York, citing specific individuals. When he got to Grimek, he mentioned what longstanding friends they were, how he'd been over to his house different times, and what respect he had for him. So, at some point shortly after that I relay JCG's reciprocal well-wishes, as well as the dumbbell pressing contest story.

Suffice it to say, the "Happy Hawaiian" insisted that 17 reps was the correct number, but he, not Grimek, made that number. Further, he insisted that I go back and make Grimek aware of the actual facts. So, when I returned and Grimek asked me if I saw Kono, I replied that I had, but in my mind was praying that he not ask me if I had run the dumbbell story by him. Darned if Grimek didn't ask me if I had, and I offered Kono's interpretation of the event, to which JCG replied, "He said what! He did not make 17 reps. The next time you see him ..."

No, the friendship did not fall apart over who pressed those 100 pound dumbbells 17 reps, and who only made 16, but I clearly walked into that one.

**Arthur Drechsler—Flushing, New York**  
**From: "Tommy Kono—A Weightlifter's**  
**Weightlifter," USA Weightlifting, 27 April 2016**

If anything surpassed Tommy's athletic and second career accomplishments, it was his character and mental powers. One example of the latter were powers of concentration so profound that when a fire alarm went off during his last C&J at the 1964 Olympic Trials, he didn't ask for another attempt because he said he didn't hear it. And if Tommy was known for anything, it was his infectious positive mental attitude combined with unbounded determination.

In terms of character, Kono learned an important lesson from John Davis, who roomed with Tommy in 1952, at the Helsinki Olympic Games. Davis, considered by many to be the greatest lifter in the world at the time, was on his way to winning his last Olympic Games and Tommy was to win his first. The very evening of Kono's victory, Davis sat the young man down and essentially told him "You are now the Olympic Champion, with all of its well-earned joy and glory. But with that honor comes a responsibility. You will for the rest of your life

represent the Olympic movement. So in your every behavior, you must uphold the rich and solemn tradition that has been handed down to you." This was a lecture that Kono never forgot, and always strived to be guided by.

I had the enormous privilege of knowing Tommy for just shy of 40 years, meeting him as a young lifter anxious to learn from one of my heroes. Many young people idolize someone from afar, only to be disappointed when they actually meet their hero. That certainly happened to me on multiple occasions. But not with Tommy Kono. As I got to know him and became his friend, he continuously surpassed my lofty image of my idol, making an impression on me forever, with his expressions of his love for the game.

For instance, many may not know that despite his many high-profile coaching assignments, Tommy was a volunteer at the Nuuanu YMCA, in Honolulu, HI, for decades (he had moved from CA to HI in the mid-1950s). He went to that Y on a clocklike basis, to train and offer coaching advice to athletes at all levels. He never charged a nickel for his priceless advice.

While those who never met Tommy will never fully appreciate his full measure, we can all be grateful that his books and other writings captured at least some of his wisdom and character for all time. Tommy would have had many invaluable messages for the lifters of today and the future, had he been with us longer. But I feel confident that the one message he would have wanted to leave with us all was one that we talked about during our last conversation before his passing. He fervently wished and believed above all else—53

that USA weightlifters can be among the best in the world once again. They can do it if they only come to believe they can, and train intensely and intelligently to realize that level of performance. I hope the young lifters of today will have the courage and dedication to heed Tommy's message, and grant him his last wish.

**Joe Dube, Sr.—Jacksonville, Florida**  
**From: Walter M. Imahara and David E. Meltzer,**  
***Book of Remembrance for Tommy Kono***

I speak in absolute confidence when I say in today's world of money sports, braggarts, self and popular glorified goons, and so many false idols whose misdeeds were eventually disclosed to the public, that Tom-

my Kono stands apart from them in another universe of sports achievement and courteous behavior. I had the privilege to have met with Tommy on many occasions, the last time at the Arnold Classic in Columbus, Ohio, several years ago. Tommy Kono was of unique class, a humble and true gentleman. My brother Virgil and I in our early training idolized Tommy, he sparked us to make bigger achievements.

**Clyde Emrich—Chicago, Illinois**  
**June 2016**

We lifted and contacted the military officer to tell us where to go after the Olympics, so we went to Stockholm and lifted in an exhibition. Tommy liked to meet newspaper people and we'd have an exhibition set up. So we did it in Copenhagen and lifted there, and we finally decided we need to get back to the military. We found that Heidelberg was the European command for the US military. ... They finally decided to keep us there, and put me in charge. In Heidelberg I was in charge of fourteen tennis courts, an Olympic size outdoor swimming pool, an indoor swimming pool and steam bath. In Mannheim, which was about 15 miles away, they put Tommy in charge of a big sports stadium. We would travel back and forth. I would lift where he was, and I had a platform set up outside one of the tennis courts where I was in Heidelberg, and he would come and lift with me. So we just went back and forth like that until we got together for the various exhibitions we gave throughout Europe and throughout Germany. But what he used to do, he loved to do, if we were going to lift somewhere, the day before he would go to some local bakery and get the most creamy bun or biscuit that he could get, and then after the meet he would get back to the hotel and couldn't wait to eat his biscuit. We had a lot of fun.

It's a funny thing. I was at the pro-bowl game back a few years ago in Hawaii, and I called Tommy's home. It would be a good chance to talk to Tommy. So his son answered, and I said who I was and your dad—yea, yea—and your dad and I were at the Olympics, and it didn't seem to faze him, and then I said, I'm here with the Chicago Bears for the pro-bowl game. That lit him up. Wow, okay. So then he got his dad.

We covered almost everything about lifting in talking and chatting. What we were going to do, what we did, what the other guys did, and stuff like that. He was

very detailed. He was very precise. He would write out exactly what he was going to do and exactly what we do in training. But then again we all did that. I kept records of what I did. But he was very precise.

**Sibby Flowers—Knoxville, Tennessee**  
**6 December 2016**

At Daytona he helped calm me down. He was very calming. He sat me down before my first international meet, and showed me how to take deep breaths and how to relax and stay calm. He was just so quiet and calm, unlike some other coaches who were real gung-ho and slap you on the back and were sort of aggressive. ... He was the only one of my coaches who calmed me down. Tommy would be in a room alone with me and talk real softly, take a deep breath and relax, close your eyes. The calmness is what I remember from him the most. He always gave great advice. He was at the training center when I was there. I was lifting pretty good and moved out to the training center, and he would always find little points that would straighten things out for me.

**Jim George—Akron, Ohio**  
**June 2016**

We are immigrants, sons of immigrants, and we have lived the American dream as far as I'm concerned. It has been so rewarding. You know, so many of us that made it, part of it was an inferiority complex, part of it was being sons of immigrants and so forth. Those of us who were Caucasian of course had the advantage of the white skin and therefore more readily accepted. Tommy being Asian of course was ostracized more, especially coming on the end of World War II, in that era. Part of our success was that we've got to prove something on our shoulders, and Tommy was probably one of the most intense human beings I've ever met in that regard. I mean a wonderful human being, a great guy and good friend, but extremely intense, extremely directed, almost to the point of compulsive. That I would attribute a great deal to his success and mine too, Pete's too, all of us in that regard. Being a champion doesn't have much to do with intellect, but it has a hell of a lot to do with drive.

It's not weight related, but going back to what I said originally, being children of immigrants, and Tommy

being Asian. He was dating a girl in York, Pennsylvania, when I was there. Her parents of course were adamantly opposed because she was Caucasian. And I was the fall guy. I was the surrogate that went in and picked her up, because I presented the Caucasian face. I don't know that's anybody's business but Tommy's and mine and yours or what. The other thing is on one occasion, we were having a discussion about World War II, with Tommy and four or five or six of us. All of a sudden, Tommy just quietly got up and left the room. Later I said, "Don't you believe about Germany or something?" And he replied, "Well I don't talk about World War II because there's too much opportunity here to get into some sensitive areas."

**Walter Imahara—St. Francisville,  
Louisiana; October 2016**

He told me some things about Dr. You, but at that point I didn't know what was going on except that Dr. You was in Hawaii. He wanted, Tommy told me, to use Tommy's medal winnings to boost him like Paul Anderson, strongest man in the world and all those things, that kind of promotion. Tommy was not very keen to that, but Dr. You said you got to get out there. You need to tell people how great you are. I listened to him later on in life. Tommy never talked about himself. Dr. You needed that. He wanted to promote Tommy to promote himself.

One of the things Tommy didn't like was the training at the training center because they were using the European/Russian method. You work out every day. Whereas Tommy says the natural body needs rest. You can make more gains by working out three times a week rather than five or six times. He says the result of their training method is that when they go to a meet, they're not super fresh, mentally alert. You hear stories about Gary Hansen who was going to nationals, and a couple of days before leaving, got a better total than he made in the meet. Tommy says it's better to go in under-trained. He had the mind to do that. But you can't tell that to American lifters. No, no, no, you got to wait to the last minute. If I'm going to press X amount, I'm not going to be ready.



**When the teenaged Kono returned from the camp in Tule Lake, he continued the training he had begun during his internment. He built this gym in the basement of his home in Sacramento, but the ceiling was so low that he had to place the plates farther out on the bar so they wouldn't hit the rafters.**

So Tommy says, the end result is that they get to a meet—a national meet at this level, at the world level—where you're supposed to lift more, but they lifted less. He used to tell me that. Because when you get to the world level, you should think, I pressed 250 pounds. In this meet I'm going to do 260. But the American lifter was trained so that when he got in a big meet, he would do less. That used to get him to no end. When you get into a big meet, you're fired up, you're in the world championships, you're the lifter. You've got to do more.

**Gary Kawamura—Honolulu, Hawaii  
12 November 2016**

I've known Tommy since he first moved here and helped him move from Dr. You's house, and he was the one who encouraged me to get into Olympic lifting. I was doing powerlifting, and I did very well at it, and I was trying Olympic lifting since I saw John Yamauchi and Patrick Omori going to the nationals, I thought maybe I should try that too. I remember one of the meets, and I

hadn't personally met Tommy yet, but I did pretty bad. After the meet he came up and said, "Oh, you're Gary, and I was thinking I heard you were doing powerlifting. You know, if you went into Olympic lifting, you might be good." With someone as famous as Tommy Kono telling me I might be good, it took me about two seconds to quit powerlifting. I never entered a power meet after that, even if I could probably win, over the next couple years. That was in the early seventies, and then I went to my first nationals in '75. But unlike some other lifters over here who were very successful, like John Yamauchi and Brian Miyamoto, I was not that successful. In fact, I went to six or seven nationals, and the highest I placed was fourth place. So, in '91 at age 46 I dropped my bodyweight to 123 and went to the nationals. Tommy was coaching me, and in the clean & jerk I missed my first attempt really badly. In the clean I fell backwards. I missed my second attempt. I had my third attempt left, and after all that work, I was thinking if I don't do this I'm going to bomb out. So here comes Tommy, and I'm thinking he's going to give me encouragement. So he comes up and all he said was, "Well Gary, you got yourself into it." That was his exhortation speech to me. And I said, "I guess so." But I made my last attempt, and I got my only national medal which was a third place. But Tommy was a father. Up till recently I actually hated my father, and Tommy to me was that father figure.

**Bruce Klemens—Oak Ridge, New Jersey**  
**From: "Tommy Kono, RIP (1930-2016),"**  
*Denis Reno's Weightlifter's Newsletter,*  
**No. 384 (29 April 2016): 3-4.**

It was an honor to know Tommy. Besides being one of the greatest weightlifters of all time, he was just a wonderful man, a great human being. I will miss him a lot. Tommy was a great competitor, a real tiger in competition. Most of his many world records were done in foreign countries, not in the USA. Why? Because he had the ability to lift BIG when it counted ... in the World Championships or other major events. He could do far more under pressure than he could do in training. Let me just tell you one story that Tommy told me years ago.

"When I started out, I trained in the cellar of my parent's home in Sacramento. I found I could normally lift "X." But I noticed when my brother came down to watch me I could lift X + Y. And sometimes my brother

would bring his friends I could lift X + 4Y. Then in National meets, X + 5Y, and in World Championships X + 6Y and more."

So, do you see the pattern? Tommy was the ultimate clutch lifter. The greater the pressure and importance of the meet, the more he could get out of his body.

**Murray Levin—Boca Raton, Florida,**  
**14 May 2016**

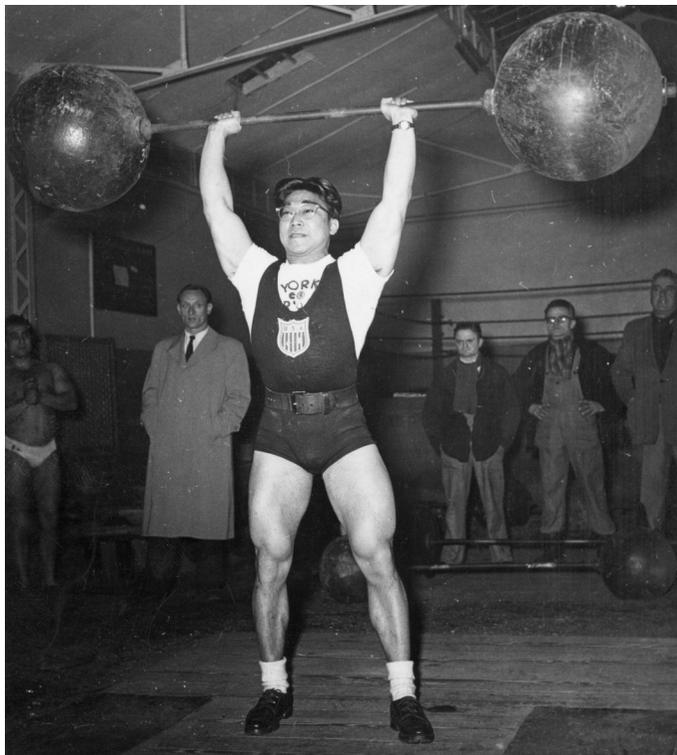
Two weeks ago, I received a message from Walter Imahara that Tommy Kono had finally passed away. Although I had received earlier messages from Kono that he was in his last days, I was stunned. The greatest weightlifter this country had ever produced was no longer with us. I went into the garage where I have my old homemade power racks. Above them on the wall is a large framed photo of Kono with all his records alongside him. I went back into my library where it is quiet. In one corner is a full-size treadmill, and above it is a photo of Tommy signed by him with a copper inlay of all his records. I stood looking at it, sat down, and then the tears came. I couldn't hold back any longer.

This wonderful man who had touched so many lives, had been my hero in my sport, and it is hard to believe that I will no longer hear that cheerful optimistic voice. And then I remembered those flashbacks when I first met him in the early 1950s when I saw him lift at the nationals. I thought of the many times I met him in York. I thought of the symposiums and seminars he did for me when I was Pan American president in El Salvador, Guatemala, and a huge one in Puerto Rico. Had I won back the presidency in the 1996 elections, it was my intention to put him in as coach in Colorado Springs.

I could write dozens of stories about his career and our travels together. But there are two that stand out in my mind, one which has never been told. It was told to me by John Terpak Sr. who was a giant in our sport and who along with Bob Hoffman headed York Barbell for almost 60 years. It was the night of the final head-to-head competition in Madison Square Garden in 1958 and the largest crowd ever assembled to see a weightlifting meet. Over 10,000 people attended. The most dramatic part of the competition was between Kono and the Russian middleweight. After the press and the snatch Kono needed a fantastic clean & jerk to win. Terpak was Kono's coach at this event, and he whispered in Tommy's ear. "I fig-

ured out what you should take to beat the Russian.” Tommy turned to him like a tiger. He said, “don’t tell me how much I need. Just put it on the bar, and I’ll lift it.” I was sitting up front that night and he put everything he had into that lift and won that match.

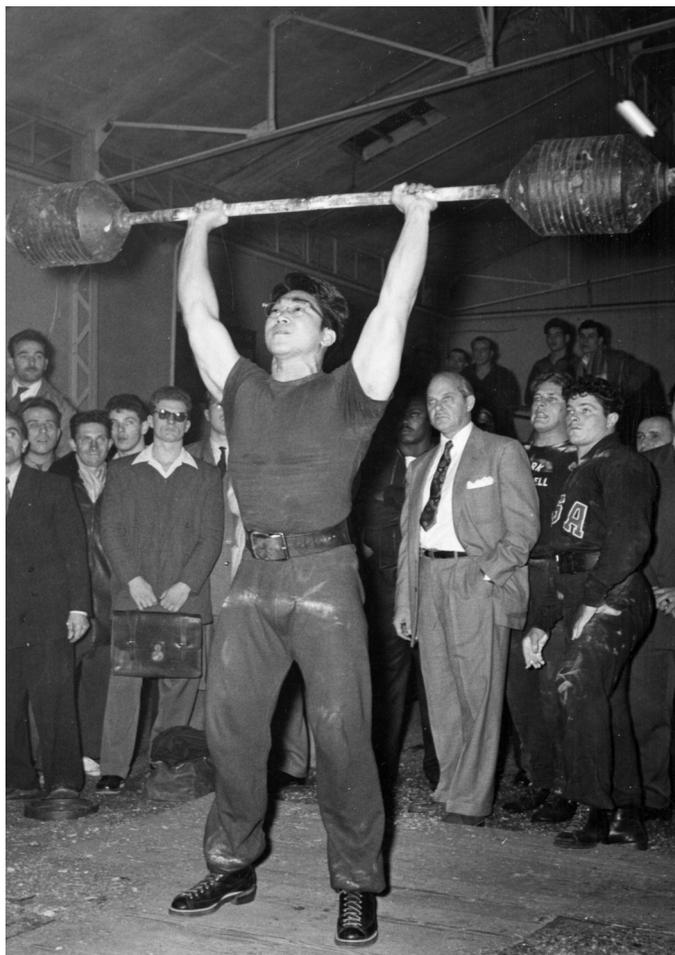
There was one other lift which in all the years of my life in the sport to me was the most dramatic I had ever seen. It was 1963, and the meet was the nationals in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. It was hot, the air conditioning wasn’t working, and everyone was watching the 181 lb. class between Kono and Lou Riecke. Riecke had been bragging he would take Tommy’s title at this event. Kono flew in and was not in his best shape, but as always ready to defend his title. After the snatch and press, Kono was behind 22 lbs., and the shout went up that Tommy would finally lose his crown. After he got his first clean & jerk, he had to jump to 375 pounds which looked impossible. The first attempt was a deadlift, and those in the audience



A favorite stop for the York team when they travelled in Europe was Robert Cayeau’s gym in Paris. Cayeau owned a number of antique barbells—including Apollon’s Wheels—and Kono, like many of the York men, couldn’t resist trying to lift some of these unwieldy implements. The globe barbell above weighed 170 kilos (374 pounds) and after it was lifted to his shoulders Kono jerked it. The thick-handled, non-revolving barbell on the right weighed 319 pounds (145 kilos), and Kono managed to clean & jerk it in 1954.

said Riecke was now the winner. I was standing about 50 feet away on the side of the stage and watched Tommy. He walked back into the hallway and stood staring at the wall. Finally he walked back on to the stage. He pulled the weight in and it almost drove him into the floor. I never thought he would come out of that clean. But he did. Then he held the weight at the chest so long, I thought he was going to black out. Then he suddenly jerked it overhead to complete the lift. I couldn’t believe it. Neither did the crowd of thousands of spectators. Those of you who have seen photos of that look on Tommy’s face could see the sheer will power. This man had to make this lift. Riecke was furious. He was screaming outside the building. “This time it’s worse,” he shouted, “he beat me on bodyweight.”

What can I say about this incredible man? As a sickly, Japanese-American boy he learned to lift in a internment camp. Yet he never harbored any ill feelings against his country, instead he was proud of our country and always told me he lifted for the USA and the team,



not himself. We will never see his like again.

**David E. Meltzer, Tempe, Arizona**  
**From: Walter M. Imahara and David E. Meltzer,**  
***Book of Remembrance for Tommy Kono***

Earning my everlasting gratitude, Walter Imahara was thoughtful enough to assign me to be Tommy Kono's roommate as we prepared to help host the 1998 World Masters Championships in Portland. Although Tommy and I had met before, this was the first time we would spend a significant amount of time with each other. Within just a few minutes of this meeting, Tommy was providing helpful advice: Showing me how best to tie the laces on my new Adidas lifting shoes; giving me counsel on how to sequence a series of tasks I faced in moving—that very week—from Louisiana to Iowa; thinking through how I needed to culminate my pre-meet training, as I was coming off a long summer layoff with almost zero preparation.

Without my asking, Tommy came over to the training hall to watch and offer advice as I went through my abbreviated pre-competition training. Later, again without my asking, Tommy stayed by my side to coach me as I began my warm-ups for the actual competition. He coached me through each of my six attempts, in a competition that was unusually nerve-wracking not because of my competitors, but because I had done so very little training during that summer, having spent most of it away from home with no opportunity to train.

I have now competed in 23 World Masters Championships; in just one single one of them, I was able to make six-out-of-six attempts: It was in 1998, in Portland, being coached for the very first time by Tommy Kono. I suspect that is not a coincidence. As I stood, ecstatic, on the podium to collect my hard-won bronze medal, Tommy joined me, and seemed to be equally happy.

**Carl Miller—Santa Fe, New Mexico**  
**1 September 2016**

Tommy was always very competitive but also a very nice person. Tommy always had something good to say about somebody. Where he really excelled was overseas, and that's where he made his big mark. Unlike a lot of athletes who don't excel going overseas, he did. He also stressed the basics in his coaching, and that's what he felt a lot of people were missing, the basic ways of lifting. He

really stressed that and answered a lot of questions on the basics. As I said, Tommy was such a great competitor on the international platform and our own. He was just very nice to people. Very humble.

**Pete Miller—Arlington, Virginia**  
**October 2016**

I first met Tommy at the Olympic Trials in '64. I just was impressed with his mental preparation. So some church bells started to go off. And then I met Tommy as a friend, and I asked him about the church bells. He said he never heard them. I was so impressed with that. And through the years I saw Tommy in many different circumstances, and I've seen him coach a lot of different people, and I especially saw him coaching some women at one of the women's world championships. And I asked him how did he as the greatest weightlifter ever enjoy coaching women. And he said he really enjoyed it because they would listen to him, and his coaching was serious. I was very impressed with that.

What I remember of Tommy is that he was so gracious in everything he did. If he had a criticism, he said it in such a nice polite way. ... He was very kind. He was my hero because he was such a humble superstar. ... You have to be a little bit arrogant to lift a heavy weight, especially if no human being has never lifted it. So Tommy was so special on that. And the thing I enjoyed about Tommy is that he treated everybody the same.

**Brian Miyamoto—Honolulu, Hawaii**  
**12 November 2016**

The first time I met Tommy was at a chin up contest in Kapiolani Park, and I knew who he was, and as I was growing up my father used to tell me about Tommy Kono. I won the chin up contest, but after that I wanted to go to the Olympics in either gymnastics, boxing or weightlifting, and gymnastics wouldn't work because I couldn't split, so I decided to go into powerlifting first and then weightlifting. Tommy had such high expectations of me. First I did it on my own, and then Gary [Kawamura] helped me, and after my first contest Tommy started to help me. After my second contest Tommy told me to go down to the 114 pound class and go to the nationals; you can qualify for the nationals. I told him no, it's too hard to drop. He said, no, go down, you can qualify for the nationals. I weighed 121. After a week, the

seed was planted, and he knew I was going for it. I told myself, this might be the only time I ever go to the nationals. So, I went to 114, and as I was going down he said, “Brian, not only can you qualify for the nationals, you can win the nationals.” So, the expectations kept going higher and higher. A couple weeks later he would tell me, “Brian, now you can not only win the nationals but make the American record.” I think the most pressure I’ve had in my whole life was qualifying for the nationals. Anyway, I qualified, and I was real strict on my diet, and I remember telling myself, if the plane’s going to crash, make it crash after the nationals. Pete [George] also helped me. Pete was my first national coach, and Pete was just there because he was getting honored at that nationals. Of course, he would help the Hawaii guys. I didn’t win. I had the weight overhead. I had two red lights and one white light. I came in second. Throughout my lifting career Tommy’s expectations were always so high. Although I did win four nationals, I never did make it to the Olympics which I thought disappointed Tommy. Besides all this, many people don’t know that Tommy was a good artist, and good photographer. He took very good pictures. Each picture meant something.

**Mel Miyamoto—Honolulu, Hawaii**  
**12 November 2016**

I used to be a basketball coach in high school, and I got interested in strength training. So I joined the National Strength and Conditioning Association. They had a booth at one of the conferences for the USAWF, and I stopped by and got interested. They were doing what was called a cub coach course. I don’t know if they still do that, but I actually had to do a lift with just the bar. I fell on my butt and really got embarrassed, but I got interested, and after that I looked up the local weightlifting organization. Team Hawaii listed Pete George as the president, so I called Pete, and he said to call Tommy Kono. Tommy invited me to come and watch one of the meets at Pearl City Highland Intermediate School. That was the start, and it really caught my interest. I’m what some people call a paper coach. I took all the USA Weightlifting certification courses and passed them. But what I really learned about coaching I learned from Tommy Kono. We became good friends, and I still don’t know why.



Two men who are always in the conversation when people talk about the most famous athlete from the Aloha State are fellow Olympians Tommy Kono and Duke Kahanamoku. Kahanomoku won five Olympic medals for swimming (in three Olympics); helped popularize surfing on the mainland, and, like Kono, worked for years for the city of Honolulu. Kono promoted sports and recreation; Kohanomoku served 13 terms as sheriff of the city.

Tommy would call me once in a while, and we would talk, and he also insisted that I come down to the Y and learn how to lift. You guys remember my terrible lifting. I entered one, maybe two, meets because he insisted. Local meets. And I’m not very proud of that, but I did, and he reminds me that I did while I try to forget that I did. Anyway, we became friends, and I miss him. I now train my little 11-year-old granddaughter who has been lifting in local meets, and I give her all the sayings that Tommy had, like *Shikata-Ga-Nai* and *Arigatai*, be thankful for what you have. I got that from him. One time he told me about injuries, and he said if it doesn’t fall off, you’re okay. If your arm doesn’t fall off, you’re okay. So that’s what I tell my granddaughter all the time.



More than most weightlifters, Kono enjoyed bodybuilding training and the muscles it produces. He was blessed with good genetics and the results are plain to see.

**Mike Mizuno—Aiea, Hawaii  
15 November 2016**

I first met Tommy when I was in the ninth grade. He had an invitation to visit our intermediate school and put on a demonstration. And I went up to talk to him because I was in awe. Here was this guy in regular clothes, and he looked like the average short little guy. And then he took off his shirt, and he flexed. And one of our teachers actually swooned and fainted. I mean literally fainted. Everyone is giggling and everything else at her.

Then somebody suggested he heard from my friend that Tommy could blow up one of those water bottles, the old-fashioned water bottles. And he said, “I haven’t done it in years, but if you have one, I’ll try it.” Out comes our health worker. “I have one.” Tommy stood there, and he blew it until it was fully inflated. Then he pinched it and said, “Okay, here it comes.” And

he blew it until his face turned red and the darned thing just blew up like dynamite. All of a sudden, the thing just went pow. So, I went up to talk to him afterwards and said I was totally impressed. I didn’t believe people like you had muscles like that because my parents, my mom, grew up in Stockton—and he grew up in Sacramento—and my mom ended up in Roark, Arkansas, in the internment camp. And then the teachers and Tommy asked if we wanted to try it. You should have seen all of us lining up to blow these stupid things up, and we just couldn’t.

**Harvey Newton—Ormond Beach, Florida  
22 August 2016**

In 1963, as a young teenager anticipating my first local meet, I traveled to nearby York, PA for a few days of training. Unknown to me, this coincided with a pre-Pan American Games training camp for the American team, including Tommy Kono. What a great experience to watch our best lifters preparing for the Games (back when Team USA was the dominant team in the Western Hemisphere).

At the end of one workout Tommy utilized the York leg press (old vertical orientation model) machine for a few sets. I have no idea how much he used, but numerous large plates had been loaded. When he finished, Tommy left a few plates on the apparatus, probably thinking that anyone could start with this minimal load. Although I’d never used this device I figured I could knock off a few reps. I got in position, straightened my legs, then slowly lowered the weights only to find I was now stuck in a fully flexed position, unable to raise the weight. One of the lifters provided enough assistance so I could extract myself from this embarrassing situation. Tommy finished his workout with some bench presses on the first model York bench, something rather unsuited for anything other than light weights. When Tommy reached his targeted sets of 335lbs he requested that I sit on the end of the bench to keep it from coming up.

Later, as I was leaving the gym for my hotel, Tommy asked me if I would like to come back that evening. He had recently returned from China and planned to show some lifting movies of international competition, along with a Chinese acrobatic display. Return I did. Joining the team and John Grimek we watched about an hour’s worth of great film highlights.

Later Tommy signed my new copy of Bob Hoffman's *Weight Lifting* with "To Harvey, Best wishes! Tommy."

**Russell Ogata—Honolulu, Hawaii**  
**12 November 2016**

I got to know Tommy when I first came to Honolulu to train because my coach said, why don't you go up to the Nuuanu Y. After three months of training, Tommy came down and he looked at my weightlifting shoes which had built up heels, really high, and he said, "You lift with these?" I said, "Yeah, why?" And that's how our relationship started, but we got along, especially after I retired, so he didn't have to scold me anymore. But he and I would talk about lifters and what made a good lifter and things he respected. He respected Pete a heck of a lot because he and Pete had the same background, and they worked the same way. They never looked for excuses, always opportunities. He filled me in about Pete's lore and about other people he respected in the game. It was not so much their lifting prowess, although Pete was Olympic and world champion. It was about who they were and what they did and about the goodness of each person. One time he told me about a trip the US team had in Europe. This guy Mike Huszka had won second at the worlds and they were going to his hometown. The American lifter, I think it was Joe Puleo, could outlift him, but Tommy told him, hey, don't embarrass him in his hometown. Build him up so that he looks good, because the meet didn't mean anything. But when Tommy said that, he also recognized that Puleo too was the guy who ended Tommy's reign as national champion. He respected Joe because of what Joe chose to do. I think in the end, a lot of times for Tommy it was about who the person was that really mattered.

**Joe Puleo—Fort Myers, Florida**  
**2 November 2016**

I first met Tommy at the 1962 National Championships in Detroit. I was a 19-year-old lifter who was new to the national weightlifting scene and Tommy was a many times world champion. I was one of his biggest fans. He was friendly and encouraging to me as a young lifter.

I moved to York that summer and trained in the York gym with Gary Cleveland, another young lifter. We

were training in hopes of making the 1962 World Championship team. We were excited when we found out that Tommy was coming to train in York. We wanted to see how he trained. Tommy, Gary and I trained together in York and Tommy was generous with his advice about training and competition. We became good friends during that time and I was pleasantly surprised when Tommy gave me a gift. It was a book entitled *How to win Friends and Influence People*.

When I thought about the title of the book, I wondered if Tommy was sending me a message that I needed to make some changes in my behavior. I told Gary about it, and he said that Tommy had given him the same book. We were worried that we may have offended Tommy in some way. We decided to politely tell Tommy about our concern.

When we did tell him, in a somewhat meek fashion, Tommy laughed and said that he had read the book earlier and thought that it was a good book and he thought we would enjoy it. There was no hidden message in the gifts. Gary and I were relieved, and we all had a good laugh about how Gary and I had been so concerned about it. In the years that followed, this was one of the stories we would tell and laugh about.

**Denis Reno—West Newton, Massachusetts**  
**3 September 2016**

A real friend is someone who makes you feel like they enjoy your company and listening to you. Tommy Kono had that ability plus he was educational to listen to, and he seemed to care about your point of view, and he always acted happy to see or hear from you. I could fill a book with the anecdotes from Tommy about many of his trips overseas to compete for the USA—also a great storyteller.

Funny thing is that Tommy Kono, as a many time Olympic and World Champion, a World class body-builder, an author and coach, a photographer and a volunteer, had a very large number of friends. And just like me, I'll bet they all felt that Tommy Kono considered them a special friend. And we were all correct—above all the things that Tommy Kono was, he was a SPECIAL FRIEND to all he knew.

I first met Tommy Kono in the pages of *Strength & Health* magazine. Tommy Kono the fabulous Olympic Weightlifting Champion, Tommy Kono the Physique

Champion, Tommy Kono the author of some great ‘ABCs of Weightlifting’ coaching articles. I first met Tommy in person in 1972 at the Munich Olympics, then was privileged to manage USA teams where Tommy was the coach during the 1980s and 1990s. This continued with regular telephone conversations every few weeks/months until his passing. He must have sensed that I hated to bother him—so like the understanding person he was, Tommy would be the one to make the calls. It was probably the best idea—I’m sure he was busy managing his time keeping in contact with his many friends and making sure as much in the Weightlifting World as possible was heading in the right direction. I’ll probably never know anyone else like him.

**Gus Rethwisch—Honolulu, Hawaii**  
**From: Walter M. Imahara and David E. Meltzer,**  
*Book of Remembrance for Tommy Kono*

I met Kono in ‘73 at the Nuuanu YMCA. He was a humble man but still a tremendous presence. He immediately encouraged me to be the best I could be. I told him my goal was a 900-pound deadlift, and he said concentrate on 600 pounds first. I did 555 pounds in my first contest in the summer of ‘73 and 605 pounds in December of 1973. He kept telling me to set small goals but don’t lose sight of 900 pounds. In November of ‘78 I pulled 845 pounds and had 900 over my knees, a good five inches up my thighs. The first thing he told me was “If you wore deadlift slippers instead of 2” thick Nike soles, you would have made it.”

When I came up with the idea for the first Hawaii World Record Breakers in 1977, everybody said it couldn’t be done; everybody except Tommy Kono. In that first tournament we had lifters from Japan, New Zealand, Sweden, Canada, Finland, Great Britain, Australia, and the best lifters from the United States. Tommy helped with sponsors and staff but more importantly he said “If you believe you can pull it off don’t worry about what everybody else says or thinks.” I lost all my staff after that first year. They were all negative. They said I was crazy trying to pull it off and it was too much stress. We got NBC to televise it that first year and then Kono hooked me up with Pan American Airlines for the second year and CBS Sports televised the show for a 1/2 hour special on CBS Sports Spectacular. Eventually in 1988, ESPN televised the World Record Breakers, and the Hawaii Record

Breakers lasted 20 years; without Kono it would have lasted one year.

Tommy Kono was responsible directly or indirectly for powerlifting, bodybuilding and Olympic lifting to flourish in Hawaii. None of the bodybuilders or Olympic lifters supported powerlifting in Hawaii even though the powerlifters supported both bodybuilding and Olympic Lifting. Kono not only supported powerlifting, he was the first person in Hawaii to put on powerlifting meets. Without Tommy Kono there is no Gus Rethwisch and there is no WABDL [World Association for Benchers and Deadlifters].

**Louis Riecke—New Orleans**  
**September 2016**

He was the best in the world. ... Boy, he was something, I’ll tell you. He was the greatest. I’ll have to admit it. I knew what the odds were when I lifted against him. Once I went to Hawaii on a business trip, and this guy says, “You look like a weightlifter.” He said, “You must know Tommy Kono.” Do I know Tommy Kono! He says, “Well he lives here.” I ask, “Do you know where I can get him?” “He works for the city.” So I called him, and he answered the phone. And I said, is this Tommy Kono? And I said, Six times world champion,” and I listed everything he ever did in his life. He was the only son-of-a-bitch I never could beat in my whole life. And he says, “Lou Riecke, what are you doing here?” And that’s true. And one time in the world, I was in really in great shape, and I knew there was the national championships. I really got in shape, and I really wanted to get that guy. I worked as hard as I could work, and I made the best total I had ever made in my life. I broke the world record [in the snatch], and guess what? Kono tied me in the total. He comes up on his last lift and tied me. And you know what they do when you have a tie? They stand up there in the middle of the stage and bring out a guy with a great big towel. You strip naked, and they weigh you, right in front of the audience. And he weighed a quarter of a pound less than me. Son-of-a-bitch, I can’t even beat you when I tie you.

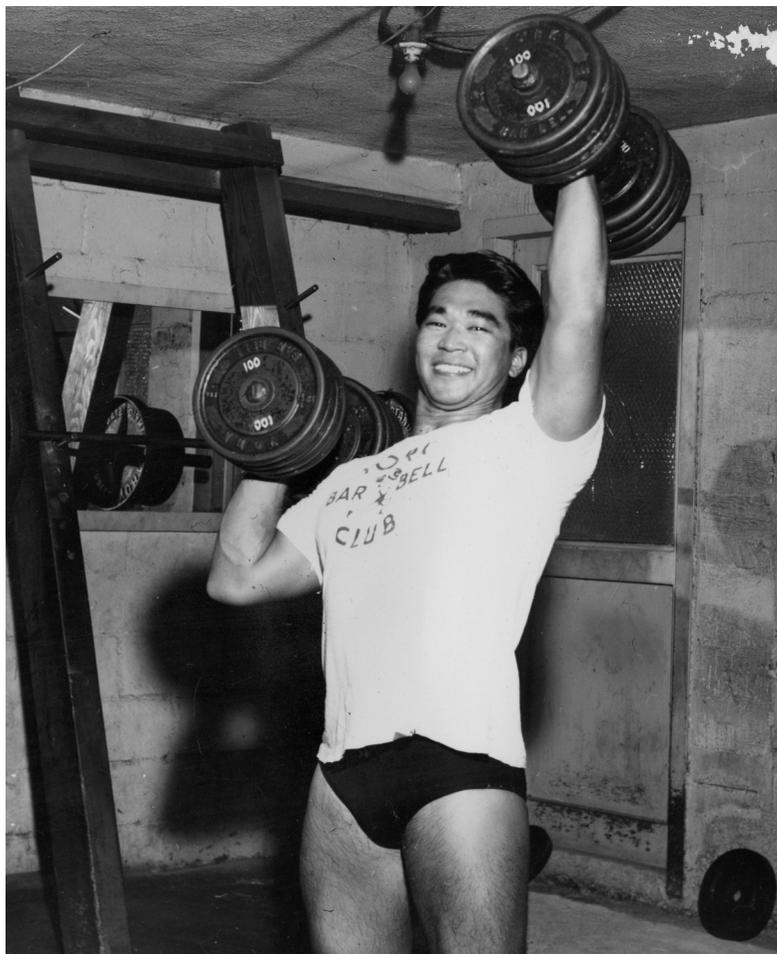
**Jim Schmitz—San Francisco, California**  
**From: Letter to T. Kono dated 15 February 2016**

I want to wish you a full recovery to good health.

I also want to let you know what a great influence you have been on my weightlifting career. I first developed an interest in strength and weightlifting in 1956 when I saw in the newspaper that a man from Sacramento won the gold medal in weightlifting. It was you of course. Then, when I began weightlifting in 1960, the first *Strength & Health* magazine that I bought had the results of the 1960 Olympics and there you were again winning the Silver medal. I followed all US lifters then, but you especially since you were from Sacramento and I was from San Francisco. I followed your career through S&H and read all your “ABC’s of Weightlifting” articles, trained by them and when I started coaching in 1968, I coached my lifters according to what I learned in your ABC’s. I think it was at the 1971 or 1974 Nationals in York, Pennsylvania, that you gave a seminar. I was there and was so impressed. Then at the 1976 Olympics I was so grateful that I could be back stage to assist in coaching my lifters Dan Cantore and Bruce Wilhelm, while you were head coach. Then at the 1984 Olympics, what a honor and thrill to be competition director for weightlifting and work with you as competition manager. The 1984 Olympics was an extraordinary experience.

I’m in complete admiration of your contribution to USA Weightlifting being on USAW’s Board of Directors. No one person has given so much to US and World Weightlifting as you, Olympic and World Champion, World Record Holder, Olympic Team Coach 1968, Mexico, 1972, West Germany, 1976, USA, Competition Manager 1984, LA, Coach US Women’s World Teams, Referee 1992, Barcelona, Jury, 1996, Atlanta, author of two books and many, many articles.

It has been such a great experience and honor to see you every summer at the Tommy Kono Open. The real highlight was your seminar the next day. I’ve been teaching USAW’s coaching courses for the past 10+ years, almost one a month, and I always tell the attendees how much I’ve learned from you, from the high pulls to a stick to the 3 front squats and 1 jerk and so much other information on how to be the best weightlifter you can be, “Quality not Quantity”. I also always include your involvement in the design of weightlifting shoes and inventing the neoprene knee sleeves.



**This photo of Tommy toying with a pair of hundred-pound dumbbells in the see-saw press appeared in *Parade Magazine* on 9 October 2005. He was a master of single-hand lifting, and it’s reported that he once bench pressed a pair of 145-pound Olympic bars, one in each hand.**

**Frank Spellman—Gulf Breeze, Florida  
27 August 2016**

In 1952 Bob Hoffman asked me to go down to the 148 pound class, and so I went down and placed second to Tommy. Several years later, we were in a bench press and squat contest in Oakland, California. It was 1956 or something like that, and we competed against each other at that time, and I think both of us weighed 170 pounds. He managed 380, and I did 340, and he squatted with 490, and I did 510. That was the first official bench press and squat contest I believe in the United States up to that time. But we only competed against each other three or four times, I think. The only thing I can say about Tommy is that he was a fantastic athlete, and he was a mental lifter. From what I understand, he never lifted heavy, real heavy,

in training, like he did in the contests, and he came up to the necessary lifts that he needed to win each time. So, he was fantastic as far as using his mental capacity.

**Doug Stalker—Aiken, South Carolina  
June 2017**

I received an email, out of the blue, from Tommy Kono in August of 1999. John Fair had forwarded an email of mine to Tommy. It was about what happened in the 181-pound class at the 1963 Senior Nationals in Harrisburg. I was spellbound in the third row, center aisle seat, a mere fifteen-year-old aspirant in weightlifting with a fancy “patron” ribbon pinned to my shirt. When I wrote John about this (because he had used Hoffman’s account in *MuscleTown*) I put things dramatically and in detail. Lou Riecke might beat the great Tommy Kono; it came down to a third attempt that few imagined Tommy could make since I recalled he had merely deadlifted the same weight, 375, on his second attempt. Tommy paced and paced at the back of the platform before his third attempt, and then, wow, he lifted the 375 overhead. John thought Tommy, whom I didn’t know then, would appreciate my account and so had forwarded it to him. Tommy did, calling me a “lifting aficionado.”

Thus began almost seventeen years of correspondence between us, most electronically but a good deal via regular mail. I can’t give an exact count, but I know that I saved 220 emails from Tommy between 2006 and 2016. I deleted others that weren’t about lifting. Add in, say, another 100 from 1999, lost back at my old university’s server, and the emails from Tommy approached the 350-mark. Tommy was also a generous guy. He sent me, via regular mail, about fifty items, from regular letters to how-to-lift brochures, his Olympic card, his pogs (as he termed them), Xmas cards, fifteen photos to frame, a copy of his IWF Lifter-of-the-Century certificate, some ten tee shirts from each of the Tommy Kono lifting meets in Sacramento, a couple Team Hawaii shirts (he claimed me as an honorary member), Xeroxes of newspaper articles, a virtual monograph on the press, TK knee and waist bands and tee shirt. Heck, I sent him an invitation to my wedding—just to let him know it was happening, never expecting him to travel that far—and the invitation said “no gifts, please.” He sent a generous check anyway.

The lifting emails were about many things: e.g., whether to let the bar hit your body in the pull, how to use straps, the advent of lifting shoes (Tommy was

there), an item in the latest Reno newsletter, who is a worthy coach these days, common errors in lifting committed even at the Olympics, the mania for spreadsheet routines, the current woes of the USAW, the rigors of being a champion without a fancy gym or jet planes, and of course his view of the current regime. My sense was that they were ignoring him more and more, he thought he had important things to correct the current situation and aimed to get the points out there one way or another. A goodly number of the emails were about things he planned to include in his second book. We would go back and forth about one thing or another for the book, month in and month out, year in and year out. How much criticism of the USAW should there be? What was wrong with today’s Masters lifting? How could you break the notion of the mental side of lifting into specific things a lifter could do? When he was wondering what to title this book, I suggested “Championship Weightlifting.” I am honored that he took my suggestion. That was, after all, what he wanted for American lifters.

**Chester O. Teegarden—Paso Heights, California,  
From: “Note to Tommy Kono,” *Bulletin*,  
California Weight Lifters Association  
Vol. 1, No. 1 (19 October 1949): 2.**

At your age I weighed 154 at my present height and I was just about as natural a Lt-Wt as you are. You may do well at 148 as a lifter but if you wish to do well BOTH in physique and in lifting you will have to have 17” arms and 47” chest and with a 30” waist. . . . Your great advantage now is your PAST experience and understanding of the DKB [deep-knee bend]. When you learn to make your arms and chest grow as you have made your legs come out you will have a terrific physique. Build your self up like some of those pictures you have drawn. Stop being tommy kono and become TOMMY KONO!!

**Leo Totten, Frederick, Maryland  
From: Walter M. Imahara and David E. Meltzer,  
*Book of Remembrance for Tommy Kono***

Way back in the day when I first got the weightlifting bug, I literally sprinted to the store when magazines were to arrive so I could get my latest copy of *Strength & Health*. I had no weightlifting coach at the time so I had to count on traveling to York Barbell to



**Two champions—Arkady Vorobiev of the Soviet Union and Tommy Kono of the United States—became friends at the 1953 World Weightlifting Championships where they both won their bodyweight class. Kono won the middleweight class that year and Vorobiev took the light-heavyweight title.**

watch Bednarski, Garcy, Holbrook and that whole crew as motivation, but it was really *Strength & Health* where I learned enough to coach myself. It was Tommy's "ABC's of Weightlifting" that was my coach for many years. His clear, understandable explanation of technique and training methodologies as well as the simple but clear drawings of the proper positions was my best resource for getting into the sport and learning the proper way to train and compete. To this day, when I am out doing my clinics and seminars, I still quote Tommy Kono from his "ABCs of Weightlifting." All of his teachings still hold true over the many years and I owe so much to Tommy for this early guidance.

**Chuck Vinci—Elyria, Ohio  
23 August 2016**

Tommy Kono at Rome said, "Chuck, the room is round, like a muscle. If you look out there, don't, because if you do, it can throw you off balance." When in Rome I missed my first press, and I remembered what he said

after that, and I made my last two. He always tried to help me. Tommy Kono was great.

**Arkady Vorobiev—Moscow, Russia  
From: *Denis Reno's Weightlifter's Newsletter*,  
No. 300 (13 January 2006).**

Kono was a great lifter, who faced the world with great confidence, and set world records in four classes. He was rightly called the "Iron Hawaiian." Kono was not only strong but had the rare ability to lift much more in contest than in his training. He had the mental toughness, and courage.

**John Yamauchi—Honolulu, Hawaii  
25 November 2016**

As a young lifter, whenever I would come to Tommy with a problem, he seemed to know exactly what I was going through and how to solve it. Once, when I was in a rut, he suggested that I work out at home for a while, with my old exercise weights. Even though there was no atmosphere, just the change up helped to get me back on track.

When I was competing, there weren't many other people doing the lifts; so I was, to a large degree, self-coached. Tommy would always preach the value of lifting properly; and since he couldn't always be present at my trainings, he told me to imagine someone videotaping the lifts. So every time I finished a lift, I would visualize and critique myself—good lift or not? Could it have been better? More control? Did I swing the bar? Did I complete the pull?

Tommy emphasized that competing nationally or internationally came with a responsibility and obligation. He made it clear that my attempts on the platform were not my call, as I had the responsibility to place as high as possible. If I make my lifts in the snatch and secured a total in the clean & jerk and placed the highest position possible, then maybe I could choose the second or third clean & jerk. At this one Nationals, I was "on." I wanted to break my PR, but Coach Tommy chose to "only" tie my PR to secure the win, rather than risk my missing the PR attempt and thus leave the door open for my opponent. It was a bit unsatisfying to only tie my PR, but I did win, so it wasn't too bad. Tommy's lifting career was post WWII and there were a lot of anti-Japanese feelings nationally. Tommy would always stress that you represent your club and/or your country—and Tommy represented us well.