Tamio “Tommy” Kono passed away on 24 April 2016 at the age of 85. It was fitting that the first official news of his death appeared on the website of the International Weightlifting Federation, which had named him “Lifter of the Century” in 2005. Almost all of Tommy’s early adult life was spent either training for, competing in, coaching others in, photographing, or writing about weightlifting—the sport in which he won three Olympic medals and set 26 world records in four bodyweight classes. In the days following the IWF’s announcement, obituaries extolling Kono’s achievements appeared in major newspapers around the world, and The Honorable Doris O. Matsui, Representative from California, gave a speech before the US House of Representatives declaring Kono an American hero. Iron Gamers took to the web to share their personal stories of Kono, posting for all to see how he inspired them, what it had been like to watch him lift; and what a humble, gracious man they’d found him to be when running into him at a gym or talking with him at a meet or a clinic. Walter Imahara and David Meltzer even decided to publish a tribute book in his honor, the Book of Remembrance for Tommy Kono, through the print-on-demand service at Lulu.com.

Here at the Stark Center, we also pondered how to respond to the sad news of Tommy’s passing, and decided to do something for him that we have done for only two other people (John Grimek and Steve Reeves) in the 27 years we’ve been publishing Iron Game History.
Iron Game History Volume 14 Numbers 2 & 3

Our decision was to create the special issue you’re holding in your hands—a journal devoted to only one person. To create this issue, we asked John Fair, the reigning historian chronicling the history of competitive weightlifting, to edit this special tribute. John, as you may recall—if you read last issue’s editorial about Tommy’s death and the gift of his collection to the Stark Center by his wife, Flo, and the Kono family—went to Hawaii on the Stark Center’s behalf and packed the large collection (with considerable help from his wife, Sarah, and long-time Kono friend and fellow lifting legend Pete George). Once the collection was here, Fair spent most of the last winter and spring going through the Kono Collection, interviewing Tommy’s friends and weightlifting colleagues, and asking people to share their memories and thoughts about Kono’s life and his matchless legacy. This issue is the result of John’s efforts to preserve the memory of “America’s Greatest Weightlifter” and to do what historians are trained to do—to drill down into the primary sources and reveal the character of this true gentleman, in the old sense of the term. (The photos in this issue are also from the Kono Collection.) On behalf of the Stark Center and fans of the strength sports we say, “Thank you” to John, to Pete George, to the other contributors, and, most especially, to the Kono family for making this issue possible.

—Jan and Terry Todd