The Roark Report

John Terpak: 1912-1993

Born: 5 July 1912 in Mayfield, Pennsylvania.
Four Grand-Children; One Great-Grandson.

John Terpak’s life was one of continuous self-improvement. Even before he won the first Strength & Health magazine self-improvement contest in February, 1936, he had been improving. Competing in the 1934 Junior National Weightlifting championships, his eighth place finish in the 148 pound class was 281 pounds behind winner John Terlazzo’s total. By the time of the 1935 Junior Nationals, Terpak won the 148 pound class and totaled 275 pounds more than the previous year. Of course, much of that was due to a successful two arm clean and jerk in 1935. He had missed all his clean and jerks the year before. Nonetheless, Terpak was setting a pattern of succeeding over previous attempts.

This year—1993—at the National Weightlifting Championships in Peoria, Illinois, Terpak was recognized for participating in sixty consecutive national championships. He won those nationals twelve times, and one span—from 1936 to 1945—was a literal decade of victory. Then in 1946 he placed second. The following year he won again. At subsequent Nationals, he was a spectator, a judge, or a coach. He also served in whatever non-spotlighted functions were needed. During Terpak’s lifting career, he participated in three bodyweight classes: 148, 165 and 181. The accompanying chart provides the details, and while not comprehensive, it does indicate the magnitude of his involvement with our sport. Take note of his lifting at the World Championships and in the Olympic Games.

Life changed over the decades for John. He went from living in a “Thirty-five dollar, five room apartment,” to much better quarters. He evolved from champion lifter to businessman and executive with the York Barbell Company. When he was recognized this year in Peoria, one noticed his absolutely squared shoulders, his head held high and his determined walk. He was not a man who had lost his physique. Even at eighty, his demeanor was not diminished.

When, only a handful of weeks after I saw him in Peoria, I learned of his death on 1 June 1993, it somehow seemed fitting that his life ended abruptly, rather than decliningly. He seemed to be full of life. Then died.

It was no easy task to be involved in our sport, with all the different aspects and federations and organizations and business competitions, and remain a survivor for more than half a century. John Terpak did it.

References to Terpak’s lifting career may be found in:

John’s byline appeared on the following articles in Strength & Health. Between April 1964 and October 1966 a series of athlete profiles ran each month called “Lifter’s Comer.” [Ed note: Few of these articles were actually written by Terpak.]


The Lifting Career of John Terpak

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Contest &amp; Place</th>
<th>One-Hand Snatch</th>
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John Terpak was part of nine Olympic teams. He served as coach of the United States team in 1968—Mexico City—and in 1972—Munich. In 1986, in Moscow, he was head referee in the (220) pound class at the Goodwill Games.


—Joe Roark