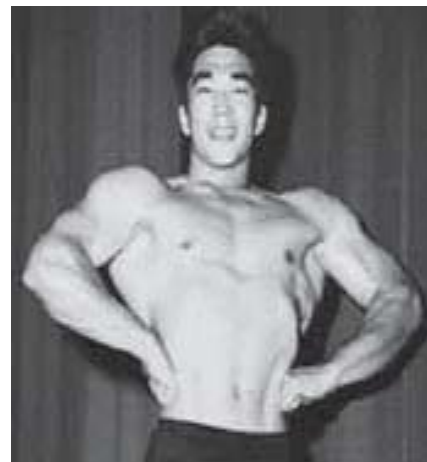


## Handout #4 Weightlifting Champions

### Tamio “Tommy” Kono

Tamio Kono is regarded as one of the greatest weightlifters in history. After spending three years in a detention camp for Japanese-Americans during World War II, Kono grew up to win Olympic gold medals in 1952 and 1956. In 1960, he won a silver, falling just short in an attempt to become the first weightlifter in Olympic history to strike gold three times. Kono won eight consecutive world and Olympic championships between 1952 and 1959, and broke 26 world records over four weight classes during his career. He also coached the U.S. Olympic Team in 1976.



Tommy Kono was born on June 27, 1930 in Sacramento, California. He and his family were forced to live in a U.S. detention camp for Japanese Americans during World War II where he was first introduced to weightlifting. He began one of the most amazing careers in weightlifting history, winning two Olympic gold medals and setting 21 world records in four different weight divisions. It was Kono's ability to move up and down in weight divisions without losing strength that allowed him to fill in wherever the U.S. Team needed him. Each of his Olympic Games was won in a different class - gold in the lightweight division in 1952, gold in the light heavyweight division in 1956, and silver in the middleweight division in 1960. Kono also won numerous world championships in three categories and was the winner of the 1954 Mr. World contest and the 1957 and 1956 Mr. Universe Championships.



At 5 feet 6 inches, Tommy Tamio Kono did not look like a weightlifting champion, but every time he entered an amateur competition he seemed to win. He broke a total of 22 world records and six Olympic records during his outstanding career.

Kono is the first and only person, to date, to hold records in four weight divisions. His ability to shift from 148 to 184 pounds without loss of strength or stamina has long intrigued the world of weightlifting.

He is the only two-division Olympic champion in weightlifting history. He won the lightweight (148 pounds) title at Helsinki, Finland in 1952 and the heavyweight (181 pounds) crown in 1956 at Melbourne, Australia. He is a member of the Olympic Hall of Fame.

Kono was named the weightlifting coach of the Mexican National Team in 1967 and the German National Team in 1976.

He currently lives in Aiea, Hawaii.

# Andrei Chermerkin

Andrei Chermerkin was born on February 17, 1972 in Solnechnodolsk, Russia. He's started lifting weights when he was 15 years old. He said that there was nothing else to do when he was growing up. Today, when he's not training to keep his title of "World's Strongest Man," he spends his time working as a police officer earning less than \$200 a month (counting competition prize money). He isn't called to duty that often because they don't have a uniform that fits his almost 180 kg (400 lb) frame.



At 182 cm (6 feet) and around 180 kg (397 lbs) he is the heaviest man to win a gold medal in the Olympic Games. Andrei does not mind his heavy weight: "The heavier is the body, the easier to conquer the heavier weights." Many specialists, however think his increasing weight and prominent belly might become a problem for him to improve his achievements, especially in snatch event.



Ivan Nikolaevich Chermerkin, Andrei's father, participated in "The Best Fathers" contest held in Stavropol on March 6-7, 1999. The main prizes were awarded to the fathers of the families that have at least three children. Ivan Chermerkin won the contest. The main reason for the jury's choice was that he is the father of the World Strongest Man. Another reason was that all the children in Chermerkins' family weighed more than 5 kilos (11 lbs) at birth.

According to the Russian Cyril and Methodius Encyclopedia, Andrei is an Honored Master of Sports (1995), an Olympic Games Champion (1996) and a World Champion (1995). In addition, Andrei won the World Championships in 1997 in Chiang Mai (Thailand) and in 1998 in Lahti (Finland). His present goal is to beat Leonid Taranenko's 266 kg record in clean-and-jerk. He is also dreaming of following the steps of legendary Vasily Alexeev who set 80 world records and won 22 World Championships and two Olympic Games.

His achievements at the World and European Championships and the Olympic Games made him the logical choice for Captain of the Russian Weightlifting Team.

At the Olympics in 1996, Chermerkin provided drama when he requested more weights be added to the bar in the final event. When the announcer said, "Loaders, load 260 kilograms on the bar," the crowd started cheering loudly, encouraging the big Russian to lift more than he had ever done before.

With the crowd behind him and his belly shaking, his lips curled in smile as the bar moved up over his head. He had set a world record and won a gold medal, too, by coupling his record jerk with his 435-pound snatch. The Russian anthem was played, and for a moment the festive crowd turned earnest. They gave Chemerkin a standing ovation. They knew they had seen history.

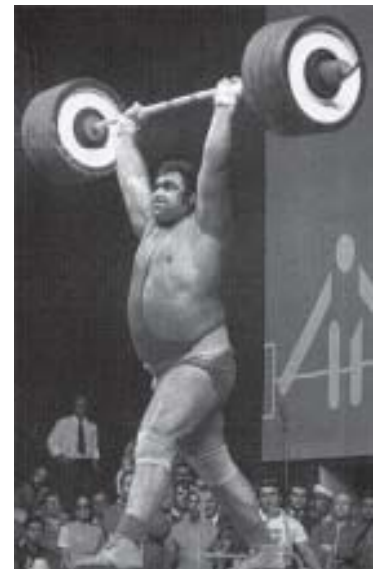
In early 1997 Andrei received a “Medal for Courage” awarded to him by Boris Yeltsin, the Russian President, for his victory in the 1996 Olympics.



## Vasili Alexeev

Alexeev burst onto the international weightlifting scene in 1970 when he became the first man to break the 500-pound mark in the clean and jerk. He remained undefeated for eight years, winning 22 world records, and is said to have been rewarded handsomely for his prowess; the Russian weightlifting federation reportedly paid him as much as \$1,500 per record.

Apparently the only thing that could match Alexeev’s hunger for victory was his insatiable appetite. Legend has it that on the day of his gold-medal victory at the 1972 Munich Olympics he ate 26 fried eggs and a steak for breakfast.



But in Montreal, site of the 1976 Olympics, it was unclear for a time whether Alexeev, the 34-year-old son of a Russian lumberjack, would lift at all. His failure to report for a routine drug test prompted many to wonder whether genetics alone accounted for his success.

He took the test finally, passed it, and then won the gold medal with ridiculous ease. His clean and jerk

was a world record 255 kilograms (562 pounds), 20 kg more than East German runner-up Gerd Bonk. His snatch of 185 kg (408 pounds) broke his own Olympic record.

Alexeev was cheered on by Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau and an overflow crowd at the St. Michel Arena, the undisputed favorite as much for his unique approach to weightlifting as for his awesome power beneath the sagging bar.



His fans included the international press corps, which hung on his every word. When the arena's press room could not accommodate the crush of reporters, post-ceremony interviews were held on the lifting platform itself. "Maybe my wife will listen to me now," he chuckled, revelling in the moment.

Alexeev was a frustration to the Soviet bureaucrats, ignoring their demands and rejecting their formal training camps to work out alone in his garden, often under the cover of



darkness, among the herbs and vegetables and hybrid roses he cultivated with care. Vasili had many unusual training techniques. Among them, lifting weights in the river Don. One witness reported: "This is what it looked like. Alexeyev dove down. Several seconds later his dark-haired head emerged from the water, then the barbell. From the discs, as from a bucket, flowed the murky yellow water of the Don."

When he wasn't training, he was collecting crystal goblets and Armenian cognac, reading Lenin and the translated works of Jack London, and listening to the recordings of Tom Jones.

His supreme confidence touched every part of his life. Not only was Alexeev the world's greatest superheavyweight, he also considered himself the finest gardener, cook, carpenter, singer and billiards player in perhaps the entire U.S.S.R. He viewed weightlifting not simply as a test of strength, but as a challenge of his very spirit.

"Some weightlifters see competition as tortures," Alexeev said in a 1975 Sports Illustrated interview. "Others see them as a great celebrations, I am in the middle. During Shakespeare's time it was said, 'What must be cannot be avoided.' I experience the tortures and the celebrations. But I lift as well as I lift because it cannot be avoided."

On November 1, 1977 Alexeyev picked up his 80th and final world record...256 kg (564.5 lbs) in the clean and jerk. His magnificent career ended at the 1980 Moscow Olympics when he failed three attempts to snatch 180 kg and was eliminated. It was his first competition after suffering an injury at the 1978 world championships.

He remained deeply involved in the sport through the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona, where he served as head coach of the Russian weightlifting team. He has since retired, and lives quietly with his wife of 34 years in the coal-mining city of Shakhty, about 800 miles southwest of Moscow.

