



LEV NIKIFOROV (RUS)

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Half a century for the benefit of weightlifting

Lev Konstantinovich Nikiforov is 75!

Born on October 5, 1936 in the village of Bezhanitsy, Pskov region. 1970, Master of Sports of the USSR. 1976, Excellence in Physical Education. 1977, Merited coach of Russia. 1993, Judge of the 1st international category. President of the Masters Weightlifting Federation of Russia.

2002, 2009, two-time champion of the World Masters Games; 2002, 2006, 2007, 2009-2011, six-time World champion; 2011, champion of European Masters Games; 2002, 2010, 2011 three-time champion of Europe; 1996-2009, 2011, 15-time champion of Russia and 15-time winner of the Cup of Russia.

Awarded: the Diploma of the President of the Russian Federation "For significant contributions to the development of sports and international sports cooperation and promotion of healthy lifestyle," the Order "For Services to the Fatherland and Cossacks» of the 2nd class, the "Marshal Zhukov" Jubilee Medal.

Question - Lev Konstantinovich what is your origin?

- My father was a philistine, mother was a daughter of a clergyman. My mother's great-grandfather was an archpriest, he was the father of 16 children: 8 males and 8 females, and all named with the letter "A". My grandfather was named Ardaleon. Grandfather and his children were the Khrebtovs.

Question - Your childhood was in the prewar and war years. What do you remember from that period?

- My childhood years were associated with the war. Mom and I were in the occupied land of the Pskov region. Before going to the war my father took us to a remote village Lotskino with 10 living houses in it; one end of the village ran into the Dubets Lake, the other in a remote

swampy wood. There were guerrillas in the wood. My mother was a communications agent between the guerrillas and underground fighters in the village of Bezhanitsy. The Germans came to the village at day time and the Russians at night. It was in summer 1943 when my mother brought the news from the county town that the Germans would recently come to the village and burn it with the people. The guerrillas evacuated all the villagers into the wood and the next day the village was gone - the Nazis burned it. After the war Lotskino has never been rebuilt.

In the guerrillas' camp I caught scabies in a very severe form. The commander let mother and me to treat at a health post in the village of Fedorkovo. My mother's friends accommodated us for a night in the village, but one of the guys, assuming that my mother was from the guerrilla unit, betrayed her. In my eyes mother was tortured, they hit her on the head with a pistol grip. Finally those people made a decision to shoot us.

Two Germans were sent to chase us to Bezhanitsy on a horse cart. Once they made a stop and had a long talk. I only remember one word they used very often - "kinder." The fate was mercy for us and we were taken into a camp at the railway station of Sushchev where in an old pre-revolutionary building made of stone many women and children were waiting for dispatching to Germany. Next morning we were lined up and taken to load a train. The people carried with them all sorts of bundles, backpacks, except my mother who did not have anything but my arm in her hand, so she plucked up the courage to turn off the road to the house of one of her friends. The guard did not suspect any trick in her courageous act and didn't return us back to the column. I was only 7 years old.

Bezhanitsky district of the Pskov region was released only in August 1944.

After the war, when the traitor died my mother revealed his name. When he was alive she was afraid of what stupid things I could do and deal with him. Holiness in the nature of my mother did not allow any violence. My father returned from the war, the first group of disabled and lived to 85 years.

Question - What do you remember about your school years?

- I remember the postwar famine. At the first grade we were constantly thinking about food, barefoot and hungry. One boy always smelled of fresh bread (his mother worked at a bakery) and in the classroom we were not listening to a teacher, we looked at the boy. One birthday I asked my mother to buy a loaf of bread for me that I ever ate. On completing six grades my mother took me to Leningrad. As an exception I was accepted to work in the railway school № 2. At that time I didn't have full 16 years.

In 1954, I graduated from the college with a degree of "Fitter-boiler maker." Of the entire group only I and my fellow-villagers Sasha Tkachev received the fifth category; after graduating from school we lived with him in a hostel room in *Obukhov defense* Avenue and worked on the Proletarian locomotive repair works.

Question - When did you join sports?

-In 1953, within the "Bolshaya Neva" festival a military parade of ships and six-oared boats racing took place. It was a fascinating sport. A young man Yosyua Itskevich by name noticed six

craftsters and suggested we should try to ride on a boat. So we did. It was the beginning of our regular trainings in flag wagging, heaving line, 10 cable's length boat racing, sailing, learning maritime terminology and equipment. We won the championship of Leningrad in 1955 and some of us got the right to participate in the championship of the USSR. Our team from Leningrad took the third place in the competition for the decathlon in Novorossiysk, I was a right aftermost oarsman in the team.

Question -What was your life after?

- In 1955, I volunteered (I had a deferment from military service) to serve in the Navy. During the four years of service in the Baltic Fleet I was promoted to a commander of WH-5 boilermen petty officer I class.

Having demobilized I came back to my native village of Bezhanitsy and went with Yuri Zhishevich, a childhood friend of mine to dancing. 188 cm in height, 90 kg of weight, navel form, peakless cap cocked back on my head made themselves felt. The only girl, tall, slender, with big eyes, a long braid and a charming smile that I invited to a waltz I did not let go all the night. 10 days of dating passed and the Civil Registration Office of Bezhanitsy registered our marriage. It was a happy marriage. We gave birth to two daughters but the illness of Tamara Mikhailovna separated us: at the age of 34 she died after a long illness.

In 1959, I moved from Leningrad to the village of Krasnoye Solntse in Bezhanitsy district to my parents and my wife.

In January 1960 idem Jura Zhishevich persuaded me to go to evening classes. I went immediately to the 8th grade without learning in the 7th. The fact that I sat down at the books and became interested in learning affected many of my peers. In 1962, I graduated from the 10th grade with only one satisfactory mark and one good rating.

Question - At what age did you start weight training?

- In 1960, the district committee of the party has sent me to the "Udarnik" state farm where I combined the work as an instructor and supervisor for Physical Education and Sport with Komsomol activities. The profession of a Supervisor in Education and Sport was inculcated in the countryside throughout the entire USSR at that time. That was a directive of the Party.

It happened like that there were two bars in the farm of Bezhanitsy and I became an instigator for the weightlifting sessions. We learned press, clean and jerk from books. Step by step we formed a team and started taking part in the regional competitions. I can't but mention our first athletes in the village of Bezhanitsy, namely Nikolay Ivanov, Konstantin Belenkov, Nikolai Vasilev, Julius Tupyakov, Vasili Ignatiev, Victor Mishenkov.

Question -Where did you get your professional coaching education?

-In 1963 I took a course at the Leningrad Institute of Physical Education and Sports named after Petr Frantsevich Lesgaft. At that time our teachers were: Alexandr Ivanovich Falameev, Associate Professor, Merited coach of the RSFSR; Associate Professors Mikhail Timofeevich Lukyanov and Nikolai Sergeevich Ippolitov. There were only 5 graduates of the "trainer-instructor for weightlifting" specialty in 1967, they were: Vladimir Shataev, Nicholai Gutorov,

Mikhail Melnikov, Lev Nikiforov, Vladimir Nechkin. My student years were not spent in vain: in the evenings I was training students of the Leningrad Institute of Fine Mechanics and Optics and the Leningrad Institute of Aviation Instrumentation; after graduating from the Institute I was commissioned to Chelyabinsk-40 (now Ozersk), a forbidden town for Westerns, where 21 Master of Sports of the USSR in Weightlifting were cultivated from 1967 to 1982. Here I initiated an annual tournament in memory of Sergey Eliseev.

Question - Who of the weightlifting experts you've worked with?

- I cannot but mention Valentin Epifanovich Yuminov, president of the Federation in Ozersk. Now deceased, he was a good and simple man who did his best for the development of weightlifting in the town. By his initiative my students threw me up on a stage in Dimitrovgrad when I completed the Master of Sports qualification.

In these years I had an honor to work with Anatolii Gennadievich Dmitriev, a wonderful, smart and talented man, an honored coach of the RSFSR; he was the main coach of Alexander Gunyashev, who became the European champion, silver medalist of the World Championship, and world record holder in jerk.

In 1976, together with Alexander Shchukin (my student, the 3rd place in the championship of Russia) I was invited to the Russian training camp where the youths were trained for the championship of the USSR. At the training camp I got acquainted with Alexei Timofeevich Ivanov, Merited coach of the RSFSR, Head coach for the Sports Committee of Russia, an educator with a capital letter who had two degrees, in education and in sport. Being a gifted teacher and organizer, he supremely loved weightlifting, he was honest and principled, and he did not allow anyone to hurt neither athletes nor coaches. He taught us collecting and reading books. Under his leadership the teams of men, juniors and youths repeatedly won the Olympics, Youth Games, championships of the USSR.

In 1977, I was awarded the title of Merited coach of the Russian Federation for training the second Russian team, which won the Youth Games of the USSR.

I worked with Alexei Ivanov in 1976-1988. He managed to rally the following wonderful teachers and trainers: Viktor Kalistratovich Dorohin (Shakhty), Merited Coach of the USSR, Viktor Pavlovich Naumenkov (Dimitrovgrad); Merited Coaches of the RSFSR: Nikolai Nikanorovich Grigoriev (Tver), Nikolai Fedorovich Potapov (Ulyanovsk), Ibrahim Abibulatovich Kodzoev (Grozny), Vladimir Nikolaevich Savchenko (Lipetsk), of Anatolii Vladimirovich Ryabtsev (Mtsensk) and Pavel Aleksandrovich Gorulev (Ufa), Georgii Zakharovich Bogunov (Kemerovo), Victor Ivanovich Astalopov (Volgograd), who later were qualified as Merited Coaches of Russia, and many others.

In those years Viktor Polyakov was the head of the Weightlifting Federation of the USSR, his deputy was Yuri Duganov, Merited Master of Sports of the USSR. Incorruptible, principled and responsible leaders of Federation worked closely with the coaches of the Sports Committee of the Russian Federation: Vladimir Vasilyevich Bogachyev, Vladimir Ivanovich Maslyayev, Yuri Vladimirovich Teryaev, Merited coaches of Russia. Many Russian teams owe them their victories.

Question - Whom have you trained yourself?

- In 1982, for family reasons I moved to work to Obninsk, Kaluga region. Though earlier, after the departure of Rudolph Vladimirovich Plukfelder I was asked to chair the Rostov weightlifting, the objective circumstances tipped the balance in favor of Obninsk. A new 15-year period in my starts and my coaching life began; that was a period of time when I have cultivated 11 Masters of sports in weightlifting (*Sports Classification System of the USSR*) and 8 masters the sport of powerlifting. Elena Naumova was the first Master of Sport of the USSR, International Class (MSIC) in weightlifting, and four sportsmen were qualified for MSIC standard in Powerlifting: Nikolai Platoshechkin, Champion of Europe, 1995; Andrei Nazarov, European Junior champion, who later became World Championship silver medalist; Irina Abramova, champion and Igor Garanin, winner of world and European championships. In 1996, Alexei Smetanin won the bronze medal at the World Junior Weightlifting Championship.

All these years, the city weightlifting Federation was headed by Yevgenii Gerasimov Ryazhnov, Deputy Chief Engineer of Physics and Power Engineering Institute; he was a man who selflessly loved weightlifting. He was in all economic and educational activities of the Federation. With his participation the weightlifting hall was reequipped, there the trainers' work was in full swing. During those years we exhibited up to 50 youths for the regional competitions.

The next stage of my sports career is connected with the town of Zhukov, where I was invited in 1998 to the post of a director of the Ice Sports Complex that was under construction. In addition to the ice arena, I built the halls for weightlifting and physical training. In 2000, the sports complex was put into operation. I combined main work with coaching all this years. During this period, I have cultivated five Masters of Sport of Russia, International Class in Powerlifting: Vera Gubanova, Vadim Zamornikov, Taras Tarasenko, Yevgenyi Efimov, Alexander Kotenko and 11 Masters of Sport. In 2004-2005, Vadim Zamornikov was twice champion of Europe and two-time Junior World Champion; he has set European and world records.

Question - How did the idea of competition in memory of Georgy Konstantinovich Zhukov in Obninsk appeared?

- The tournament in memory of our countryman Georgy Zhukov, Marshal of the Soviet Union, four times Hero of the Soviet Union had a character of city championship, later it became regional, and further on got All-Russian, Union and International. Do you remember championship of the USSR among sports clubs and PE groups in 1960 that were canceled in the long run? Together with Yevgenyi Gerasimovich Ryazhnov we made up an idea to revive the involvement of grassroots level athletes into competition; we called the tournament *Championship of Russia among the SC and PEG in memory of Zhukov G.K.*

The popularity of the events, which were attended by up to 60 groups of PE our vast Russia, crossed the line. The tournament was attended by athletes of Ukraine, Belarus, Tajikistan, Finland, Poland, and El Salvador. Over 320 athletes took part in the competition in 2000-2001.

Question - You are one of the organizers of the veterans' weightlifting in Russia. How was the Federation of veterans organized?

- Veterans' sport was formed in a very special way. To participate in *Championship of Russia among the SC and PEG* we obliged the teams include athletes and veterans who have always been and are still now in grassroots groups of physical education except youths, men, and women athletes.

Viktor Kuznetsov, father of Pavel Kuznetsov, Olympic champion, constantly took part in our tournaments. It was he who brought the news that the world and Europe have been holding championships among veterans for several years (*Masters' Championships*), and he took part in

them in recent years. An idea came to my and George Neskorođov's heads to set an organization in Russia that would unite all veterans of weightlifting. The Federation was established at a regular *Championship of Russia among the SC and PEG in memory of Zhukov G.K.* in May 1996. As it happens the initiators were elected to be its leaders. So Lev Nikiforov has become the FVTAR president with Yuri Neskorođov as a deputy.

So we started annual championships, the Cup of Russia, and took part in European and world championships. It was a challenge to undergo spiteful critics of the members of principal Federation, heads of the Sports Committee of Russia and other ignorant people and save the Federation. So we are already 16 years, we are developing, win international competitions and are proud of it. We are proud for extending the sporting life of the people. What I urge all.

Question - Please give your assessment to Russian veterans if compared to the international masters.

- According to the formal parameters - ranking and the number of medals won at World and European Championships- Russian masters are the strongest. But I personally like more informal assessment of the leaders of International Federation: "Amazing people you are the Russians! If you haven't won the gold, all the rest is not a success for you! "

That's what we are in the eyes of foreigners! In their minds the Russian and Soviet athletes as well as the athletes of the Russian Federation are always the strongest!

Question - What can you say about the future of Russian weightlifting?

- Heavy athletics in the country should be kept on developing consistently and persistently, without going to extremes; we should collect 'our kilos' at the championships. And the result is sure to be!

To the Weightlifting Federation of Russia led by Sergei Syrtsov, its young president I wish success in London!

Question -What would your wish to the "Olympus" magazine that celebrated its 20th anniversary?

- First of all congratulations to Vladimir Saltykov on the anniversary of his brainchild. Thanks to his enthusiasm and love for heavy athletics the "Olympus" has received recognition from domestic and foreign weightlifters, professionals and amateurs.

Secondly the information regarding weightlifting posted online cannot compete with the content of the magazine, because it does not always meet the professional level, it is inaccurate and sometimes misleading.

I base my judgments on events, which I was a direct participant in person. And I have something with which to compare.

Thirdly I'd like to wish the chief coaches of the country's picked teams take the opportunity of the " Olympus " to exchange experiences with the coaching body and athletes, as they have a chance to work with the most gifted athletes. Their experience and methodology of training should be the property of many promising weightlifters.

Interviewed by Yevgenyi Sidorok

File pictures of Lev Nikiforov