

# Lifters of the Year 2008

## A German for the First Time – Chinese Repeat

### Iran's Alihosseini gets "Man of the Future" Special Award

#### Just take a look at this list:

BLAGOEV Blagoi, BUL (1982, 1983), SULEYMANOGLU Naim, BUL-TUR (1984, 1985, 1986, 1988, 1992, 1996), PETROV Mihail, BUL (1987), IVANOV Ivan, BUL (1989, 1990), CHUN Byung-Kwan, KOR (1991), PESHALOV Nicolai, BUL (1993), PETROV Alexei, RUS (1994), DIMAS Pyrros, GRE (1995), CHEMERKIN Andrei, RUS (1997), JELIAZKOV Rumen, BUL (1998), MUTLU Halil, TUR (1999, 2001), REZAZADEH Hossein, IRI (2002, 2003, 2004), ILIN Ilya, KAZ (2005, 2006) and RYBAKOU Andrei, BLR (2007). – Isn't it impressive?

#### And the fabulous ladies:

SUN Cai Yan, CHN (1991), PENG Liping, CHN (1992), CHEN Su-Chih, TPE (1993, 1995), GUAN Hong, CHN (1994), LI Hongyun, CHN (1996), TANG Weifang, CHN (1997, 1998), DING Meiyuan, CHN (1999, 2000), POPOVA Valentina, RUS (2001), WANG Mihgjuan, CHN (2002), LIU Chunhong, CHN (2003, 2004), THONGSUK Pavina, THA (2005), CHEN Yanqing, CHN (2006), JANG Mi-Ran, KOR (2007). The above roll call includes those 14 male and 13 female weightlifters who have earned the "Lifter of the Year" titles at the annual elections held by **World Weightlifting** since 1982.

A summary of these 27 years reveals that votes have been cast on altogether 136 men and 106 women lifters, representing 43 countries. The inventory is imposing enough, yet one of these stars rises above his colleagues: Naim SULEYMANOGLU. The Bulgarian-born Turk stands alone with his six titles as Best Lifter of the Year, representing two countries. The span between his first and sixth election comprises twelve years. The "Pocket Hercules" was the first junior to have outscored the senior stars. He was only 17 years old when elected for the first time, and 29 when crowned for the sixth time. As regards the voting charts, the USSR was represented by 35 male lifters, Bulgaria with 29 lifters. Not surprisingly, China leads the women's ballots with their 52 champions having received votes to the various positions, including 2007. While Chinese women can boast nine title-winners and eighteen ladies were ranked in the top three, none of the Chinese male champions (out of 15 nominated) have yet made it to the Lifter of the Year position. Only three Chinese men have been ranked in the top three.

2008 was the seventh year for men and third year for women to elect the Best of the Year following the Olympic Games. Only once did it happen that in an



Olympic year someone other than one of the Olympic champions was elected as Lifter of the Year. This singular event dates in 1984 when Suleymanoglu (at the time as Shalamanov), although he could not participate in the Los Angeles Olympic Games, was still voted as best of the year, at the age of 17 years. So, in 2008 the men celebrated their 27<sup>th</sup>, the women their 18<sup>th</sup> election

of the Lifter of the Year. This time we introduced a further innovation. As opposed to the earlier practice of casting ballots by e-mail and fax, the IWF website [www.iwf.net](http://www.iwf.net) offered an online opportunity to vote. We can state that the system worked. Ballots were cast from all over the world, from all of the five continents, from Canada to New Zealand, from Brazil to South Africa and of course from Europe. We received 278 votes from Iran (see below), and more than 30 from China. On the other hand, unfortunately no one from successful weightlifting countries like Belarus or Russia wanted to send his or her vote on the favorites up to the deadline. While we are happy about the high number of votes received, it is a pity that we were unable to accept more

than 200 of them, due to various deficiencies. In the end, weightlifting fans from all over the world indicated 23 male and 13 female weightlifters' names who thus participated in the "finals". As usual, some "strange" votes have been cast again, votes we were thus unable to verify for the scoring. For instance, several voters indicated Hossein Rezazadeh, who has not been on stage for the last

three years but works as Chief Coach for the Iranian team. Similarly, a few ballots included the name of Mu Shuangshuang who failed to appear in any international competition in 2008. In the 27 years history of the elections, the Voting Supervisory Commission had to meet to decide on one particular issue.

The athlete in question is the young Iranian giant, Saeid Alihosseini. This 20-year old talent, hopefully facing a bright and success-

the coming years, will unfold his potential in a wider international contest and may then run for a prominent position in his own right even at the Lifter of the Year elections.

In any case, this situation gave us a good idea. From now on we shall give a special award to the "Man of the Future". For 2008, that is by all means Saeid Alihosseini, Iran.

Coming back to the Best of 2008, the Beijing Olympic champions evidently took the honours. They occupy the top 8 positions for the men, and the top 7 positions for the women. Special preferences among the gold medal winners created groups for both genders. Three champions in each sex pulled off the field, scoring over 800 and a thousand points. An extremely close finish marked the men's contest. The minimum margin of 16 points separates the first and the second ranked men. Only 37 points indicate the difference between the winner and the third place-winner. In the women's election, the top-ranked lady overtakes the runner up by 144 points and the third by 254 points.

Despite their most

successful year, Chinese men could not make it better than a third place. In contrast, their women continued the sweeping victory from the previous year. Three Chinese ladies are ranked in the top four, including the winner's position.

Among the men, 56kg Olympic champion Long Qingquan received the highest number of votes to first place, but only ten bal-

lots indicated him as second best, so finally he landed in 5<sup>th</sup> position overall. In the top eight positions, which were taken by the Olympic champions, there are only two Europeans, with the rest of them being Asians, yet the top two places are taken by the two Europeans.

The Best Male Lifter of 2008 is German **Matthias STEINER**. With Steiner, Germany celebrates its first ever Lifter of the Year. Before him, the best position by a German was noted by Weller, who was ranked third in 1997.

Since the opening of the voting procedure, Steiner and Aramnau got the bulk of votes, but Zhang was at their heels all the way. The final stage of the voting reminded us of the Steiner vs. Chigishev finish in Beijing. As we remember: the Russian was comfortably in the lead when, against all odds, the German finally jerked the 258kg and won. A short while before the closing of the Lifter of the Year election, Aramnau stood with 850, Steiner with 835 points. In the last days, however, we witnessed a dramatic turn. From the last 11 voters Steiner collected 60 points (including 8 votes to winner). In this finish Aramnau had to be content only with 29 points. On the overall, the superheavyweight Olympic champion finally

outscored the 105kg gold medal winner by 16 points. Among those casting their ballots in the finals we recognised Frank Mantek, Steiner's coach (his ranking being Steiner, Scerbatih and Zhang). Ballots in this final phase came from Germany, Austria, Brazil and the Philippines and each pointed at Steiner as the Best Lifter.

Another testimony for Steiner's wide recognition and fast-growing popularity is that he collected votes from 32 countries, among those 20 put his name in the first rank.

The progress of the voting among the women had less excitement in store for us. Top favorite Liu Chunhong registered the first and the last vote: naturally to the top place in both cases. Altogether 250 voters thought that she should be among the best.

At certain points both Chen Xiangxia and Chen Yanqing seemed to corner Liu Chunhong, but in the end 144 plus points marked Liu's prominence over Chen Yanqing. The only thing the two had in common was that both celebrated their second Olympic gold medals. Korea's "giant" Jang Mi-Ran got significantly less nominations to the top position than both double Olympic champions, but all the more voters put her into second or third rank, paying due respect to her exceptional performance in Beijing.



ful career, set up 9 junior world records in the +105kg during the year of 2008. With his final 451kg total he would have taken third place in Beijing. Undoubtedly, his accomplishments are remarkable. Yet, the Commission felt that it would not be correct to verify 207 ballots that are formally unacceptable. We decided so in the sincere hope that this young man with exceptional talent, in

**Best Lifters of 2008 - Women**

Rank	Name	OG	Nat.	Points	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>
1	LIU Chunhong	(1)	CHN	1,451	113	68	80
2	JANG Mi-Ran	(1)	KOR	1,307	52	111	97
3	CHEN Yanqing	(1)	CHN	1,197	107	48	52
4	CHEN Xiexia	(1)	CHN	914	60	54	56
5	JAROENRATTANATARAKOO	(1)	THA	872	43	88	39
6	PAK Hyon Suk	(1)	PRK	769	43	52	52
7	CAO Lei	(1)	CHN	741	35	36	79
8	ROHDE Julia	(7)	GER	16	1	1	1
9	OZKAN Sibel	(2)	TUR	7	1	0	0
	VUKAS Silvana	(-)	SRB	7	1	0	1
11	KOROBKA Olha	(2)	UKR	5	0	1	0
	USMAN Mariam	(5)	NGR	5	0	1	0

## LIU CHUNHONG — CHN

29.01.1985

Olympic champion

Result in 69kg: 286kg (128+158), world record

Ever since she appeared on stage she has proven time and time again that she is the Queen of Weightlifting, i.e. the Best of All Times in this sport. Her reign has lasted for six years.

Liu was not even seventeen when she started to collect the shiniest medals and world records in 2002, at Havirov, at the Junior World Championships. Her medal collection from 2002 to 2008 includes:

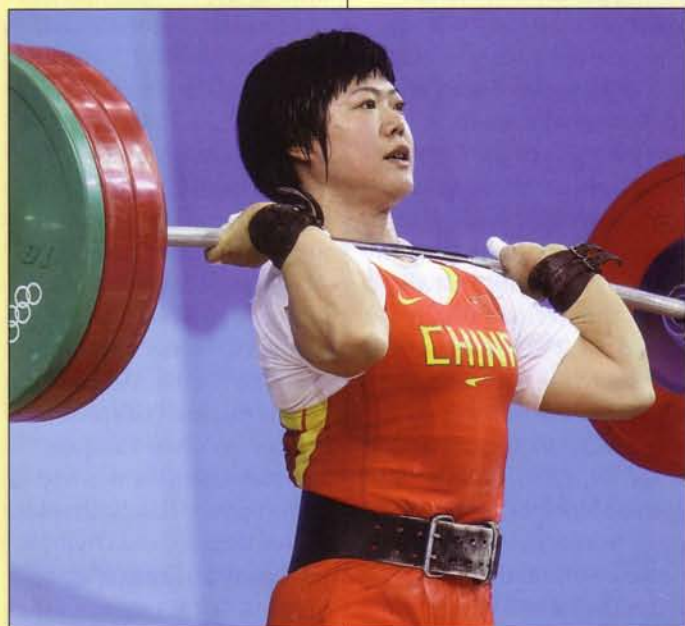
Together with her compatriot Chen Yanqing, she is the first double Olympic champion of women.

When capturing this second Olympic gold medal, Liu pinned five new world records in Beijing. She overtook the runner up with 31 kilos. In total her 286kg new world record is ten kilos better than Slivenko's record set in 2007, and four kilos more than the 75kg Olympic champion Cao Lei's. Liu Chunhong signs all the three valid world records in the 69kg and the clean and jerk world record in the 75kg category.

No doubt she is the Best of



Jang Mi-Ran, KOR



Liu Chunhong, CHN

	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE	IN ALL
Olympic Games	2	0	0	2
Senior W.Ch.	6	5	0	11
Junior W.Ch.	7	2	0	9
University W.C.	3	0	0	3

That is: 25 gold medals, 7 silver medals and no bronzes.

No matter what kind of index we use when establishing a ranking, her name will come up as top ranked. For instance:

Liu Chunhong set up the most senior (28) and most junior (27) world records. She was elected for the most times (3) as Lifter of the Year

the Best – and she was just 24 years old this January.

## JANG MI-RAN — KOR

09.12.1983

Olympic champion

Result in +75kg: 326kg (140+186) world record

At her debut in July 2001 in Thessaloniki, at the Junior World Championships, she was only 18. With a bodyweight of 100.63kg she achieved a 260kg total. Cheryl Haworth and Viktória Varga outclassed her, so she took three bronze medals.

In the last seven years these figures have changed signif-

icantly. At her second Olympics, at the age of 25 years, bringing 116.75kg on the scale, Jang Mi-Ran improved the world record to 326kg. Meanwhile, she traded her junior bronzes for many others, more valuable than those first ones. In Beijing, for instance, she took the Olympic gold medal. Her scorecard includes further one Olympic silver and 6 gold, 3 silver and 1 bronze medals from senior world championships.

The victory in Beijing was not unpredictable. After 2004 Athens she never again settled for less than the gold. Her winning series involved the world championships in 2005, 2006 and 2007. She captured those titles notwithstanding an equally potential counterpart all the way through: Mu Shuangshuang from China. Jang was undisturbed by the appearance of her challenger. In the footsteps of Ding Meiyuan and Tang Gonghong, she too

surpassed the magic 300kg limit in 2004. In Beijing she finished the race with a world record of 326kg. Between her scores in Thessaloniki (2001) and Beijing (2008) the span involves 53.5kg. Another comparison of past and present reveals that while at the 2003 WC Ukrainian Olha Korobka had defeated Jang by 2.5kg, at the Games in Beijing in 2008 Jang outmastered her by 49kg. Jang Mi-Ran is incredibly but deservedly popular in her country, Korea. She boasts her own Fan Club. However, her fame has crossed the borders because at the 2008 Lifter of the Year election she received many votes. That is her fifth nomination. Last time in 2007 she was voted the Best, while in 2006 she had been ranked runner-up. 2008 winner Liu Chunhong got 261 top three nominations and Jang received 260 of the same. Indeed, the difference was a mere hairbreadth's.

Rank	Name	OG	Nat.	Points	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>
1	STEINER Matthias	(1)	GER	896	47	78	44
2	ARAMNAU Andrei	(1)	BLR	879	39	74	59
3	ZHANG Xiangxiang	(1)	CHN	859	41	76	50
4	ILIN Ilya	(1)	KAZ	772	28	72	54
5	LONG Qingquan	(1)	CHN	724	60	8	66
6	LU Yong	(1)	CHN	576	26	34	56
7	LIAO Hui	(1)	CHN	548	8	56	53
8	SA Jae-Hyouk	(1)	KOR	516	8	44	60
9	DABAYA Vencelas	(2)	FRA	79	2	9	5
10	CHIGISHEV Evgeny	(2)	RUS	71	5	0	9
11	RYBAKOU Andrei	(2)	BLR	41	0	5	4
12	GOEGBUER Tom	(13)	BEL	32	4	0	1
13	KOLECKI Szymon	(2)	POL	14	2	0	0
14	SCERBATIHS Viktors	(2)	LAT	10	0	2	0
15	HOANG Anh Tuan	(2)	VIE	5	0	1	0
	DOLEGA Marcin	(4)	POL	5	0	1	0
	HENEQUIN Benjamin	(6)	FRA	5	0	1	0
	SPIESS Jürgen	(9)	GER	5	0	1	0
19	ZHANG Jie	(-)	CHN	4	0	0	1
	VELAGIC Almir	(8)	GER	4	0	0	1

**CHEN YANQING – CHN**

05.04.1979  
Olympic champion  
Result in 58kg: 244kg  
(106+136)

Believe it or not, beside her triumphs in Athens and Beijing, the first ever two-fold Olympic champion of the women recorded only two participations in senior and one each in junior and university world championships. And all those happened back in the last century.

At the age of 18 Chen Yanqing was world champion among the seniors and she turned 29 when obtaining her second Olympic gold. Very unusual for a Chinese! Also very untypical is her path in terms of body-weight categories: at the very young age she used to excel in the 64kg, only to continue winning in a field six kilograms lighter, in the 58kg category. In her six major competitions she collected 12 gold and 2 silver medals.

Chen was no less diligent in breaking world records. 20 senior and 15 junior world records are registered under her name. Her 251kg total

has remained untouched since 2006. She opened in Ramat Gan, at the 1<sup>st</sup> University World Cup in 1998, with six senior and six junior world records. Her latest records – five – highlighted the 2006 Asian Games in Doha. A special feature of this shower of world records in Doha is that she produced it in a



Chen Yanqing, CHN

comeback after a 7-year long break. After the 1999 World Championships in Athens Chen was not selected to any further world championship squad before her nomination to represent China once more at the 2008 Beijing Games. Again, she did not find her match. We are just toying with the thought: what a career she may have possessed had she not been sent after 1999 only to the two Olympic Games?!

Her path is very much parallel with her compatriot's, launched and winning at Beijing: Zhang Xiangxiang.

**STEINER MATTHIAS – GER**

25.08.1982  
Olympic champion  
Result in +105kg: 461kg  
(203+238)

It is just a matter of a minute. A minute of suspense when a single lift will decide everything, but it also takes an athlete, an Athlete wanting to get to the top and doing EVERY-

THING to get to the top. It is just a matter of a minute – but the road leading to that minute is long and windy. With the very last lift of the Beijing Olympic Games Steiner wrote history. He wrote history by jerking 258kg, in a superhuman, unforgettable effort, winning the champion title. At once he made it to the rank of the world's most popular sportsmen and – following his Olympic victory – won many fans to weightlifting all over the world.

He landed in the giants' category as a beginner, while his opponents already boasted remarkably successful careers among the super-heavyweights. Steiner came with 3 junior world championship bronzes, an Olympic seventh place, a personal best of 405kg and a 9<sup>th</sup> position in the world ranking in his bag. Due to a change of citizenship (from Austrian to German) he did not have any scores since Athens, except the Good Luck Beijing Olympic Test Event in



Matthias Steiner, GER

January 2008, which he won. Everything about him changed at lightning's speed. From Austrian he turned German; from a 105kg lifter he became a man weighing 145.93kg; from 405kg he made 461kg; from mediocre positions he catapulted to the Olympic title. And the world elected him to Best Lifter of 2008. In his new home, Germany, he was voted as the Sportsman of the Year 2008, amongst many other famous champions. His battle culminating in Olympic victory is an example for true sportsmanship. His personal story and courage have spread weightlifting's popularity around the world. With Steiner not only a new champion was born but also a new idol.

### ARAMNAU ANDREI – BLR

17.04.1988  
Olympic champion  
Result in 105kg: 436kg  
(200+236) – 3 world records

At the first major international competition in his life, the 2006 Junior World Championships held in China, Aramnau came up to 393kg, taking the runner-up position behind Ilin (401kg) in the 94kg category. Two years later both captured the Olympic title in Beijing. Following this entrée, at the 2007 meeting of the juniors the young athlete from Belarus proved best in his new and current body-weight category, the 105kg. His total grew to 407kg. Three months later he humiliated his elders by winning the senior title in ChiangMai, by the way adding another 13 kilos to his personal best. Aramnau continued speeding on and he was not to be stopped on his road leading

higher and higher. When he arrived at the Games in Beijing he was already counted with as the number one favourite. Alas, he did not disappoint those trusting him. Despite still being a junior, he had no difficulty in humbling again all the competitors of the category, including many a great champion. And the gold medal alone failed to satisfy his appetite. He set a basketful of world records: 3 senior, 5 junior world records and 4 Olympic records. In two years, from 393kg he rose to 436kg. Aramnau is what you would call the "generic" weightlifter, a natural strongman. However, he also has the skill required and, what is most important, the mental stability. Being a young man, he is the man of unlimited possibilities. Who know where his limits are? As of 2009 he will "officially" become a senior. Twice before he has given lessons to his seniors. In a mere two years span, at each of his career's landmarks (Hangzhou, Prague, ChiangMai and Beijing) he could add a significant amount of kilos to his result. His collection includes an Olympic gold medal, two senior world championship titles and a

2<sup>nd</sup> place as well as 3 gold and 3 silver medals among the juniors. With Andrei Aramnau the Republic of Belarus celebrates its first ever Olympic champion. No wonder he received the Year's Sportsman Award in his country and now he boasts the world's second Best Lifter of 2008 title.

### ZHANG XIANGXIANG – CHN

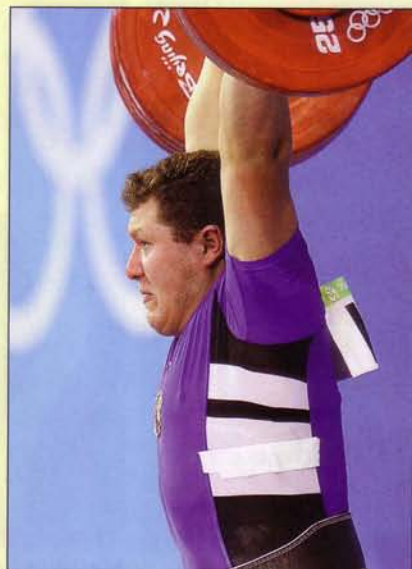
16.07.1983  
Olympic champion  
Result in 62kg: 319kg  
(143+176)

China's tenth Olympic champion. The new pride of his nation has covered an interesting and exciting path in the last eight years. Zhang is the one who entered more Olympic Games than world championships. He has never been selected to the world championship squads. His first international appearance was Sydney, 2000. Aged seventeen, in the 56kg he opened with an Olympic bronze, beaten only by Mutlu and Wu Wenxiong. His next selection came two years later, to the junior world championships, where he swept in all the three gold medals. Then he was forgotten again. China,

facing the dilemma of the plenty, failed to invite Zhang to the national teams for several years to come. During that time nine other lifters were launched in his category at the different challenges. Li Yinglong, Chen Lu, Le Maosheng, Su Feixinang, Shi Zhiyong, Qiu Le, Zhang Ping, Yang Fan kept handing on the baton to each other. Meanwhile, Zhang was confined to smaller competitions, yet his third rank in 2005 and seventh place in 2007 in the world ranking list indicated that he was still around. Then, a short 4 months prior to Beijing he had to face new competition: Zhang Yi corrected the category's 10-year old world record to 326kg. For one reason or another, the Chinese head coaches picked the almost-forgotten Olympic medallist and one time junior world champion when putting together their squad for the Beijing Games. In this overly challenging situation, Zhang Xiangxiang lived up to the expectations. Eight years after his first and last Olympic appearance he took the honours in the 62kg. Can we expect to see him again in 2016?

*Jenő Boskovic*

Andrei Aramnau, BLR



Zhang Xiangxiang, CHN

