

# DAVID WEBSTER, OBE REMEMBERS LOUIS MARTIN, MBE

Early in January of 2015 one of the most charismatic World Weightlifting Champions in history — Britain's Louis "Louie" Martin — passed away, having in his heyday made a tremendous impact in national and international sport. In addition to Louie's matchless lifting, his special brand of sportsmanship made him an icon and valued role model who will never be forgotten by those who knew him well.

Born in Kingston, Jamaica, on 11 November 1936, Louie attracted attention as a youngster, growing up with a small pig as a pet! The most exciting aspect of his life as a young man occurred in 1955, when the Martin family moved to Britain. Many West Indians, in order to live and work in a better economy, immigrated to Britain at that time, and on the Monday after his arrival Louie went to the Labor Exchange in Derby, immediately got a job, and began work two days later.

Before Louie became a weightlifting champion he was a world class bodybuilder. Hailed as "The Ebony Adonis," he competed with distinction in the 1950s when the National Amateur Bodybuilding Association (NABBA) selected him for their major national and international events. What is more, a popular TV program had weekly heats leading up to the final and Louis won this. More important to Louie than the substantial prize,

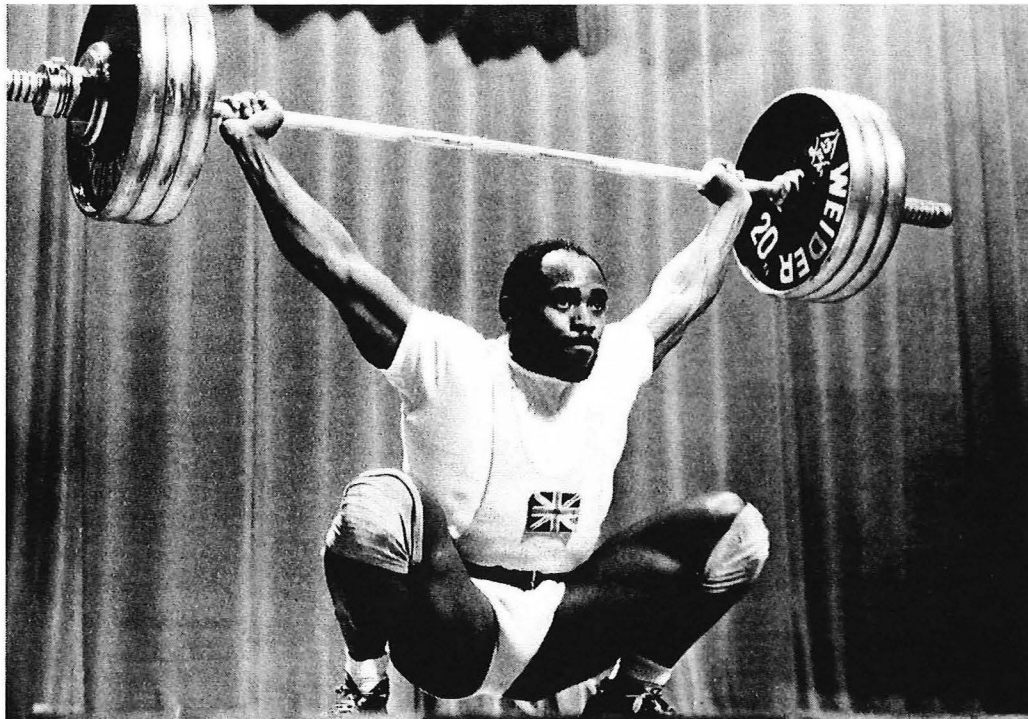
however, was meeting the competition judge, Reg Park — Mr Universe (amateur) 1951 and Mr Universe (professional) 1965 — his favourite bodybuilder; they had never met before that time.

Louie's very first weightlifting competition was at the 1958 Empire and Commonwealth Games, and even though I and my lifting pals realized his vast potential he was very raw and unsure of himself. Without an experienced coach he bombed out on the press and was very dejected. The day after this set-back he was still very ashamed at his results, and decided to go back to bodybuilding. Accordingly, he went straight to the gym in the Commonwealth Games competitors' village and began doing bench presses as a symbol of his return to physique competition.

As it happened, I went to the gym that same day with a few Scottish lifters, and when I found Louie there, benching, I spoke to him and asked how he was. At that point, sounding and looking very despondent, he told me that he didn't think he was well suited for weightlifting. I informed my fellow Scotsmen, and we were all so horrified at the thought of losing Louie that we adopted him on the spot. By the time he paraded with us in the closing ceremony we had persuaded him to try again. The rest is history.



Longtime friends Louis Martin and David Webster are among the most famous and accomplished men in British weightlifting. Martin won four world championships in weightlifting, gold medals in three Commonwealth Games, and medaled in both the 1960 and 1964 Olympics. Webster—who helped design Martin's training programs and worked with him as his platform coach—was a pioneer in the analysis of weightlifting films, wrote the first International Weightlifting Federation-approved book about the history of the sport, and conducted clinics for the IWF in many parts of the world. The two men are shown here in Rome during the 1960 Olympic Games.



Captured by the noted British photographer George Kirkley, Louis Martin demonstrates his flexibility and solid technique in the snatch.

He more than justified our faith in him, and with just one year's training he beat the famous Arkady Vorobyev of the Soviet Union and became a world champion! Absolute shock waves went around the iron game world and Louie rapidly became an international star in the sport of weightlifting. It was not just how much weight he lifted; it was how he lifted it, and it was his personality. Off the platform he was amiable and courteous to all. On the platform he would stalk backwards and forwards behind the bar — glaring at it with nostrils flaring and muttering self-hypnotising phrases before slapping his hands together and raising a cloud of chalk. At that point he would pounce on the bar and whether he was ripping it to arms' length like a feather in a snatch or grinding it out every inch of the way during a heavy press, he had the crowd enthralled and totally involved in every lift.

When Louie began his career as a weightlifter Britain had a very solid coaching scheme but had not had great success internationally. However, with experience and good coaching Louie's technique improved and his improvement had a great impact on how Britain's coaches were regarded internationally. This was apparent as our coaches began to receive invitations from all over the world — thanks in large part to the success of our

Louis, who was always quick to credit those who helped him. The great thing was that we were all singing from the same hymn sheet, as the saying goes.

Bill Miller was Louie's club-coach, and he and Louie's other coaches had all been trained by our National Coach, Al Murray. I mention Bill as he was a local man and did a fine job. When he and I were producing daily, as well as long-term, plans with and for Louie, Bill cooperated one hundred percent in supervising his daily workouts month after month between competi-

tions. At that time I often worked as Louie's warm-up and platform handler in some of the major championships — such as the European Championships in Bulgaria and the World Championships in Iran. He won both. In Iran, he was also awarded a gold medal in 1965 for having set a new world record in the clean and jerk with 190.5 kilos (420 pounds), and after the contest he gave the medal to me. Of all the iron game artifacts in my collection, nothing is more precious to me than Louie's medal. Nor was I the only coach honored by Louie. For example, after one competition I noticed that he was scrutinizing his haul of medals very carefully. When I asked what he was doing he said, "I want to give the best one to Bill Miller but not one of them is big enough or good enough!" Please forgive me for mentioning Bill specifically, and for mentioning myself by name. Names are being kept to a minimum in this remembrance, as it is all intended to be about Louis Martin and about the way he treated the many officials, particularly coaches, who helped him on his way to the top. His matchless career and his open heart enhanced the image of weightlifting and, in so doing, brought glory to Britain.

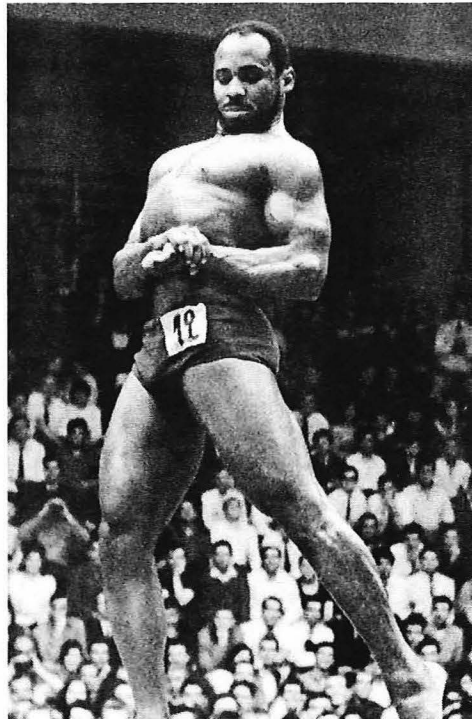
As most readers will know there is a lot more to weightlifting than hoisting big weights. Having the cor-

rect mind-set is essential, and Louie was a great thinker and quite a philosopher. He told me he did not mind training after work four times a week for a year just to have three hours on the championship platform. “But I need to win,” he added. He spoke of laying sleepers [*Ed note: heavy floor joists*] while at work and afterward — even though he was exhausted by the work — still doing his full workout as described in his training plan. On one occasion, when a blizzard had paralyzed the road system, he phoned Tony Ford, his training partner at the time, with the message, “I am at the gym and waiting for you.” Poor, loyal Tony then got out his motor bike and actually fell twice on his way to the gym in what he later described as the most hazardous journey of his life.

Looking back on championship results of fifty years ago, today’s readers can be forgiven for not fully appreciating the magnitude of the records Louie set, but a consideration of the socio-economic conditions for elite athletes at that time will make such an appreciation easier. During the time when he competed, Soviet competitors as well as those from certain other countries had all their competition and training expenses covered. Also, American lifters, for example, were sponsored by the irrepressible Bob Hoffman, but in most other countries outside the Eastern Bloc the majority of weightlifters and officials had to cover all their own expenses in order to take part in the international meets. Britain’s competitors considered themselves lucky when they had travel paid by their association, even though they had to pay for their own meals. In spite of the sometimes exorbitant costs of foreign restaurants, Louie always ate very well in quality as well as quantity. He would joke that when he got home he would just do more “overtime” — extra working hours — to cover such expenses.

Although idolized worldwide, Louie kept his feet firmly on the ground. His family was *very* important to him, of course, as were his friends. One example of his character is that he paid his club fees like everybody else.

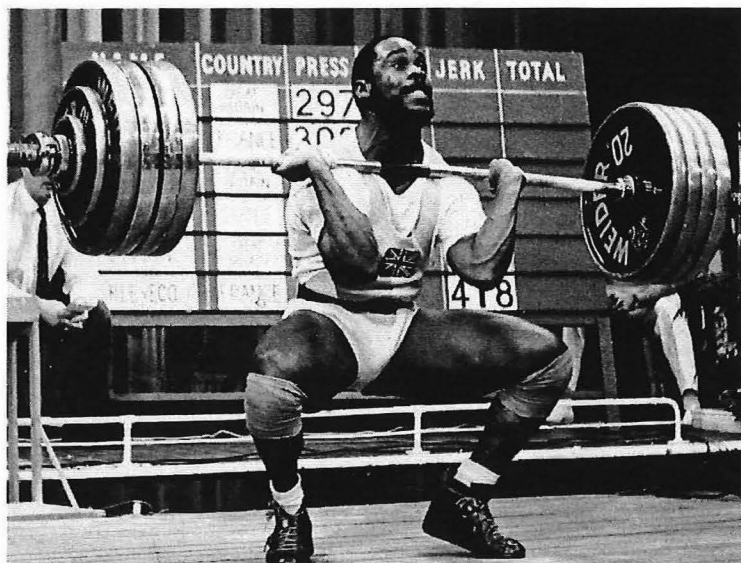
Because of such a down-to-earth attitude people loved him, just as he loved them. On a personal level our weightlifting club members idolized him. Even children, including my own off-spring, thoroughly enjoyed being around him. Although mine were very young when they first met “Mr. Martin,” they still remember him with real affection. This shows the impression he made. Louie enriched the lives of so many of us — young and old, famous and not famous.



Four-time World Weightlifting Champion Louis Martin also tried his hand in bodybuilding, as did such weightlifters as Tommy Kono, Steve Stanko, and Mahmoud Nambjou.

He also positively influenced weightlifting officials in many ways, and here is one example. During a European competition tour in 1969, Austria was the first place we visited. On arrival, keys were given to the lifters, two to a room, as the lifters checked in randomly. Names and rooms were, as always, recorded in case of messages or mail. However, the next day at breakfast we discovered that a few of the lads had changed keys so they could room with their particular mates. Louie suggested that next time we should just put all the keys on the table and let them sort it out themselves and eliminate any possible confusion. Not surprisingly, this plan worked out perfectly and was very popular. As it happened, it turned out that every room had mixed races. We had a South African and several superb West

Indian lifters in those days, but the black/white room sharing had nothing at all to do with races. Two shared because they liked playing cards. Louie shared with Tony Ford — a lifter from the same area — and so it went. It was a sensible and helpful suggestion that was heeded by officials, and as a bonus the result showed how totally integrated British weightlifting had become. (Incidentally, Tony Ford, Louis’s training partner and roommate on that occasion, later became a Commonwealth Games medalist for England.) In daily life Martin expected no special treatment because of his celebrity status. In his interactions with his fellow electricians at work and his training mates at the gym, he never faltered in his steady friendship which made his friends in both worlds appreciate the man as much as they did his feats



Although Martin was having trouble completing this clean, he excelled in all three of the Olympic lifts that were used during his competitive career — the press, snatch, and clean & jerk. In 1965, when he won his fourth and final world championship, he set a world record of 190.5 kilograms (420 pounds) in Tehran, Iran.

with the barbells.

When Louis Martin married a local lass, Ann Robinson, in November 1964, it created a stir in some quarters, which quite surprised Louie, who had not thought much about race before then, as he found himself treated equally at work and in major competitions around the world. Because he was so famous in Great Britain at this time, having won the world championships in 1959, 1962, 1963 and 1965, a prominent Derby newspaper declared that his wedding was breaking new ground. In fact, the *London Times* regarded the wedding as so socially significant that they had Princess Margaret's husband, Lord Snowdon, take photographs of Louis and Ann in their home — photos that were then used to launch the newspaper's new Sunday magazine supplement, which was also the first time the *London Times* included color photographs in its publication.

Our hero left many admirable legacies to national and international sport in general and weightlifting in particular. One contribution is especially important and must be mentioned. Those who are students of the sport know that when Louie was in his heyday a great shadow was cast by the increasingly rapid growth of the use of anabolic steroids and other performance-enhancing drugs by lifters. At one World Championships Dr. John Zeigler was much in evidence. Ziegler, a physician who lived in Olney, Maryland, had occasionally served as the team physician for the U.S. lifters and in the late fifties and early sixties he played the leading role in the intro-

duction of anabolic steroids to Bill March and Tony Garcy of the York Barbell Club, and Lou Riecke of the New Orleans Athletic Club. The drugs then spread from those exceptional lifters into competitive weightlifting and other sports in the Americas as well as in Western Europe. In any case, Louie made his views very clear in Ziegler's presence, stating that anyone who used such substances were cheats and should be banned. Louie added that he would willingly take any doping tests in any place and at any time, and he pointed out that he had shown on the platform that championships could be won without the use of banned substances. Those were much simpler times, of course, but what Louie said was, and remains, a very inspiring message.

Louis Martin's extraordinary and ongoing accomplishments were noted in high places, of course, and in 1965 he was deservedly and publically awarded the MBE [*Editors' Note: "Member of the British Empire" and "Order of the British Empire" are both very high honors not commonly given to athletes and coaches.*] by the Queen for his contributions to British Sport. Not surprisingly, when Louie's lifting days were over he wanted to give something back to his beloved sport and to the country that had treated him with such respect. Therefore, he opened a weightlifting gym in Derby for the benefit of young people who could not afford the higher cost of professional fitness and health clubs. There were no joining or attendance fees. He simply put a tin receptacle near the door and members would put in what they could afford. Sometimes more was taken out than was put in! Even so, Louie carried on — for 34 years. Our hero — the lifter behind the statistics, titles, and honors — was a man of conviction and high principles.

Finally, after devoting his money, time, and energy on coaching ambitious young lifters for a third of a century he closed his gym in 2004 in order to take care of his wife Ann, whose health was fading. She died three years later. Another important part of Louie's story is that he dearly loved and was very proud of his two fine sons — Louis, a police officer and Richard, a medical doctor. They both reciprocated that love, and gave Louie great support and company and cared for him when he needed it most.

In the latter part of his life the British Weightlifting Association elected him as their President, and he was very appreciative of this recognition. He was even

more joyful when he was asked to carry the Olympic Flame for the 2012 Games in London. His love of parades and the celebration of the enthusiastic crowds took us right back to that eventful day at the closing of his first major Commonwealth Games at Cardiff in 1958 when he decided that he would stick with his decision to change from being a bodybuilder and become a weightlifter.

I have done my best in this remembrance to focus on Louie's contributions to and impact on national and international sport, but I also want to remind you of the well-rounded character of this great man. For one thing, he had a fine singing voice that reminded most people who heard him of a famous singer during that time — Nat King Cole. However, Louie didn't like to sing publicly as he was fearful of appearing to show off. Also, although not everyone knew it, he had a love of poetry, and his favourite book was the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, which he knew by heart. He had also memorized many of the famous works written by other eminent poets, and he told me that he might have even tried to become a poet although he believed he would have

felt uncomfortable had he succeeded as he didn't want to be seen — as some sportsmen he knew were perceived to be — as quoting poetry as a gimmick to pretend to be an intellectual.

In Louie's declining years, inhalation of asbestos substances that took place during his long career in construction exacted its toll, and in September 2012 he was diagnosed as having mesothelioma. On Friday, 16 January 2015 I received a telephone call informing me that Louis had died that day quietly at home with his family. The funeral was delayed by a post-mortem (autopsy) after which the Derby and South Derbyshire Court pronounced that his death had resulted from an industrial disease.

At 1:45 pm on Monday, February 2, the Saint Lawrence Church in Heanor, Derbyshire, was packed and overflowing for his funeral, even though extra seating had been provided. The great man's friends and admirers, who travelled from far and wide, heard a moving and splendid oration from his oldest son, Dr. Richard Martin. Both Richard and Louis, Jr. who also spoke, agreed that they had lost not just their father; they had lost their best friend. As Omar Khayyam wrote:

*The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ,  
Moves on: nor all your Piety nor Wit  
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,  
Nor all your Tears wash out a Word of it.*

Louis Martin was much loved by all of us who knew him. Without a shadow of doubt he was the most successful British weightlifter of all time, and I am doubtful that a future British lifter will match or top his remarkable career. Louis Martin's greatness as a weightlifter was exceeded only by his goodness as a man. May he rest in peace.

<b>Louis Martin's International Lifting Highlights</b>		
<u>World Championships and Olympic Games</u>		
1959	Gold	Warsaw, Poland
1960 (Olympics)	Bronze	Rome, Italy
1961	Silver	Vienna, Austria
1962	Gold	Budapest, Hungary
1963	Gold	Stockholm, Sweden
1964 (Olympics)	Silver	Tokyo, Japan
1965	Gold	Tehran, Iran
<u>European Championships</u>		
1959	Gold	Warsaw, Poland
1961	Silver	Vienna, Austria
1962	Gold	Budapest, Hungary
1963	Gold	Stockholm, Sweden
1965	Gold	Sofia, Bulgaria
<u>Commonwealth Games Results</u>		
1962	Gold	Perth, Australia
1966	Gold	Kingstown, Jamaica
1970	Gold	Edinburgh, Scotland

#### **Other Notable Achievements in the Life of Louis Martin**

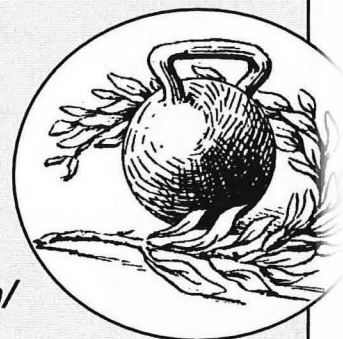
12 Time British Weightlifting Champion  
 1961: First British lifter of any weight to total 1,000 lbs.  
 1962: World Record total of 480 kilos, Budapest, Hungary.  
 (He later made 500 kilos)  
 1965: Named Member of the British Empire by the Queen.  
 1965: World Record Clean and Jerk of 190.5 kilos, Tehran.  
 1969: First British lifter of any weight to total 500 kilos.  
 1966: English Flag Bearer at the Commonwealth Games.  
 2012: London Olympic Games Torch Bearer

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