

What's next? The fourth peak...?!

Halil: King Power's Chosen Child

E x c l u s i v e I n t e r v i e w

Once upon a time... Out of King Power's 135 children, admired far and wide, four were especially close to his heart. No wonder: they stood out even among their proud and

instead of his first home, Albania. The Smallest and Youngest Son, called Halil Mutlu (Mutlu meaning "Happy" in Turkish) did the same as his oldest brother and followed his

Golden Mountain again. However, for just one of them, for Halil, Beijing emerged on the horizon offering yet another chance to capture the Gold of the Dreams for the fourth time. He can be the Chosen One, the first to boast such an unprecedented triumph. Well, all that is no tale at all.

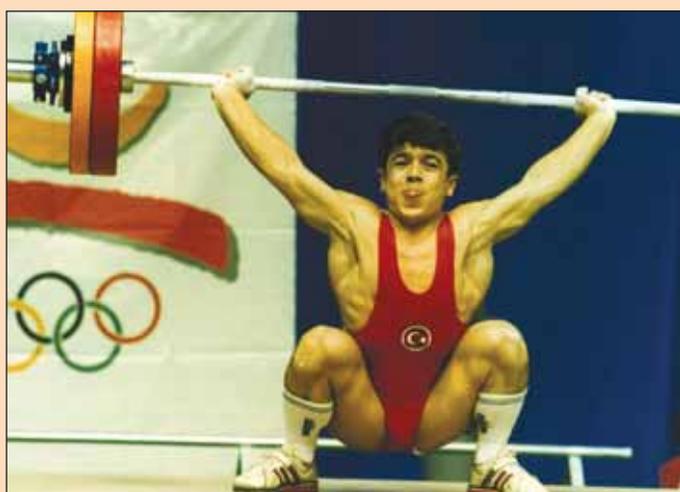
When this opportunity arrives, Halil Mutlu will be beyond his 35th birthday. Then again, his determination, his courage and the intensity of his training defy age. In January 2008, Halil revealed to World Weightlifting that he wanted to attend his fifth Olympic Games. What is more: he won't go to Beijing simply as a tourist...

Should Halil succeed in fulfilling this Ultimate Dream, he will be the first weightlifter in the world to boast four Olympic gold medals.

In a global context of all sports he might rise among the world's greatest. His name may be engraved in gold in the history book of the Games launched in 1896.

Before passing on the word to Mutlu himself, let us be acquainted with the – even so far – unprecedented and fabulous weightlifting career of this potential protagonist of the Beijing 2008 Games.

He called in at the world ranking list already in 1990, at the age of 17. In a competition held in Sakarya, Turkey, he lifted 242.5kg (107.5 and 135)



Mutlu in Barcelona 1992

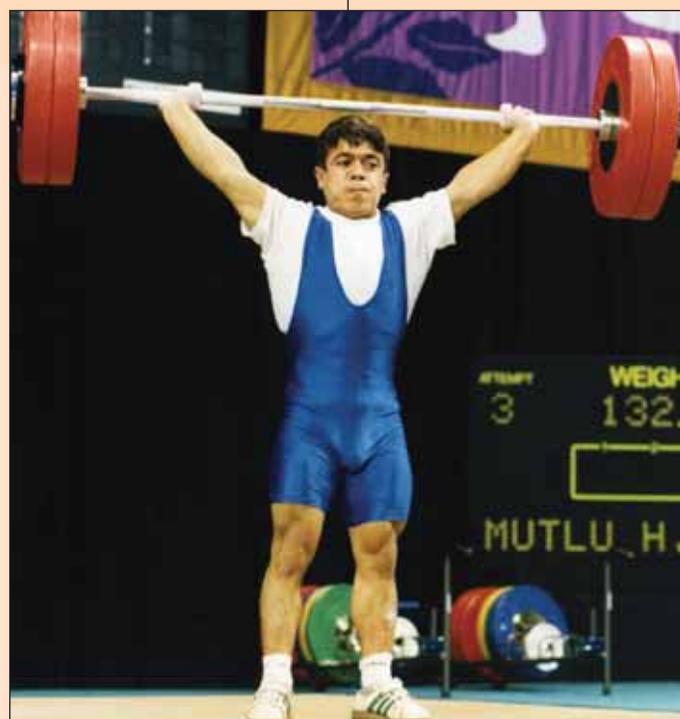
excellent pals. As it was, the King's offspring fought their recurrent tilt every four years amidst the unparalleled attention of the people and peoples of the world. Every time, their Dream of Dreams, their Ultimate Goal was to climb the Golden Mountain. A few ventured out as many as five times.

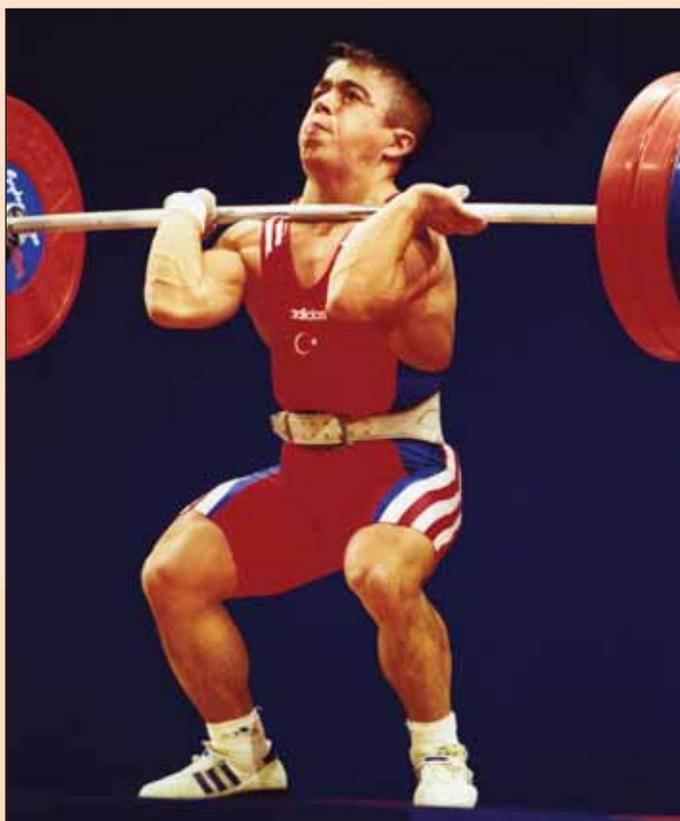
In the middle of their preparation for the Quadrennial Trials, each of the Four Favourite Sons grabbed the ash and took to the road. The Oldest One, Naim, went from Bulgaria to Turkey. The Second Oldest, Kakhi, left Georgia for Greece and their Younger Brother, Pyrros, also chose the Greek land

footsteps on a path leading to Turkey.

Beside these Four another thirteen brave men managed to climb the Golden Mountain's peak twice. However, only these Four could conquer the Golden Mountain as many as three times. They attacked the peaks from different angles. For Naim Seoul was the starting point. Kakhi and Pyrros took off from Barcelona, whereas Halil's first accomplishment was in Atlanta. But the next aim for each of the Four was Sydney, of which three wandered on to Athens. Neither Naim in Sydney, nor Kakhi or Pyrros in Athens were able to climb right up to the peak of the

Mutlu in Atlanta 1996





Mutlu in Sydney 2000

and thus occupied the 9th position in the world. He first made the team for the Junior World Championships in 1991 and took bronze in snatch. This bronze medal deserves special highlighting because that was the first – and at the same time – the last bronze medal in Mutlu’s career. In the next fourteen years, be it Olympic Games or world championships, he got medals only of the shinier kind of metal. Altogether 23 in gold and 6 in silver.

In the season of 1992 he was already the junior world champion and finished in fifth place at the Olympic Games of Barcelona. He waived goodbye to the juniors in 1993 – with three gold medals around his neck. In the same year he captured three silver medals in what was his first world championships among the seniors. Thereafter, however, in each and every world-scale competition he took part (whether Olympic Games

or world championships) the Turkish prodigy seized at least one gold medal. And five times in world championships (1994, 1998, 1999, 2001, 2003) he did not accept less than three gold medals. He was the winner in Atlanta, in Sydney and in Athens – at the Games. Since the last Olympics, however, he has not entered the world championships. Let him explain the reasons later in this article.

Victories alone, however, failed to satisfy Halil’s appetite. He started to mass-produce world records with the first one dating on 18 November 1994. All in all, 9 world records in snatch (from 127.5 to 138.5kg), 6 in clean and jerk (from 158 to 168kg) and 5 in total (282.5 to 305kg) have been registered against his name. His 138.5kg snatch, 168kg jerk and 305kg total are still today unsurpassed world records. Mutlu is the only man in the world in the lightest category who could not only reach the 300kg dream limit but even

exceeded it by 5 kilos. In the category’s all-time ranking Mutlu’s domination is stupefying. Wu Meijin from China came closest to his output, when lifting 292.5kg in 2002. Of the probable entries in Beijing Li Zheng has 287.5kg, Wang Shin-Yuan and Hoang Anh Tuan have 285kg, Eko Irawan has 282kg in their scorecards. Halil will be nearly two times the age of 2007 world ranking leader Irawan.

After a truly condensed description of Halil Mutlu’s career, let us listen to the Hero himself.

Just a note before: let us express our thanks to the Turkish Weightlifting Federation for their help in making this Exclusive Interview. Special gratitude should be accorded for the exclusive photos made for **World Weightlifting**.

Is it sure that you will participate in the Beijing Olympic Games?

Mutlu in Athens 2004



“Of the triple Olympic champions I am the only one who is still in competition. I can have a chance to get a fourth gold medal. If I were to miss this opportunity, it would be a betrayal to the sport of weightlifting.”

You made some successful entries in the 62kg as well. Now, which category will you choose the 56kg or the 62kg?

“The 56kg. I have been living a disciplined life and pursued a strict regime ever since, and I never took a break. I have been working out, so my bodyweight did not get out of control. There is no reason for me to move up to the 62kg.”

What kind of trials are you planning to have before the Olympic Games?

“In April I will participate in the European Championships in Italy.

What happened since Athens?

“As I have said, I did not stop training – despite all the problems I have encountered during this period. I knew that one day I was going to have



Three Olympic gold medals – so far...

a chance to be remembered not because of using doping but because of my successes."

Apart from training, what have you been doing?

"I continued my studies at the Gazi University of Physical Education and the Faculty of Sport Administration. And I was happy to be together with my growing family. I am happily married and my two sons were born after the 2004 Athens Games. Tuna was born on 1 October 2004 and Arda was born on 22 July 2007."

Coming back to the subject of weightlifting: did you ask Naim Suleymanoglu for advice? Did you learn from his example when, returning after a long break following Atlanta, his attempt at capturing the fourth Olympic gold medal in Sydney proved to be unsuccessful?

"Naim has always been my idol but he is also my friend. In all these years we trained together a lot and during that time I listened to his advice and tried to learn his technique. At the

moment, therefore, I no longer need his advice, especially as he is not directly involved in weightlifting."

What is your specific goal for Beijing?

"Of course, not just to be there, in my fifth Games. Without any doubt my aim is to be successful. You can make your own interpretation of this expression."

What result do you think you will be able to achieve?

"Let it be my secret!

What do you know about your potential rivals?

"I have observed the various competitions. I know who lifted how much and when. It is only natural that they too are working hard, as they want to defeat me. That's sport. But I have not been just sitting around, either. We shall meet and let the best win. I don't think that any athlete has a guarantee for winning – including me."

What kept you away from the platform after Athens?

"At the 2005 European Championships I had a positive doping test and

I was suspended for two years. Besides, I had a serious injury that needed time to cure. Nevertheless, I continued training under any condition. In Chiangmai I wanted to lift but I fell ill and I did not want to take risks with a view to Beijing." *What do you expect from the 2008 Games?*

"The same as every athlete or sports fan. I expect it to be a grand fiesta of sport and of course, I have my own personal expectations – see above."

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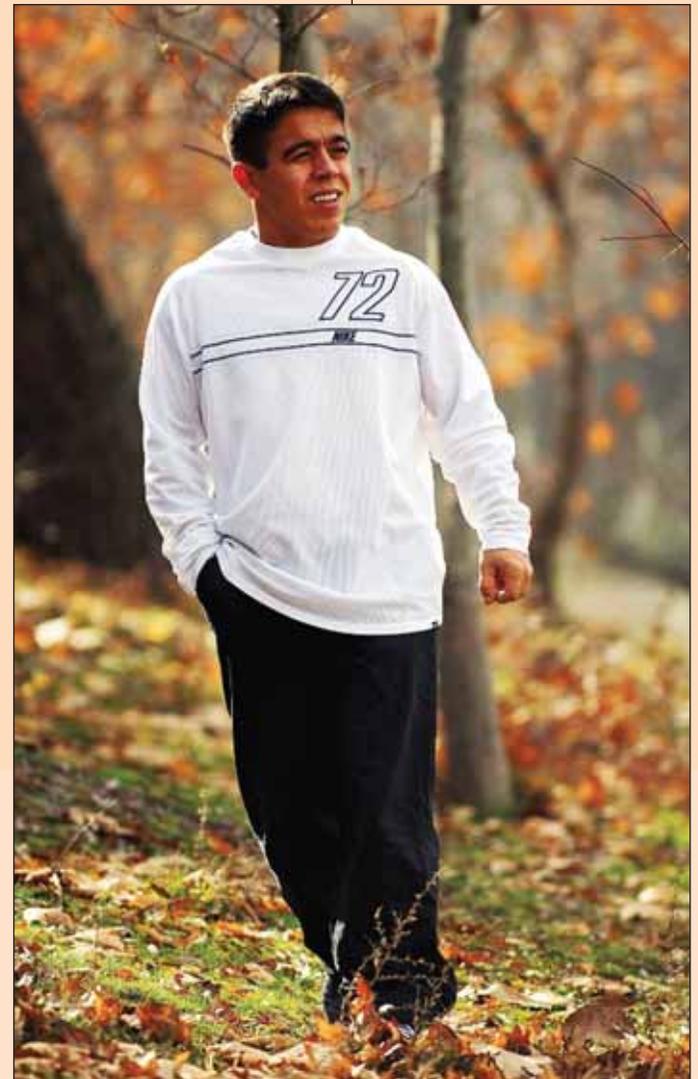
Will it all happen like in tales? Will the Youngest – and Dearest – of the Four Chosen of the 135 wonderful offspring of the King of Power climb to the highest peak of the Golden Mountain for a fourth time?

Many would answer: yes, he will...

Some first-hand information from the Turkish weightlifting camps:

- Naim Suleymanoglu today is chiefly involved in politics. He has not been with the weightlifters for a few months but it would be impossible to stay away for ever.
- The two other Olympic champions of Athens, Nurcan Taylan and Taner Sagir are in training together with Mutlu and the team in the National Training Camps. The women's team will have to perform well at the European Championships to qualify for the Olympic Games. That is very important for Nurcan.

Jenő Boskovics



On the path to Beijing