

Exclusive Interview with
Marcus STEPHEN
of Nauru

**From weightlifter to President
of the Republic**



of the Olympic Movement. Let us quote Paul Coffa's words: "I have known Marcus since he started weightlifting in Melbourne in 1986 and I had the pleasure of coaching him for 16 years until his retirement from competition in 2002. Marcus has always been a humble individual. He was a tremendous competitor and admired and respected by all who know him. **A true champion.** Through the friendly and humble nature of Marcus, Dr. Tamás Aján, President of the IWF took an interest in the small island nation of Nauru. He made all efforts to ensure that Nauru became a member of the IOC in 1994, which finally enabled Marcus Stephen to compete at the Olympic Games for his country."

And this Champion has been elected to President of the Republic of Nauru! Despite having risen to rank and eminence, he has remained the same Marcus Stephen as we used to know him. Even amidst his official schedule involving the UN, other Heads of State and ministers, he took the time and effort to

In the 28 years of publishing **World Weightlifting** we have written and printed 106 issues. In all these years the magazine has featured many an interview, reports and conversations with champions, weightlifting officials, experts, Olympic leaders. This time, when putting together the manuscript of

Marcus lifting in Guangzhou the 1995 World Championships

the 107th edition of **World Weightlifting**, we are a little embarrassed. This is the first time when the President of a Republic is giving us an exclusive interview. Our first dilemma is

how to correctly address him.

Discovered and coached by the positive dynamic of Oceania weightlifting Paul Coffa, Marcus Stephen - or should we henceforth duly address him "His Excellency Marcus Stephen"? - actually put Nauru on the map of weightlifting and finally

answer our questions for **World Weightlifting.** Weightlifting is very proud of you, Your Excellency! Thank you for enriching this sport and we wish you to be as successful for your country as its President as you used to be as a competitor.

What are your reflections on your weightlifter's career? Did you reach your goals or have any of your dreams remained unfulfilled?

"My weightlifting career was fantastic considering where I came from. Nauru is only 10,000 people and during those days any athlete from Nauru would normally come last in regional competitions.

To travel the world, to win competitions and medals in Europe, Commonwealth Games, World Championships, top ten at the Olympics was never ever heard of for a Nauruan."
"Did I ever reach my goals? To be honest, no, I wanted to be world champion in the clean and jerk. But now having time on my side to reminisce, there were great champions in my era. The likes of Suleymanoglu, Chinese lifters, Peshalov, Sabanis and many more who are in the same level. So to go back and think, was it really possible to achieve my dream with such great people and athletes? Maybe no but this did not register when I was competing. We all have two arms and two legs."

What did weightlifting mean in your life? How did this beautiful but difficult sport help you get along in other areas of your life?

"Weightlifting will always be part of my life. No matter what I do, where I go, all the people I meet know about my career in weightlifting. Even Heads of States, Vice Presidents of Countries, Ministers, business people and almost every person in the Pacific region have heard of my name."

"Weightlifting to me is a very tough sport. It is not a sport for the weak hearted. You go through many pain barriers, many mental barriers that sometimes you think is not possible. This is where weightlifting has assisted me through my career. The burden and pressure expected of you by the nation to perform for many years assist me to cope with pressures of work. The only difference is that with work there is more Team consensus and participation on resolutions."

What is your professional qualification?

"I did my High school in Melbourne, Australia at a Catholic Boarding school (St. Bedes College, Mentone). During my weightlifting days, I managed to finish my Associate Diploma in Business majoring in Accounting at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. Since my return to Nauru, I have held many positions from Chairman of the Bank of Nauru, Chairman of the Nauru Fisheries & Marine Resources Authority and held many Ministerial portfolios before becoming President."

We remember that you lifted in the World Championships in Melbourne,

At the 1998 World Championships in Lahti

but in other categories you helped in as a loader. Do you like to give a hand?

"During that Championship my last 2 lifts in the clean & jerk was to break the world record when the new categories were introduced and standard world records were given. After my session, I was loading for the next division. To me then, I did not consider myself any better than my training partners who were the loaders. I enjoyed their friendship and camaraderie and I wanted to be with them and be part of the World Championship even though I was lifting. Part of our training then and even with Nauruan lifters now is to be humble."

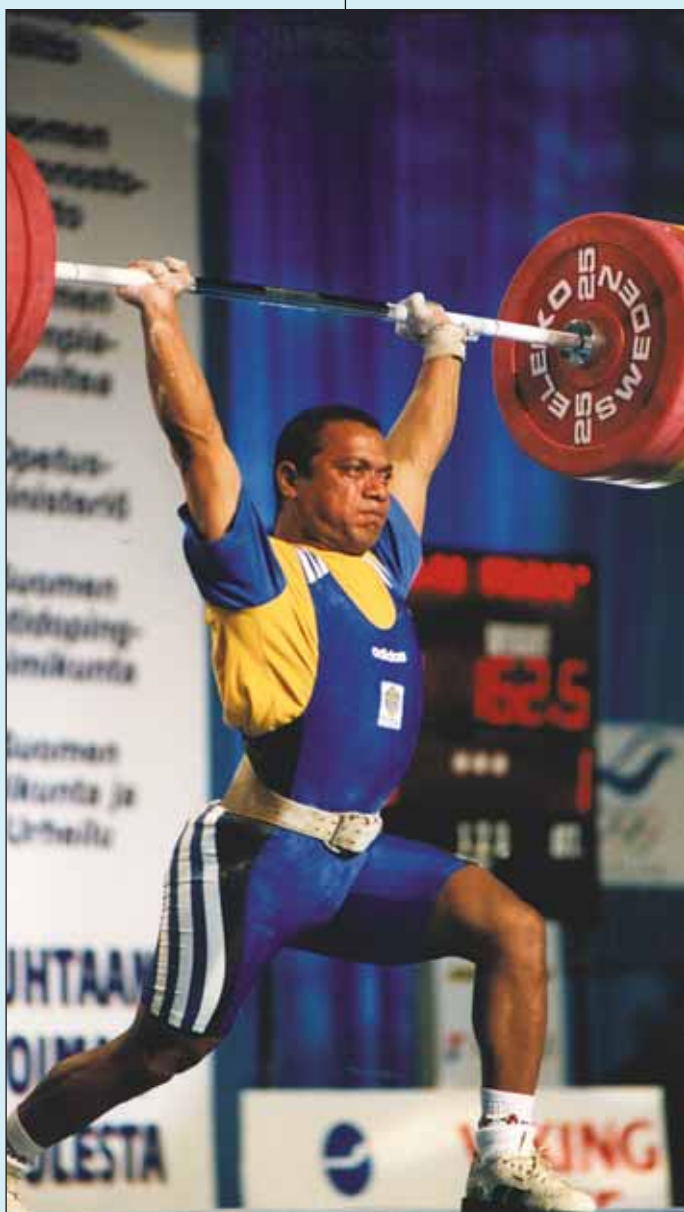
What will be your connection to weightlifting in the future? Since you stopped your active career have you been working out at all? If yes, will you have time to continue some training?

"I am still involved with programmes and assisting with competition in Nauru. My involvement with the Nauru Olympic Committee as Secretary General ensures that weightlifting remains the priority sport because of its success internationally and they deserve every assistance they get."

"In terms of training, no I have not had one training session since 2002."

What is your concept concerning the development of sports in Nauru? Do you have a project?

"Again, my involvement with the Nauru Olympic Committee is to promote and build new infrastructures for all sports. We also realise that being very small in population we have to have a practical approach and realise we cannot be competitive in all sports. We know our limitations and we concentrate on





At the Opening Ceremony of the 2006 Commonwealth Games in Melbourne with his "stepfather" Paul Coffa

a few power sports that suit our natural build. Such sports as weightlifting, judo, taekwondo and boxing are ideal for our natural build."

You participated in three Olympic Games. What are your expectations from the competitions in Beijing 2008? Would you eventually name a few gold-medal favourites?

"I participated in Barcelona in 1992 for Samoa, Atlanta 1996 and Sydney 2000 for Nauru. The Olympic Games is the ultimate of all World Championships. The whole world are your audience and the success at any Olympic Games is non comparable. Even though I never won any medal at Olympic Games level, I have been told by friends who are medallist that it is really special. To me it is priceless." "I expect the Chinese to be very strong in Beijing. I would name the Iranian super heavy weight defending champion as my clear gold medal favourite."

Who do you consider as the greatest weightlifters of the last few decades and of the present? Did you have any role-model weightlifter?

"In my humble opinion, Naim by far is the greatest. He was like the Michael Jordan in basketball. It was a privilege to see him in action. Even when I was competing against him, I really respected and admired him." "I have also had the privilege to meet and train with Nicu Vlad, Blagoi Blagoev, Sevdalin Marinov, Kiril Kunev, Stefan Botev and another of my arch rival in Yurik Sarkisian. They are all champions in their own right and fantastic people. I learned so much. The saying "seeing is believing", in my case it really

taught me about THE training. It opened my eyes and showed me what is required. I had two fantastic arch rivals in Sev and Yurik and I did not shirk my task but competed in a friendly and healthy environment that helped me achieve wonderful results."

Apart from these outstanding weightlifters who were your friends and training partners, who played an important part in your life?

"I think it will be wrong of me not to mention our godfather of weightlifting in Oceania. Paul Coffa is an icon in Oceania and a very well known and respected person in the weightlifting World. Paul has been very instrumental in my career and this is an opportunity for me to say thank you for everything. Even though we are thousands of miles apart, we have managed to stay in touch. Maybe this Beijing Olympic Games we will see the first Pacific lifter to win a medal and you can bet that Paul has that golden touch involved." "One more special thanks to one special person, Dr Tamas Ajan." "And let me take this opportunity and this channel to thank you everyone and to all my friends my very best wishes. Life is too short and you should enjoy and make the

most of it whilst you are young. You can never rewind time so that you can correct your mistakes. Finally, to the aspiring Olympians, good luck in Beijing!"

Marcus Stephen scored his greatest success in 1999, at the World Championships held in Athens. He reached the 300kg limit, winning a silver medal in clean and jerk with 172.5kg, trailing the Chinese world-record holder Le Maosheng. Among those he defeated were Minchev, Peshalov, Sabanis, Oleschouk, Shi Zhiyong, Ikehata, Sarkisian and Hafiz Suleymanoglu. At the Commonwealth Games in Auckland in 1990, he won 1 gold and 2 silver medals. In Victoria in 1994 he won 3 gold medals, and he won another 3 gold medals in Kuala Lumpur in 1998. Then he went on to win 3 silver medals at Manchester in 2002. Besides, he was Oceania Champion 12 times between 1988 and 2000, and collected 12 gold medals at South Pacific Games and Mini Games. In 2005 he became a member of the Weightlifting Hall of Fame.

Jenő Boskovics and Anikó Németh-Móra

The Son of a Small Nation boasts a Great Career

Year	World Event				World Ranking		
1990	---	---	---	---	37 th	60kg	255kg
1991	WC	9 th	60kg	267.5kg	29 th	60kg	267.5kg
1992	OG	9 th	60kg	275kg	26 th	60kg	275kg
1993	WC	8 th	59kg	277.5kg	16 th	59kg	277.5kg
1994	---	---	---	---	26 th	59kg	262.5kg
1995	WC	11 th	59kg	282.5kg	12 th	59kg	282.5kg
1996	OG	---	59kg	---	54 th	64kg	270kg
1997	WC	8 th	64kg	282.5kg	9 th	64kg	295kg
1998	WC	11 th	62kg	287.5kg	13 th	64kg	292.5kg
1999	WC	7 th	62kg	300kg	9 th	62kg	300kg
2000	OG	11 th	62kg	285kg	18 th	62kg	285kg
2001	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
2002	---	---	---	---	32 th	62kg	265kg