

By Sam Roberts

Weightlifter Leonid Zhabotinsky broke 19 world records

Важкоатлет Леонід Жаботинський подолав 19 світових рекордів

В Україні у віці 77 років помер штангіст, олімпійський чемпіон, кумир Арнольда Шварценегера Леонід Жаботинський.

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/sports/weightlifter-leonid-zhabotinsky-broke-19-world-records/article28423978/>



Leonid Zhabotinsky, a record-breaking Ukrainian-born Soviet weightlifter who picked up Olympic gold medals in 1964 and 1968 and was Arnold Schwarzenegger's teenage idol, died Jan. 14 in Zaporozhye, Ukraine. He was 77.

His death was announced by his son Ruslan, who did not specify a cause, according to the International Weightlifting Federation.

Even in the sport of superheavy weightlifting, where superlatives are not taken lightly, Mr. Zhabotinsky's sobriquets – Big Zhabo and the Strongest Man of the World – seemed like understatements.

He was nearly 6 feet, 3 inches tall and weighed as much as 365 pounds. He marched in the opening parade of the 1968 Mexico City Olympics gripping the 40-pound pole bearing the red-and-gold Soviet hammer-and-sickle banner in only one hand, while every other flag-bearer needed two.

"He stole the show," recalled Mr. Schwarzenegger, the weightlifter, bodybuilder, actor and former California governor, who, as a teenager in Austria, kept a photograph of Zhabotinsky taped over his bed. "He was extraordinary, another form of inspiration: If he can make it, I can make it."

Zhabotinsky earned a bronze medal at his first Ukrainian state championship in 1957 and, in 1963, broke his first of 19 world superheavyweight records. In 1974, he set his last, with a snatch of nearly 409 pounds.

In 1964, he faced off against an archrival and Soviet teammate, Yuri Vlasov, who was defending his Olympic title in Tokyo. With one lift remaining in the competition's three events, the press, the snatch and the clean and jerk, Mr. Zhabotinsky rattled Mr. Vlasov by deliberately underperforming, then returned and broke his own clean-and-jerk record to win a gold medal.

He took a second gold medal in 1968 in Mexico City, after another theatrical display.

"He came out for the snatch staring straight ahead," Robert Lipsyte wrote in *The New York Times*, "his golden-tipped curly hair glistening atop the mushy, mobile face that seemed to munch on itself, now sly, now terrified, always about to fall apart like raw marble beneath the chisel of a clumsy sculptor. Up, Up, upupup, he roared as he snatched 170 kilos, an Olympic record.

"He lowered the bar, and waited on the platform for a coach to come out and rub his thighs back to life. Then he limped heavily offstage, to hysterical applause. He lifted only once in the clean and jerk, 207.5 kilos, 10 kilos lower than his jerk record, but enough to give him a total of 572.5 to tie his total record.

"Why, someone asked, hadn't he tried to break his own record instead of just tying it?

"The great face crumbled, reassembled, the shoulders shrugged in twin volcanos.

"'What for?' he asked."

Hailing from a Cossack family, Leonid Ivanovich Zhabotinsky was born in Uspenska, Ukraine, on Jan. 28, 1938. His father, Ivan Philipovich, was an amateur athlete. His parents were not “outstanding in their physiques,” he told the Soviet magazine *Amateur Athlete* in 1967, adding that he bore a greater resemblance to his grandfather.

His family moved to Kharkov, where they endured the Nazi occupation. After the eighth grade, he quit school and got a job in a tractor plant. He took evening courses to finish high school, became a state shot-put champion, and began studying as a teenager under Mikhail Svetlichny, who was both the factory’s resident weightlifting trainer and a poet.

In 1969, Zhabotinsky was sidelined by surgery; after earning a doctorate from the Kharkov Pedagogical Institute, he returned to the sport in 1973. He set his last world record in 1974 at the Moscow Championship of the Soviet Army.

He went on to coach the Soviet Army in weightlifting and left the military in 1991 as a colonel. He later worked for the Moscow Institute of Business and Law.

In addition to his son Ruslan, he leaves his wife, Raisa, and another son, Vilen. Both his sons are weightlifters.