

The Adventure Continues..

It is hard to believe that almost 26 years has passed since my family and I moved to the Pacific Islands. We have spent over a quarter of a century here, but all adventures must come to an end. On June the 12th we will be leaving New Caledonia and the Pacific to return home to Melbourne, Australia.

Who would have thought that a virus—Covid 19—could rapidly change the world and cause a devastating impact to the economy, businesses, sports, and to our very lives. I have no regrets whatsoever spending so much of my life in the Pacific. Weightlifting *is* my life and I am proud of my work and my achievements during my stay, at no cost to anyone individually or Federations. Over these many years, I have made so many close friends and it has been a true privilege coaching the hundreds of lifters who have come through my doors.



1998

Juan Antonio Samaranch, at the time President of the IOC visited the Nauru weightlifting Institute

It was October 1994, after having spent 29 years coaching in Australia, when my young family packed suitcases and left Melbourne for Nauru. I felt that I had done everything possible for Australia at that time and was about to embark on a new challenge: my job was to establish the Nauru Olympic Committee and develop sports. Coincidentally it was 1994 when Marcus Stephen was also going to return home to Nauru from Melbourne after having spent almost 10 years in Melbourne studying and training with me. He had just finished his university Degree in Finance.

With my background in weightlifting, and the physical attributes of the Nauruans, it was like finding a goldmine of potential. By February 1995, in a short four months, with the help of the Nauru Government, I established the Nauru Weightlifting Institute. It was an incredible success, lasting seven years and producing 172 lifters—equating to 1.72% of the population of Nauru. The whirlwind of popularity and success in weightlifting on this tiny nation was inspiring. During this time, we also assisted a number of lifters from different islands of the Pacific. Even Juan Antonio Samaranch was astonished at the

achievements of the Nauruan weightlifters when he visited Nauru in 1998. Our success surpassed the continental level and exploded into the Commonwealth and World platforms. By this time the Nauru Olympic Committee was well established and with the assistance of the Nauru Weightlifting Federation, many events were funded by these two bodies.

By 2002, I moved my family to Fiji with thoughts of retiring. In truth, those plans were put to a halt as within two months, by April, I built a weightlifting centre in Sigatoka. **The centre was opened by the then President of the OWF, Seiuli Paul Wallwork, who quoted in the following OWF Annual Report of 2002:**



2002



2002

“During the opening ceremony of the institute, Seiuli Paul Wallwork spoke passionately about the unity and friendship with the Pacific islands and believed that training within the Oceania Weightlifting Institute would further enhance the atmosphere to train and compete at the highest level via the spirit, which is rich within the Pacific. He also praised Paul Coffa for his vision, his ambition and his passion for the sport that he loves so much. For providing a weightlifting institute for the young people of the Pacific. And in particular for funding the building and equipment from his own personal funds.”

In 2005, Seiuli Paul Wallwork, whilst staying at my house in Sigatoka for a few days, convinced me and my family to move to Samoa where we spent two wonderful years producing great lifters and major international events. The Government provided a magnificent stadium for weightlifting, and I was happy to contribute \$75,000 from my personal funds towards the building for the accommodation of the athletes.



2005

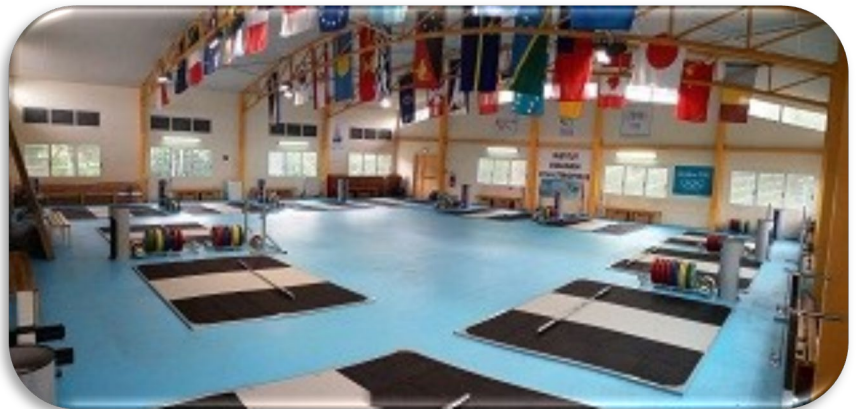
The Samoan Minister for the 2007 Pacific Games The Hon. Faumuina Tiatia Liuga opens the Weightlifting Institute in Samoa



2005

The brilliant weightlifting institute in Apia -Samoa

In March 2008, the Institute program moved to New Caledonia, and with the support of the New Caledonia Government, the CTOS and the City of Mont Dore, they built one of the best weightlifting institutes in the world with accommodation facilities for 24 lifters which included dining room, meeting room, television room plus an office for the Institute and provided also an office for the OWF. This was opened in August 2009.



2009



The cutting of the ribbon at the Oceania Institute in Mont Dore- New Caledonia on August 1st 2009, from left Monsieur Pierre Frogier, Deputy of the Republic of France, Monsieur Phillip Gomez, President of New Caledonia Government, and other VIP's invited guests.

Now, almost 26 years later, and due to the upheaval of the Coronavirus pandemic, the closing of countries borders, the postponement of the Olympic Games to 2021, and with no indication of when borders will open again and with all the Institute scholarship holders having returned to their home countries—the Institute program has ceased. **But of course, this is not the end of the journey.**

The Institute program will be relocated to Australia, working together not only with the Australian Weightlifting Federation but also the Australian Government. The program itself will be relocated to either Melbourne, Canberra or Sydney, once the restrictions of Covid-19 cease.

The Institute program in the Pacific has had so much success. Some of the greatest weightlifters were given their start at the Institute, laying a pathway for thriving sporting careers. All in all the program has produced 265 internationally successful weightlifters from Nauru, Micronesia, Palau, Kiribati, Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, Guam, Cook Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, American Samoa, Samoa, Niue, Fiji, New Caledonia and Wallis & Futuna.

These are some of the achievements coming from these great lifters during these 26 years:

- **314 Pacific Games Gold medals**
- **15 Gold, 14 Silver and 13 Bronze Commonwealth Games Medals**
- **97 Oceania Male Senior champions and 68 Oceania Female Senior champions**
- **1 Gold, 5 Silver and 4 Bronze medals won at World Senior, Junior & Youth Championships**
- **4 World Junior Records established**
- **From the Atlanta Olympic Games in 1996 to the Rio Olympic Games 2016, 45 lifters made the Olympic Games.**
- **So many Institute lifters won Sport Men and Sports Women of the year awards in their respective countries during this period.**
- **And so many Pacific lifters competing at the Pacific Games, Commonwealth Games and Olympic Games carried their national flags at either the Opening Ceremonies or Closing Ceremonies**
- **So many major international events were organised with the assistance of the Institute lifters.**

Out of all the programs I have created in the Pacific, the OTIP program I introduced in 2012 has been incredibly rewarding. Over 43, 500 students have taken part so far in this school program with 120 lifters plus coaches having attended the training camps at the Institute in New Caledonia from 2012 to 2019 fully funded. So many of these young athletes have gone on to become champion weightlifters competing at Commonwealth, World and Olympic Games. Another successful program is the Email International Club Tournament which attracts hundreds and hundreds of lifters every year. And so many other projects initiated from the Institute.

There are so many people I would like to thank, but in truth 26 years' worth of gratitude cannot be shortened into one line. Nevertheless, I would like to extend my appreciation to the countries who not only facilitated weightlifting in the Pacific, but in turn contributed to the success of the Institute by sending their lifters to train there together. Most importantly, I must extend my respect and utmost thanks to the Nauruan Government and the Nauru Olympic Committee (during the years 1994 to 2001) the City of Sigatoka (Fiji) (during 2002 to 2005), the Government of Samoa (during 2005 to 2007), and of course, the CTOS and the City of Mont Dore. In particular, I would like to thank the Government of New Caledonia for the building and accommodation provided for the lifters and the care they extended to my family whilst we stayed in Mont Dore during 2008 to 2020.

A special thanks must go to the Eleiko company for donating the latest equipment to the Institute program.

I have learnt so much of the Pacific culture, Micronesian, Polynesian and Melanesian. The memories and the friendship of the Pacific people will stay with me forever. **The Institute program will not stop. It will still include Pacific lifters, but this time it will be in the Land Down Under.**

Paul Coffa (OWF General Secretary)



OTHER NEWS:

- Kiribati Weightlifting Federation held an Extra General Meeting on May the 2nd and congratulations to Tevii Turiano for being elected President of the Federation. Whilst the new General Secretary is Tenoa Betene. The OWF wishes the President, General Secretary and the new Executive Board a very successful term of office.
- By now everyone in the region are aware that the OWF has organised a League Tournament between the 22 countries of the Pacific. The first round will start on the 17th & 18th July. The teams competing against each other in the first round are: **Kiribati v Pacific 2, New Zealand v Pacific 1, PNG v Fiji, Australia v Nauru, Solomon Islands v Samoa.**
- 24th – 25th July, don't forget to submit your entry on line for the Eleiko International Email tournament for Individual lifters. For all those lifters who have been or are training at home during this Covid 19 pandemic or have returned to their training venues. Twenty Eleiko bars (only) will be given out to the winners of each bodyweight category.
- Weightlifting Fiji held its General Meeting on the 31st May, 2020. Congratulations to Della Shaw-Elder on being elected the new President and to the new General Secretary, Josaia Tuinamata. The OWF wishes the President, General Secretary and the new Executive Board a successful term of office.
- **COMING SOON**The OWF is organizing a one hour coaching session on line to be conducted by Mr. Lyn Jones, from Australia. Lyn is one of the most knowledgeable coaches in the world of weightlifting. He has coached Australia and USA for many years producing a number of great lifters including an Olympic champion. At this stage we are looking to host this seminar in the month of August. Of course this depends on the Coronavirus situation. We will keep you informed.