

IN MEMORIAM

Remembering Ronald John “Ron” Mann

22 SEPTEMBER 1939 – 14 JULY 2026



When we look at the history of Olympic weightlifting in New Zealand, we naturally celebrate the lifters who stood under the bright lights, chalked their hands and broke national records. But behind every official kilogram raised and every historic milestone achieved stood people whose devotion ensured those achievements were accurately recorded and never forgotten.

With the peaceful passing of Ronald John “Ron” Mann, aged 86, Weightlifting New Zealand mourns the loss of its legendary longtime statistician and record keeper. Alongside his devoted wife, Gail Mann, Ron spent a lifetime preserving the history and integrity of the sport he loved.

I did not have the privilege of knowing Ron personally. However, the more I have learned about his work, and the more of his handwritten records I have been fortunate enough to see, the clearer it has become that his contribution to New Zealand weightlifting was immense. Ron did not simply preserve our history after the event. He lived through it, witnessed it and recorded it as it happened.

From Young Lifter to Wellington Stalwart

Ron’s connection with weightlifting began remarkably early. He is understood to have started training at approximately 14 years of age, placing his introduction to the sport around the early 1950s. He therefore came of age within a weightlifting culture still closely connected to the sport’s formative generations.

For those who knew him during his years in the capital, Ron was an influential figure and a foundational presence within Wellington weightlifting. Ron and Gail are remembered as warm, welcoming and ever-present members of the community. Long before Ron was maintaining national records from his home, he was involved at grassroots level, contributing to the life and continuity of the sport in Wellington.

That early involvement continued into competitive weightlifting. Garry remembers competing alongside Ron in the basement of the Wellington YMCA during the early 1960s, together with Bryan Mahoney and

Dick Harris. It provides a vivid glimpse of Ron not only as the statistician and record keeper he later became, but first as a lifter participating in the sport himself.

Ron and the Men of Iron

During weightlifting's earlier decades, the athletes who established and developed the sport were often known as the "Men of Iron". The expression evokes the generations of lifters who built New Zealand weightlifting through the middle decades of the twentieth century, often with limited resources but enormous commitment.

Ron belonged to the era that followed directly in their footsteps. Having begun training as a teenager, he did not discover the story of New Zealand's early lifters retrospectively. He grew up within a sport that was still being shaped by them.

This connection is particularly meaningful when considered alongside the history of Weightlifting New Zealand documented by former president Bruce Savage. That history records the achievements of prominent lifters of the 1960s and 1970s, including Brian Marsden, John Bolton, Brian Duffy and Philip Sue, among others.

For us, these are names from the recorded history of the sport. For Ron, they were his contemporaries.

A First Hand Record of History

Among the surviving evidence of Ron's extraordinary involvement is an official handwritten record book dating from May 1973. Its pages contain detailed manual tabulations from numerous competitions, including Auckland and Wellington championships, Wainuiomata championships and the weightlifting competition at the 1974 Commonwealth Games in Christchurch. The surviving entries appear to extend across the Games sessions, preserving the competition lift by lift and total by total.

Long before electronic scoring systems, spreadsheets and digital databases, results had to be calculated and recorded manually. Every attempt, successful lift and total required care, concentration and accuracy. Ron's handwriting captures that work as it took place.

These books are historically important for a reason that goes beyond the results they contain. They are contemporary working records of the sport in action. Bruce Savage's history allows us to look back and read the stories of the athletes of those decades; Ron's original tabulations sit alongside that history as documents created at the competitions themselves.

There is something powerful about viewing those handwritten pages today. What now appears to us as sporting history was, when Ron put pen to paper, simply the competition unfolding in front of him. The names we now recognise as significant figures in New Zealand weightlifting were the athletes whose performances he was recording, and some of the records we now research were records he may well have witnessed being made.

A Master Investigator of Strength

To call Ron a statistician only begins to describe his contribution. He was a meticulous investigator of weightlifting history. Before modern databases made information easy to search, Ron audited ranking lists, traced historical competition sheets and painstakingly maintained the records of generations of lifters.

His work required far more than entering figures into columns. Names, dates, bodyweight categories, competition results and record progressions had to be checked against original material. Discrepancies had to be investigated, calculations verified and the historical record protected from error. Ron's exceptional eye for detail made him a trusted authority within New Zealand weightlifting.

Preserving the History of the Iron Game

Ron's passion for statistics and history flowed naturally into extensive record books, reports and historical compilations. These were not simply lists of numbers. Together they mapped the statistical life of national and international weightlifting and preserved the names, weights and dates behind the sport's achievements.

Through his work as the OWNZ and WNZ statistician and record keeper, including his contributions to official statistician's reports, Ron helped ensure that the achievements of New Zealand lifters remained visible to the generations who followed. His work gave athletes a permanent place in the story of their sport.

Integrity Beyond the Record Books

Ron's dedication was not confined to papers and archives. His wider service placed him close to the competitions and people whose results he recorded. The same values evident in his statistical work - accuracy, fairness, consistency and respect for the sport - also shaped his contribution to the weightlifting community.

For Ron, a result was never merely a number. Behind every entry was an athlete, a competition and a moment that deserved to be recorded correctly. In protecting the accuracy of the record books, he also protected the integrity of the platform and the achievements of the lifters themselves.

Ron and Gail

Ron and Gail shared a partnership that extended across sport and everyday life. From Wellington to Palmerston North, they were a true team. While Ron devoted countless hours to records, rankings and the history of weightlifting, Gail provided the support that enabled him to give so generously of his time and expertise.

Gail's own sporting involvement was in powerlifting, which Ron also followed closely. They travelled just as much with powerlifting as with weightlifting. In 1980, they attended the World Powerlifting Championships in Texas, where Precious McKenzie was among the competitors. These shared experiences were an important part of their life together.

Their interests also extended beyond the lifting platform. For around eight years, Ron and Gail travelled throughout the North Island taking part in dog agility with two dogs Gail remembers fondly as "two good dogs". It is a warm glimpse of the shared interests and companionship that enriched their lives.

To Gail, the Mann family and those closest to Ron, the Weightlifting New Zealand community owes a profound debt of gratitude. Thank you for sharing Ron with our sport and for supporting the work that has preserved so much of our collective history.

An Enduring Legacy

Because of Ron's dedication, generations of New Zealand athletes have a permanent place in history. Every time an athlete consults a record, studies a ranking list or discovers the achievements of an earlier lifter, they benefit from a path built by Ron's painstaking work.

Ron represents something increasingly rare: a direct human link between the formative generations of New Zealand weightlifting and the sport as it exists today. The era of the "Men of Iron" was not merely a chapter he later studied. It was an era through which he lived, and the decades that followed were recorded and preserved through his hands.

His handwritten books are more than collections of results. They are first-hand records of an era and evidence of Ron's extraordinary continuity within the sport. They remind us that history does not preserve itself. It survives because dedicated people take the time to record it carefully, protect it and pass it on.

He witnessed it. He recorded it. And, through a lifetime of service, he became part of it.

Weightlifting New Zealand extends its deepest and most heartfelt condolences to Gail Mann, the Mann family and all those who knew Ron.

Rest in peace, Ron.