

2003 European Weightlifting Championships
15-20 April
Loutraki, Greece

PRESS RELEASE

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TURKEY COMES TO GREECE WITH ALL ITS TOP STARS

He is short (150 cm.), usually weighs 56 kg, but he works wonders: 30-year-old Halil Mutlu of Turkey, has been entered to take part in the 62 kg. category at the 2003 European Weightlifting Championships. The competition will be held 15-20 April in the spa resort of Loutraki, 80 kilometres west of Athens. If Mutlu does actually compete, he will be staging a comeback following a year's absence due to injury. In his career he can boast of gold medals in the total of all major competitions, including the 1996 and 2000 Olympic Games, the 1994, 1998, 1999 and 2001 World Championships, as well as the 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1999, 2000 and 2001 European Championships. Mutlu holds the 56 kg. world records of 138.5 kg. in the snatch, 168 kg. in the jerk and 305 kg. in the total.

Turkey is coming to Greece with a full team of 8 men and 7 women, including all the country's stars. Some of the best known: Bunyami Sudas (105 kg.) was second in the 2001 World Championships and has also finished three times in third place at European Championships; Sedat Artuc (56 kg.) boasts two silver and one bronze European Championships medals; Ekrem Celil (69 kg.) was the 2001 European champion; Reyhan Arabacioglu (77 kg.) was third in the world in 2001 and in Europe in 2002; and Mehmet Yilmaz (77 kg.) was third in the 2002 European Championships.

Turkey's women's team is also strong, led by the likes of Sule Sahbaz (75 kg.), silver medalist in the 1998 and 2001 World Championships, European champion in 1996, 1997 and 2002 and runner-up in the 1999 European Championships. Other top stars in Turkey's women's team at Loutraki 2003: Derya Acikgoz (+75 kg.) was third in the 1994 World Championships at the age of 17 and has ranked first in 1997 and second in 1996 at the European Championships; Nurcan Taylan (53 kg.) won the silver medal in the World Championships and the bronze in the European Championships in 2003; Emine Bilgin (58 kg.) was the 2001 European champion, but finished in second place last year; Aylin Dasdelen (58 kg.) was the 2002 European champion; and, finally, Aysel Ozgur (75 kg.) won the gold medal in 1997, and the silvers in 1996 and 2002.

A legend of international weightlifting, Nikolay Pechalov (62 kg.), formerly of Bulgaria and now representing Croatia, is the only man to have ever defeated the famed Naim Suleimanoglu in the total, when the latter was at his peak. This was at the 1992 European Championships. Pechalov, now 33 years of age, was the 2000 Olympic champion in Sydney and also holds a silver from 1992 in Barcelona and a bronze from 1996 in Atlanta. He has also won World Championships gold medals in the total in 1990, 1993 and 1994, as well as silvers in 1989 and 1998 and a bronze in 1995. Pechalov climbed to the top of the podium of European Championships in 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1997, 2000 and 2001; he was second in 1989 and 1990 and third in 1999. Croatia takes part in this year's European Championships with a total of three men.

Khafiz Suleymanov (62 kg.) climbed to stardom at the 1989 World Championships in Athens, when he won the gold medal for the Soviet Union, and then promptly proceeded to defect and seek political asylum in the Turkish Embassy. Suleymanov changed his nationality to Turkish and his name to Suleymanoglu. But this year, he returns to Greece as Suleymanov once more--this time representing Azerbaijan. He is now 36 years old and boasts a long list of international successes, such as silver medals in the total of the 1993, 1994 and 1997 World Championships; in European Championships he has finished first in 1991 and 1997, second in 1993 and third in 1995.

Other top Azeris at Loutraki 2003 are Asif Melikov (62 kg.), third in the 1997 World Championships, and Turan Mirzoyev (69 kg.), 3rd in the 2001 European Championships.

Despite not having a tradition of distinction in international weightlifting, Slovakia, nonetheless, comes to Loutraki with a world champion in its ranks. Martin Tesovic (105 kg.) topped the rankings of the total in the 1997 World Championships and has also ranked third in the 1997 and 1999 European Championships. Slovakia has entered three more men (including Rudolf Lukac in the 77 kg. category), as well as Zuzana Kovacova in the women's +75 kg.

The Czech Republic is coming to Greece with its star Petr Sobotka (+105 kg) and two women.

MORE INFORMATION ON THE WEB:

www.weightlifting.gr/loutraki2003/