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## Tiny Turks spar for attention at Olympic Weightlifting

By Gideon Long

SYDNEY, Sept 14 (Reuters) - In a former military warehouse in the suburbs of Sydney, two tiny Turks spar for the attentions of photographers, onlookers and their own Olympic rivals.

On one side of the cavernous hall is Naim Suleymanoglu, three times Olympic weightlifting champion and regarded by many as the greatest exponent of his sport in history.

Pacing a wooden platform on the other side of the Sydney weightlifting training centre is Halil Mutlu, also an Olympic champion and seemingly unbeatable in the 56 kg category.

In turns, these two mighty mites slam ever heavier weights on to their lifting bars and heave them above their heads, one drawing inspiration from the other.

Mutlu snatched 140 kg in training this week and lifted 170 kg in the clean-and-jerk. In competition, both feats would have bettered his own world records.

Every now and then, the two men slip through a side door into an adjacent bus depot for a cigarette. Like most of the Turkish team, they are heavy smokers.

When they return, many of their rivals simply lay down their weights and gather round to watch.

The Japanese sit on the floor and gasp as Mutlu lifts three times his own bodyweight over his head in two smooth movements.

A Taiwanese female lifter stops Suleymanoglu to have her photograph taken alongside him.

"Naim is maybe the more serious of the two," Turkish coach Omer Ozturk said. "Halil is a happy man. He likes to joke."

Suleymanoglu appears the more relaxed, pulling his chair up to the edge of his platform and sitting like a king on his throne, surveying the scene around him.

He wears a T-shirt bearing the logo from the Barcelona Olympics, as if to remind his rivals of his pedigree.

"I will win gold. I love gold," he says before checking his confidence and acknowledging this will be the toughest yet of his four Olympic contests. "Halil will win gold too," team manager Savas Agaoglu adds. "And I think he will break two, maybe three world records."

Suleymanoglu's remarkable tale of defection from Bulgaria and victories at the Olympics in Seoul, Barcelona and Atlanta has been well documented but Mutlu's story is less well known.

He too left his native Bulgaria in 1989, when the communist authorities were suppressing ethnic Turks, banning their language, closing their mosques and forcing them to drop their Islamic names.

He joined Turkey's elite weightlifting team in Ankara and went on to win the world championship four times, the European championship five times and a gold medal at the Atlanta Olympics.

"I'm not thinking about the competition yet. I'm concentrating only on training," Mutlu said. "But when it starts I'll be thinking of gold first and world records only second."

The Turks have their own nicknames. Suleymanoglu is the Pocket Hercules while Mutlu is the little Dynamo.

Suleymanoglu is even smaller now than he was when he won his third gold medal in Atlanta. He has to be - the Olympic weight classes have been changed and he will compete here in the 62 kg category instead of 64.

But compared to his team mate he is tall. Mutlu weighs just 56 kg and stands at 1.50 metres (four feet 11 inches).

This weekend both men will bid for gold but until then they remain the undisputed kings of the Sydney training room.

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