

Greek weightlifting begins anew

A new season is dawning for the Greek weightlifting team, which is set to begin this Friday with the 2008 edition of the Greek Weightlifting championships in Loutraki.

The team will be competing in the shadows of what many are calling the greatest sports scandal to hit Greece. Earlier this year, eleven lifters tested positive for the banned drug Methyltrienolone, bringing disrepute for the sport in a country that treats its champion lifters like gods. Long-time coach Christos Iakovou resigned, and senior federation members also departed the scene.



In search of a new start, Pyrros Dimas, the face of weightlifting in Greece and a worldwide icon of the sport, was named the Greek Weightlifting Federation's new president this past October.

Dimas has a difficult job ahead of him. For starters, he not only has to rebuild the sports' image in Greece following the M3 scandal, but also work at the regional level throughout the country to ensure enough young people are taking up the sport, a task made all the more difficult as a result of the scandal. The federation also faces serious financial hardships, made all the more pressing by the large fine imposed by the international federa-

tion following the positive drug cases.

Despite the uphill battle, Dimas remains optimistic. He recently wrote in his regular column for the Greek daily "GoalNews" that he would not have accepted the challenge if he didn't feel Greece could once again show strong results in the sport.

Head coach Valerios Leonidis shares in the optimism.

"It is the first Greek championship with Pyrros at the helm. I hope to see certain things that will be positive for the future. I am by nature optimistic, and I believe that we can achieve. I also know that Pyrros is a fighter, and that he will set his sights high," said Leonidis at a recent press conference promoting the upcoming championships.

Bill against prison overcrowding child sex abuse passed

A justice ministry bill for relieving overcrowding in prisons and the protection of children from sexual abuse, also including an amendment setting the maximum allowable quantities for the more common illegal drugs that could be considered to be for personal use, was passed by Parliament on Wednesday.

The justice ministry also accepted three amendments to articles proposed by main opposition PASOK and the Coalition of the Radical Left.

Under the bill passed into law on Wednesday, maximum quantities that are considered to be for the holder's personal use, even if the person is a known addict, are 1.5 grams of heroin and cocaine, 20 grams unprocessed cannabis, and 2.5 grams processed cannabis, including the packaging.

Other changes were to the terms for the conditional release of inmates suffering from serious illness, with the measure now applying to those suffering from AIDS, chronic kidney failure requiring regular dialysis treatment, quadriplegics, those with drug-resistant tuberculosis, those with advanced liver cirrhosis and 67 percent disability, people over 80 suffering from senile dementia and those suffering from final-stage malignant tumors.

Among the proposed amendments accepted was one that recognized the successful completion of a state-approved drug rehabilitation program as a mitigating circumstance in the sentencing of drug users.

Escapee from Greek prison plans to surrender, father says

WINNIPEG - The father of an international fugitive who fled from a Greek prison says his son plans to turn himself in to authorities.

Kevin Hiebert, 35, who was serving a life sentence for drug-smuggling, recently vanished after spending nine years in custody.

Kevin Hiebert received a life sentence for smuggling 2 kg of cocaine into Greece.

He called his father, Dick Hiebert, on Monday about plans to turn himself in to a Canadian embassy. He wouldn't tell his father where he was hiding. "It would definitely be a relief once he turns himself in," Hiebert said. "It's going to be a nightmare for us if he lives underground. If there is a price on his head, that makes it difficult for him to move around."

Hiebert wishes his son could surrender to officials in Winnipeg, but doesn't

think it's possible.

"I don't think he has the resources to get to Canada," he said. "Being a celebrity fugitive, the price tag for underground transportation has gone way up."

Kevin told his father he wants the Canadian government to ensure he can finish his sentence on home soil when he turns himself in.

Officials with the Department of Foreign Affairs did not respond to repeated requests for information over the last week.

Last week, Dick Hiebert said an official with Foreign Affairs called his former wife in Winnipeg to warn them the department believes an arrest warrant has been issued by foreign authorities. Canadian officials reassured Hiebert they will protect his son while in the country.

Hiebert spent a week with his son in Athens on an authorized vacation away from the prison. He was worried Greek officials were also looking for



him because he spent time with his son so close to Kevin's disappearance.

Dick Hiebert, who lives in Texas, came to Winnipeg Nov. 18 to try to sort things out.

"I've gone through the RCMP and there is nothing there. I tried to call the embassy in Athens and I just get an answering machine," Hiebert said about inquiring into the possible warrant out for his arrest. "I don't think there is a threat there."

City Hall opens stores for the poor

A DUAL INITIATIVE BY MUNICIPAL AUTHORITIES IN ATHENS AIMS TO PROVIDE THE CAPITAL'S POOR WITH FREE MEDICINE AND CLOTHES.

The Welfare Pharmacy and the Athenian Market are scheduled to be up and running in the same building in the capital's central Varvakeios meat market within the next few weeks. The concept behind the initiative is the same as that which led to the creation of the Welfare Grocery, which offers low-income citizens food and household goods from its base on central Sophocleous Street. The new initiative aims to offer even more support to the same social group.

The pharmacy, in its first phase of operation, will select 200 low-income citizens with health problems and offer them free medicines. Its long-term aim, apart from expanding its service to other beneficiaries, is to provide low-income citizens with social security coverage. "We aim to target citizens who are entitled to a social security booklet but do not know it - our experience shows that there

are hundreds of individuals like this in Athens," said Eleftherios Skiadas, Athens's deputy mayor responsible for social welfare. "We also aim to serve foreign citizens, even illegal immigrants, if their cases are approved by municipal social services staff," Skiadas added.

The Athenian Market will also serve low-income citizens, providing them free clothes. Again the first phase of beneficiaries will be chosen by social services staff and issued coupons that they can use as cash in the store. Already 750 potential beneficiaries have come forward and several businesses have expressed an interest in contributing goods, according to sources at City Hall. Municipal authorities also welcome donations from individuals. All clothes deemed adequate for secondhand use will be laundered and put on the shelves of the Athenian Market, municipal officials said.