

Willpower of champions

Massaro, Perrotta bring home world weightlifting titles

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The Journal News

Jim Massaro once again earned the right to call himself the best in the world. For John Perrotta, it was the first time. For both, it was special.

Massaro of Nyack and Perrotta of Valley Cottage placed first in their divisions at the World Natural Powerlifting Federation championships in Lancaster, Pa. Eleven nations were represented in the competition.

The 47-year-old Massaro, competing against five others in the masters (age 40-49) 242-pound raw division, won with a bench press of 370 pounds, setting a WNPFF world record for the division. (Natural powerlifting is drug-free. Raw means lifters compete without a special assisted shirt that helps them raise even more weight.)

Massaro has been competing for about 15 years, winning five national titles. He also won a world championship in 1992. Massaro is the strength coach at Nyack High School, and in recent years the world championships have conflicted with the high school football season, preventing him from going.

He'd also been bothered by injuries since then. He still had shoulder and elbow problems through March, when he won at nationals to qualify for the event in Lancaster.

"I started going real easy, icing up a lot and being careful," he said. "I actually learned to train a little smarter. If something hurts, back down from it. I don't push myself anymore."

Massaro, who owns Advanced

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Powerlifter Jim Massaro

Body fitness center in Nyack and works as a personal trainer there, wants to keep lifting indefinitely. His personal-best bench press is 480 pounds, with an assisted shirt.

"I'm just planning on continuing as long as I'm healthy," Massaro said. "My goal is on my 50th birthday, I want to bench 500. I'll probably have to put a shirt on for that."

His protege, Perrotta, has plans of his own. The two train together four or five days a week. Perrotta, 26, beat five other lifters in the 242-pound ironman division, for the best combined bench press and dead lift. Perrotta benched 415 pounds and dead-lifted 550 pounds.

"I just wanted to go in for the whole experience," said Perrotta, who was competing at his first worlds. "I guess all the training really paid off for it."

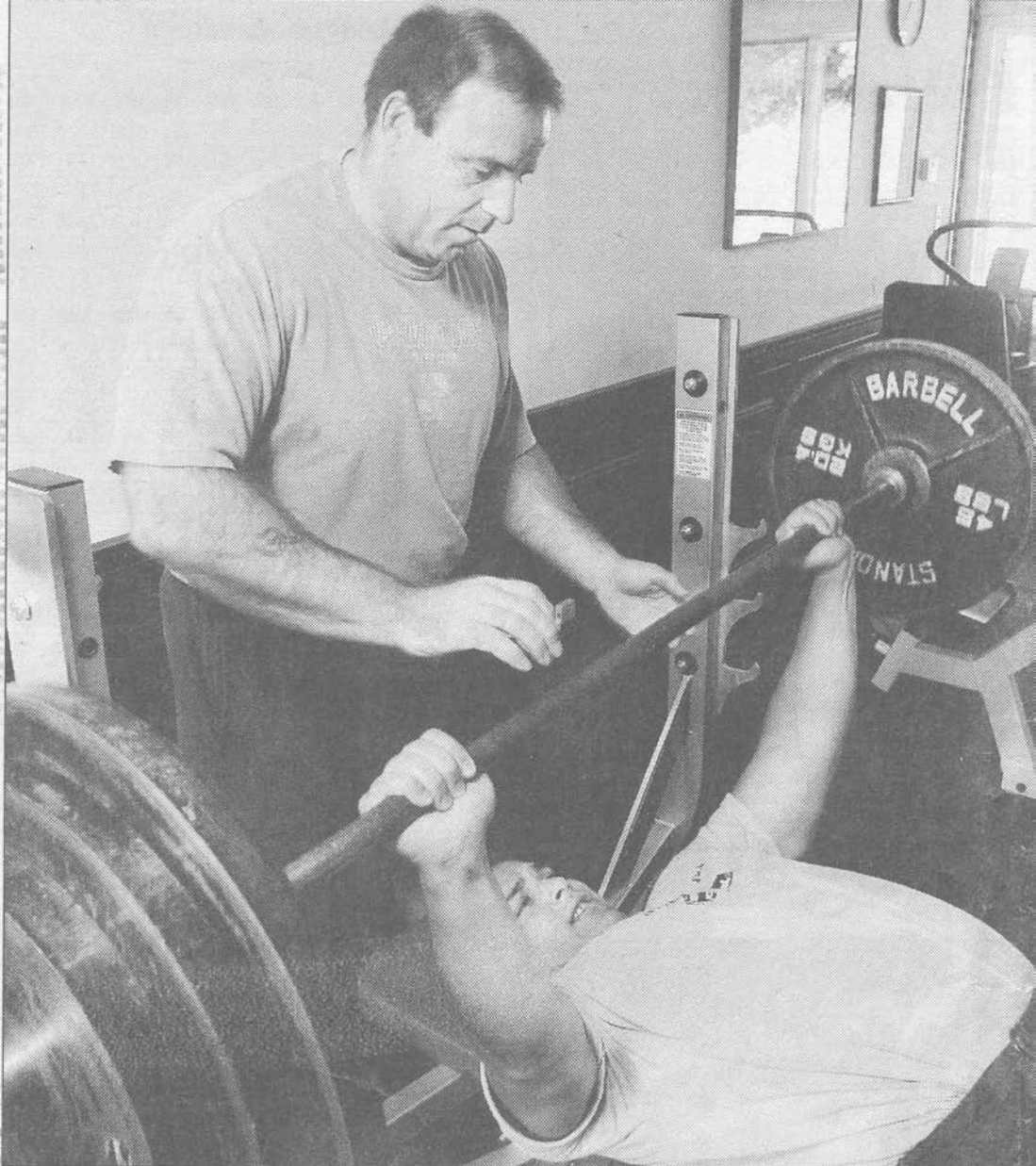
Perrotta has been lifting since he was 18, but he took about 2½ years off from competition during college. When he first started working with Massaro as a teenager, he weighed about 140 pounds and could bench that same amount for just one repetition.

Now Perrotta — who works as a trainer at Advanced Body and wants to have his own gym someday — weighs about 225, and the amount of weight he can lift continues to rise.

"Training with him has just opened up so many new avenues,"

Perrotta said. "My bench went from what it was then to what it is now. It just seems to go up every couple of months, with no plateaus."

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Joe Larese/The Journal News

Jim Massaro spots John Perrotta at Advanced Body fitness center in Nyack. The men won first place in their weight and age classes at the World Natural Powerlifting Championships.