

SCHWARZENEGGER, LALANNE, ATLAS...HOW ABOUT **MACK MIYA?**

By Jeff Russo

owner/president, The Edge Fitness Business Consulting

If you're a Canadian fitness club owner, manager or employee, chances are you know something about American fitness icons Charles Atlas, Jack LaLanne and Arnold Schwarzenegger. Canadian fitness icon, club owner, strongman, boxer, equipment designer and builder, and personal trainer to the stars, Mack Miya, may not ring a bell.

Until a few months ago, the 83-year-old Miya was the longest running fitness club operator in North America. Mack's Gym opened in the late 40s at Queen and Lansdowne in Toronto.

Mack was born and raised in British Columbia and spent six months in an internment camp during the Second World War. Mack has always been outspoken about how the government stole his par-

ents' land—they were Japanese immigrants—because their English was poor and they couldn't stand up for themselves. Mack took out some of his frustrations in the camp by competing in boxing exhibition matches with other Japanese Canadians. Eventually, he began boxing as a 128-pound featherweight. He won numerous titles and attributed his knockout power to the strength he developed by helping his fa-



ther chop trees in B.C.

Mack continued to develop his strength and power by designing and developing his own training equipment, including his renowned arm-wrestling machine. He always had a welding shop at the back of his gym and was probably one of the first people to ever develop and sell commercial equipment. In fact, Mack used his popularity, strength and sales skills to sell fitness equipment at Simpson's department store where he performed feats of strength for customers.

At 5 feet 6 inches, Mack worked out five hours a day, seven days a week to develop his super human power. He set many world lifting records and was able to bench press over 500 pounds and perform a single arm overhead press with 300 pounds, both amazing feats in a pre-steroid/supplementation era.

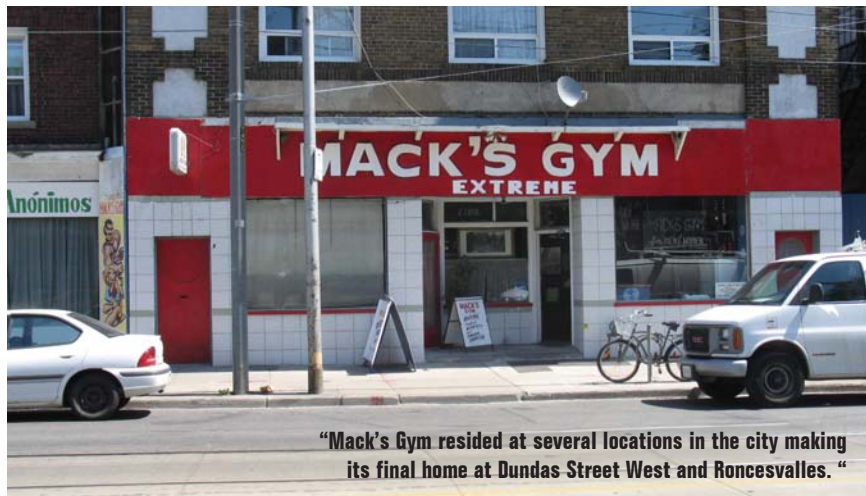
Mack's name frequently appeared on the marquee at Toronto's El Mocambo with the likes of the Rolling Stones where he would perform his strongman act. Mack often jokes that Jagger was paid thousands of dollars but that he only received \$50, even though he was a bigger draw at the time. Mack performed his demonstrations at the Canadian National Exhibition and for years easily won any arm wrestling tour-



Mack Miya



"Mack continued to develop his strength and power by designing and developing his own training equipment..."



"Mack's Gym resided at several locations in the city making its final home at Dundas Street West and Roncesvalles."

bers told me how much Mack cared about them, how dedicated he was to helping them get results and how he had helped turn their lives around.

When he finally decided to retire at the age of 83, he was still selling memberships, managing his gym and working out every day. In an age of cardio theatres, luxurious change rooms, multiple lines strength equipment and posh nightclub-like atmospheres, I'm going to miss Mack's hardcore heaven.

Mack, thanks for fighting the good

fight, keeping the faith and finishing the race while remaining true to your roots in times of constant change. Whether we want to admit it or not, our industry owes you a lot.

The longest standing club owner in North America, equipment designer and developer, world champion power lifter and arm wrestler, boxer and celebrity trainer, storyteller, entertainer and amazingly fit at 83. Who's my hero? Sorry Arnold, Jack and Charles. Mack has my vote! FBC

name he entered. Mack's Gym was filled with trophies in the front lobby from strength and arm wrestling competitions that he had won all over the world. Mack always had a boxing/wrestling ring in his club, and he personally trained many celebrity boxing and wrestling stars including Ric Flair and Yukon Eric.

Mack's Gym resided at several locations in the city making its final home at Dundas Street West and Roncesvalles. The famous banner, made from red painted wood, is one of the first established fitness logos. It represented hard core, serious training for people who wanted to build their bodies and improve their health and longevity. By the way, Mack never apologized for the words "bodybuilding" and "gym." In fact, when he arrived in Toronto in the 40s the term Health Emporium was being used instead of gym. He also claims to be the person who invented the term "bench press." Prior to that time, the anatomically incorrect term "pull press" was used.

Over the years, I spent many nights bringing friends, club owners and anyone who wanted to hear a great story to Mack's Gym. Mack was always there and was always gracious and willing to sit and chat after his royal club tour. Many of his mem-

fitness **DEPOT** *Enhancing the*
COMMERCIAL *Fitness Experience*

Our Focus:
Data
Cardio
Strength
Stretching
Entertainment

PRECOR USA
CARDIO THEATER
Nautilus

Visit our new website at
fitnessdepotcommercial.com
1-888-245-7871 • 416-243-0725