History of the USA Masters Weightlifting Program

The Masters program was founded by William (Bill) Clark in 1975. Bill started weightlifting in 1959 when his boxing team was looking for an off-season sport. There was not a state meet at the time, so he held the very first one in Columbia in 1959. The idea of a Masters program came to the table in 1973 at the AAU convention, and was approved by a laugh with the mention of old people wanting to lift and compete. In 1974, only four lifters entered the National Masters Meet – Jim Witt, Jack Lano, Wilbur Miller, and Bill Clark. The Meet was cancelled that year. In 1975, the meet was held in Columbia with 15 entries. Age groups were divided by 5 years starting at the age of 40. Bill Clark was our first Masters Chairman and his Vice Chair was Walter Imahara.

Initially, Masters included men only. In 1976, Bill violated the IWF rules which limited lifting to males only, and worded a sanction which made a combined Power/Olympic lifting competition into an all-female meet. It broke the gender barrier and women’s weightlifting was off and running.

The World Masters program was also started about the same time. The World Masters was held every year. The decision of where the competition would take place was decided at their congress, which is the annual meeting at the World Championships. All Masters Chairmen were allowed a vote (one vote for each country). All elections for officers took place there as well. Women were eventually allowed to compete separately and another age bracket was added (35-39). Walter Imahara was voted in as the new Masters Chair after Bill Clark stepped down. Walter was also the IWF Masters Chairman for 20 years. In 1996, Howard Cohen was voted Masters Chair and serves in that position today.