

## Antonio Palazzo Named USATF-New England Athlete of the Month for August



*Photo: Antonio Palazzo*

BOSTON – **Antonio Palazzo**, age 83, who lives in Providence, RI, and competes for the Twilight Throwers, has been named USA Track & Field – New England’s Athlete of the Month for August 2011. At the 2011 USA Masters Throws Championships held at Connecticut College in New London, CT on August 13-14, Antonio won the gold medal in the M80 Ultra Weight Pentathlon.

The ultra event consists of five increasingly heavier weight throws. For Antonio’s age division, the weights were 12, 25, 35, 45, and 55 pounds. Palazzo placed first in every category and scored 2593 points in winning the pentathlon.

Antonio grew up during the Great Depression. He had to quit school to work and help support

his family, and thus never had a chance to participate in high school sports. Joining the U.S. Marine Corps in 1945, Palazzo was stationed in northern China just as the war in the Pacific was ending. He rejoined the Marines again during the Korean War. During this second stint of service, he spent time playing football and played against Harry Agganis, the legendary “Golden Greek,” who starred in football and baseball at Boston University and went on to play for the Boston Red Sox, before dying suddenly at age 28 of a pulmonary embolism. Antonio remembers that tackling Agganis took all his strength.

Antonio played semi-professional football in the Providence area when he returned from the Marines, but over the years, physical labor served as his strength and conditioning program. A non-drinker and non-smoker, Antonio dug cellars and worked on construction, where he wielded a 16 lb. sledgehammer. Just three years ago, as he was turning 80, his nephew **Robert Palazzo**, who competes up to the national level in masters throwing, urged his uncle to try masters competition. Antonio was pleasantly surprised after some practice tosses with a throwing weight. He jokes that using two hands for a hammer throw was not so challenging, because he was used to swinging a sledgehammer of the same weight with one hand. Soon, he was winning gold medals at the Rhode Island Senior Games and other meets.

Competing in a national championship event seemed a natural progression, but on top of knee and rotator cuff injuries, Antonio suffered a heart attack in mid-July – an attack serious enough to require placement of a stent. Nonetheless, Antonio insisted on throwing in the New England Championships held at Mount Pleasant High School in Providence and then at the national championships at New London.

As a first-time USA Track & Field national champion at age 83, Antonio Palazzo represents a model of strength and fitness that is somewhat of a throwback. Today’s athletes train with weights and have access to a wealth of information about conditioning. Antonio Palazzo hearkens back to a day when this was not the case.