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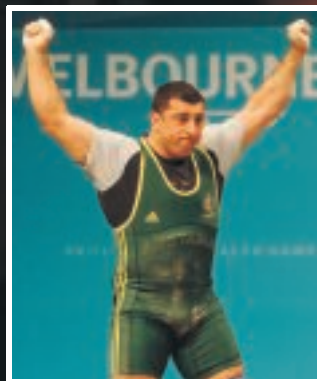
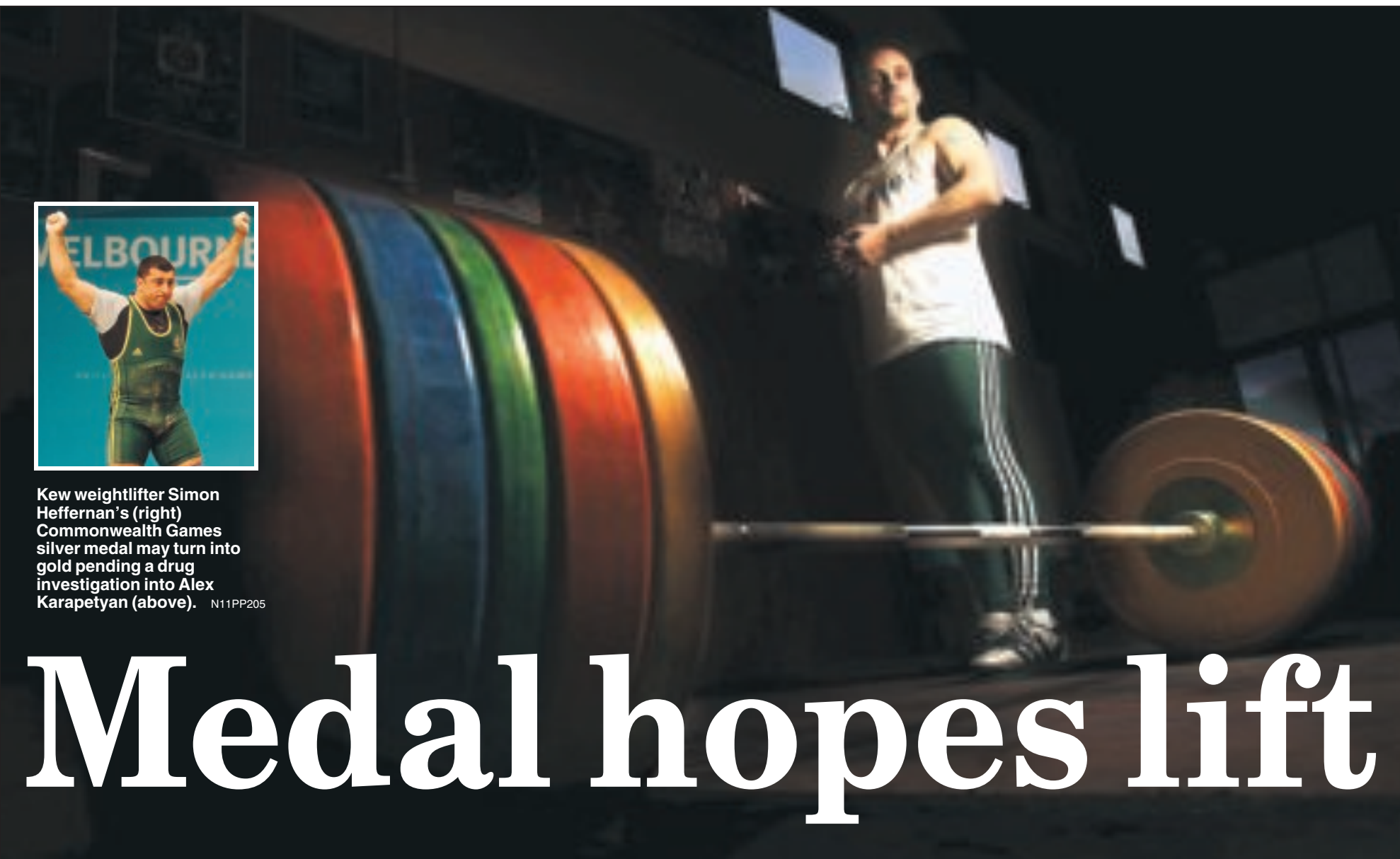
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Kew weightlifter Simon Heffernan's (right) Commonwealth Games silver medal may turn into gold pending a drug investigation into Alex Karapetyan (above). N11PP205

Medal hopes lift

NOEL TOWELL

A DOPING scandal engulfing the Australian weightlifting scene could give Kew competitor Simon Heffernan a prized Commonwealth Games gold medal.

The man who beat Heffernan in the 94kg class at last year's Melbourne games, Alex Karapetyan, is one of five figures at the centre of drug allegations that could lead to him being stripped of his title.

The former Armenian lifter is accused, along with another athlete, of using the banned stimulant benzylpiperazine (BZP), after samples taken in the US in 2005 were recently re-tested as part of a year-long investigation.

If found guilty, Australian team member Karapetyan could face a life ban and be stripped of his medal, giving gold to Heffernan.

The Kew silver medallist said the scenario was "pretty surreal".

Heffernan told the *Progress Leader* that a lengthy process would be followed before an athlete would be stripped of a medal.

But the lifter said he was prepared to be patient.

"I want it all done properly, but I want an end to it, I want my gold medal if that's what I'm entitled to," Heffernan said.

"Even if I get it, I'll still feel a sense of loss because they can't give me that moment back.

"But if I was the best and the cleanest there, then I want my medal."

The Australian Weightlifting Federation, which is based in Hawthorn, said it could not comment on the matter.

In a written statement, the federation said "any person who is notified of an anti-doping rule violation is entitled to a fair hearing.

"The Australian Weightlifting

Federation cannot comment on any matter relating to anti-doping rule violations before they are duly determined."

After missing Commonwealth Games gold, Heffernan broke his leg while teaching at Forest Hill's Emmaus College, destroying his tilt at this year's World Championship.

He hopes to be fit for the selection trials for the 2008 Beijing Olympics.



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