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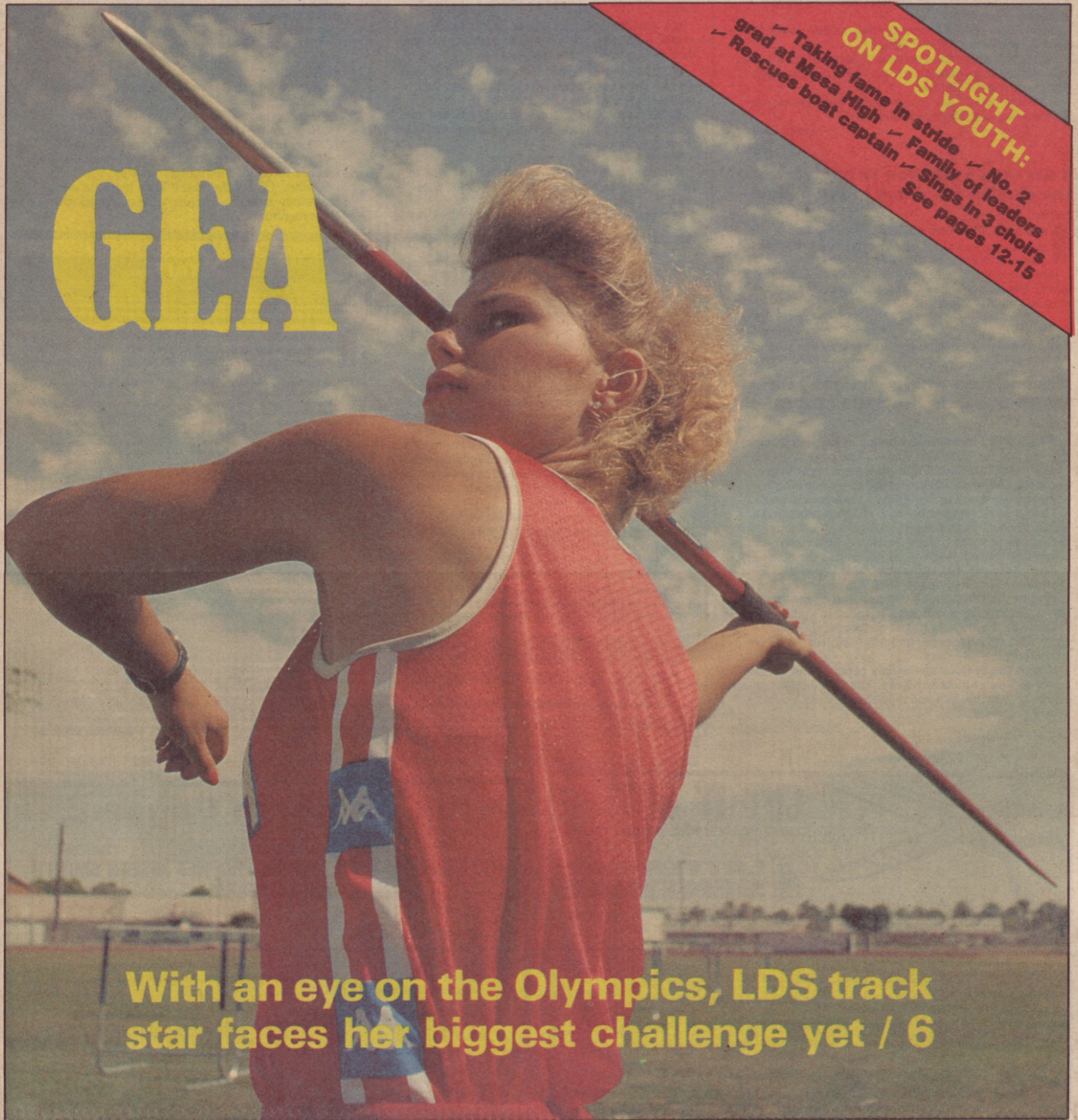
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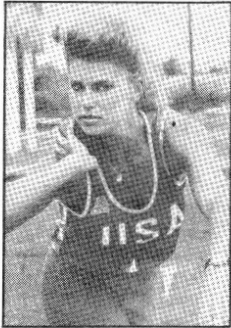
May 14, 1988



GEA

**SPOTLIGHT
ON LDS YOUTH:**
✓ Taking fame in stride ✓ No. 2
grad at Mesa High ✓ Family of leaders
✓ Rescues boat captain ✓ Sings in 3 choirs
See pages 12-15

**With an eye on the Olympics, LDS track
star faces her biggest challenge yet / 6**



by David L. Mix
Staff Writer

GEA Johnson has won practically every national award available in track and field competition. All but an Olympic medal, that is.

Once considered a 1988 Olympic hopeful, Gea has suffered a number of serious setbacks recently and now faces the most formidable hurdle of her career.

The daughter of Sally Johnson, of the Tempe 20th Ward, Tempe South Stake, Gea competes for ASU and attends the University 20th Ward.

She graduated from high school two years ago with an impressive string of awards and medals, including:

■ the Dial Award, given to the nation's two best scholar-athletes;

■ the Milky Way Award, which is granted to four regional athletes; and

■ the Gatorade Award, presented to the region's outstanding track and field star;

Not to mention the records she set and meets she won while in high school. She also won the Miss National Fitness award, was named All-American in track and was chosen Miss Teen-Ager of Arizona.

All of which she accomplished while maintaining a perfect 4.0 grade-point average—which she continues to maintain at ASU.

One of the reasons Gea is widely considered Arizona's premier track star is because she competes—and wins—in seven different categories: the high jump, shot put, 200-meter dash, long jump, javelin and 800-meter run.

YET despite her remarkable success, she has encountered a number of overwhelming obstacles recently that, depending on how she deals with them, will determine her future as an athlete.

Says Gea: "I am having a very bad year this year. I am not even close to being able to compete in the upcoming Olympics, but I will in four years."

The problems:

■ She suffered hamstring and quadstring injuries.

■ She sprained an ankle.

■ She suffered tendinitis.

■ She pulled a muscle—an injury similar to shin splints.

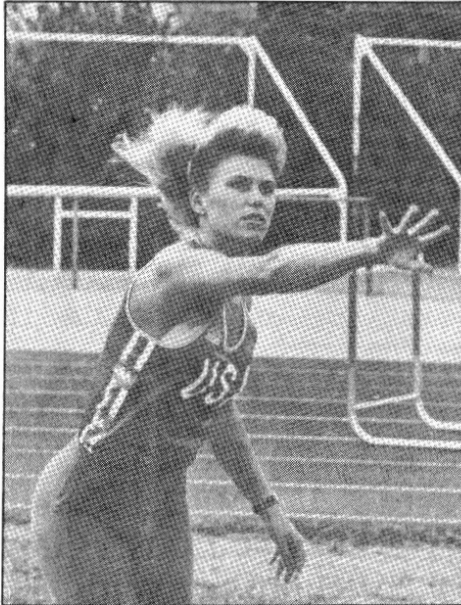
■ And her coach, Clyde Duncan, was taken away by the school in the middle of the season. That, Gea says, was perhaps the low point of her career.

"They made a 180-degree change in my training," she says. "The coaches tried to change too many things suddenly. They did not have expertise in the areas I was being trained for. When things are going well, you do not change them just because of your ego."

The move by the school certainly affected Gea's attitude toward the sport and toward ASU. She has hinted, in fact, that she may not be interested in com-

The toughest hurdle of all

How star LDS athlete Gea Johnson is now facing her biggest challenge ever on the road to the Olympics in the decathlon



Gea training in the shot and the hurdles: 'I just try to deal with it and channel it in one direction'

peting for ASU.

Says Gea: "Coach Duncan is the best there is. The other coaches seemed to be ego involved, and a lot of people in high places just don't listen.

"I don't know what I'm going to do next year. I can't handle another year like this at ASU. I am really going to try to do well this summer and finish on a positive note."

Now, she says, she must put the problems behind her. The first step back toward the winner's circle is to regain the confidence that helped her sail through high school competition.

"I lost confidence and faith in myself," she says. "It has affected my family and school life. I am trying to get myself back together and start liking the sport again."

THERE'S no better time to begin. She is set to compete in a decathlon in California later this month and will travel to the Nationals in Texas later this summer.

Her goal, she says, is to place high enough at the national meet to be named to a national track team.

She set a record at ASU last year for points and says she intends to break that record.

Gea, who studies organizational communications, has often competed and excelled in the face of extreme difficulties, including ridicule by opponents in the form of taunting during meets and fallacious accusations of immorality and drug abuse.

But the pressure of being the top women's athlete in the state—and perhaps one of the top 10 in the nation—has yet to take its toll.

She simply shrugs it off, saying any pressure comes from within. "I just try to deal with it and channel it in one direction."

It's clear Gea's family and Church life have played a huge role in her success. She teaches the Star-A (5-year-old) class in Sunday School and lists playing with her younger brothers and sisters among her favorite activities.

Says Gea: "I love the Church, especially the emphasis on the family. To be a good person you have to have a good heart. Nowadays many people are not close to their parents. If we didn't have the close family life, we couldn't do the things we have all been able to

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The Johnsons: Sally Johnson with (back, l-r) Shay and Mya and (front, l-r) Theyne, Gea and Tava

A family full of achievers

How the Johnsons are not languishing in Gea's shadow

by David L. Mix / Staff Writer

WHEN Gea Johnson first started bringing home gold medals, her mother, Sally, didn't realize it was the beginning of years of accomplishment by all five of her children.

Here are the other four Johnson children and their remarkable academic and athletic successes:

■ **Mya**, 19, also competed successfully in track during high school, but left the locker room behind in pursuit of an education in law.

She attends Berkley University part time, where she also tutors. She plans to go full time this fall and will eventually complete law school.

■ **Theyne**, 18, has a severe learning disability and went to a special school until he was 16. He reads at the 6th grade level and writes at the 7th grade level.

Theyne has enjoyed hunting for 10 years. He also competes in handicap rodeos in Buckeye and Kansas.

Currently he works at the Rawhide Livestock Auction, where he moves the livestock into the ring. He also helps with roundups, building fences and taking care of sick animals on ranches.

■ **Tava**, 12, is student body president in her 6th grade class, where she earns straight A's.

She says her favorite subject is math, and she is already studying pre-algebra.

She likes swimming, softball, basketball, ice skating, snow skiing, water skiing, jazz dance and tennis. She plans on playing tennis and working on gymnastics this summer.

■ **Shay**, 10, a 5th grader, set two records in track at the BYU Junior Olympics recently. He also won three gold medals at the junior nationals.

Shay currently plays Pop Warner football.

Sister Johnson credits her father, Preston Redd, with much of her children's success.

Says Sister Johnson: "He is the father figure. He provides financial, emotional and spiritual support."



'I will get married in the temple'

► From page 6

do."

She has managed to hold onto her principles and ideals despite being vaulted into stardom by publicity in the media—and despite her career in modeling and acting.

Gea has worked as a model on a number of occasions, but she says she is not concerned about that now, as she is concentrating on school and track.

She is dating a young man who is not LDS but has attended Institute.

Says Gea: "He has agreed to take instruction if we get serious. I don't want him to convert unless he believes. I will get married in the temple or there will not be a wedding."

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