

Women's Physique World Presents

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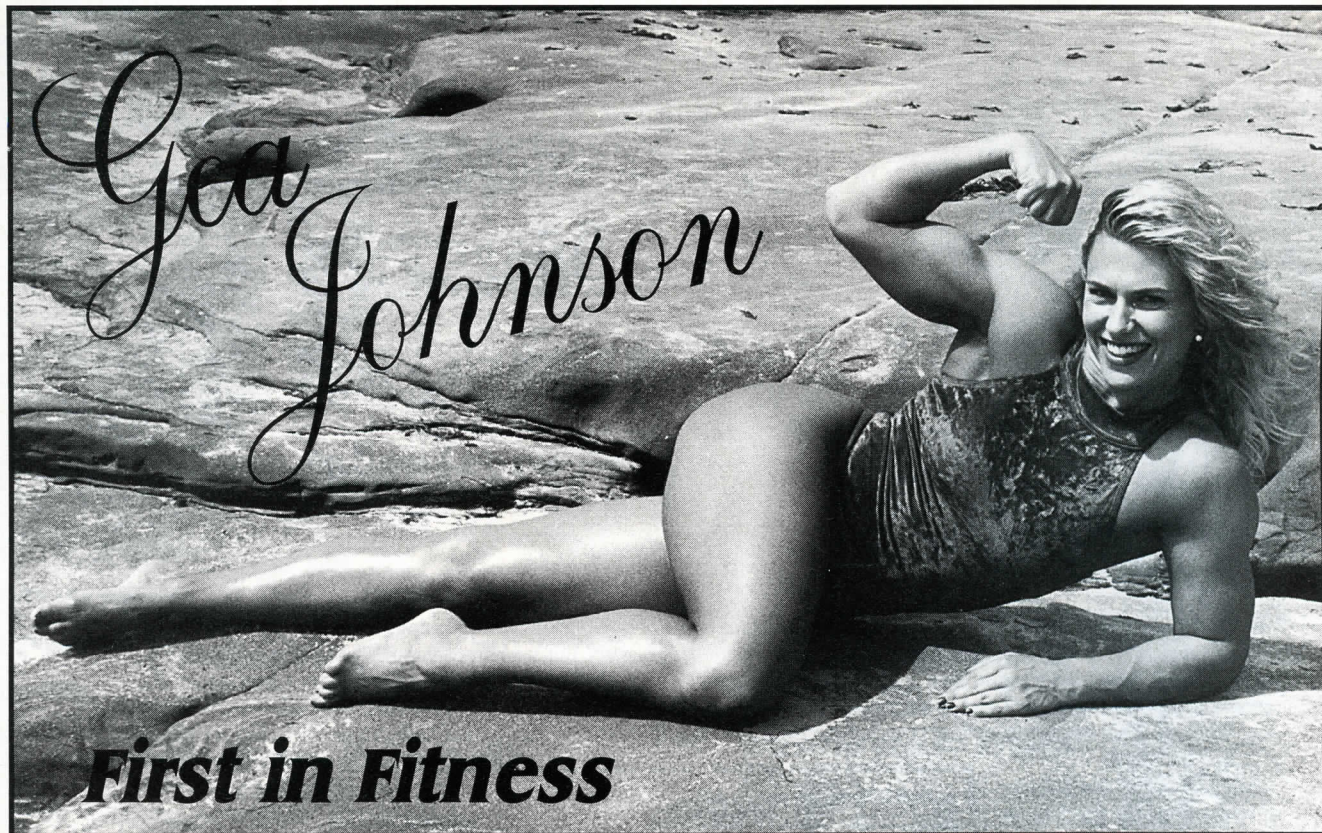
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**1997
Ms. Galaxy
Coverage**

**Gea
Johnson**
Fitness'
First
Champion

**Beautiful
Bodies**
The Future
is Now!





It's a good bet you've probably seen Gea Johnson on Fit TV's infomercials selling Proform Spacesaver Treadmills or Healthrider Softstriders. Or if you're a track & field fan you've witnessed her chasing Jackie Joyner-Kersey as one of America's finest heptathletes during the past several years.

But if you blinked, you may have missed Johnson in her one-and-only appearance as a fitness competitor. She made that singular effort a memorable one, however. Back on November 16, 1985, Johnson - then a teenager - took part in the first-ever Ms. National Fitness Championships at the Tropicana Hotel in Las Vegas. The contest was promoted by Wally Boyko and held in conjunction with the National Fitness Trade Show...an event that continues to this day.

Gea Johnson won that historic event and since then has become one of the most successful and accomplished women in the history of the competitive fitness family.

Today, as a woman nearing 30, she is in the prime of her athletic career and as the year 2000 draws near, she is looking to culminate her lifelong sporting efforts with a trip to the Olympic Games in Australia, perhaps as one of this country's finest Olympic lifters.

by Mike Bogen

In a perfect world, Gea Johnson would compete in both Olympic lifting and the heptathlon in the 2000 Olympic Games.

But, it's not a perfect world, and, as much as Johnson, a former Miss National Fitness champion, would like to become the first athlete ever to compete in two sports in the same Olympics, even the 29-year-old super-achiever knows she's bucking some extremely tough odds.

There's no question that Johnson, a 5-7, 148-pound native of Fresno, Calif., who now calls Tempe, Ariz., home, is in the ballpark for making the United States

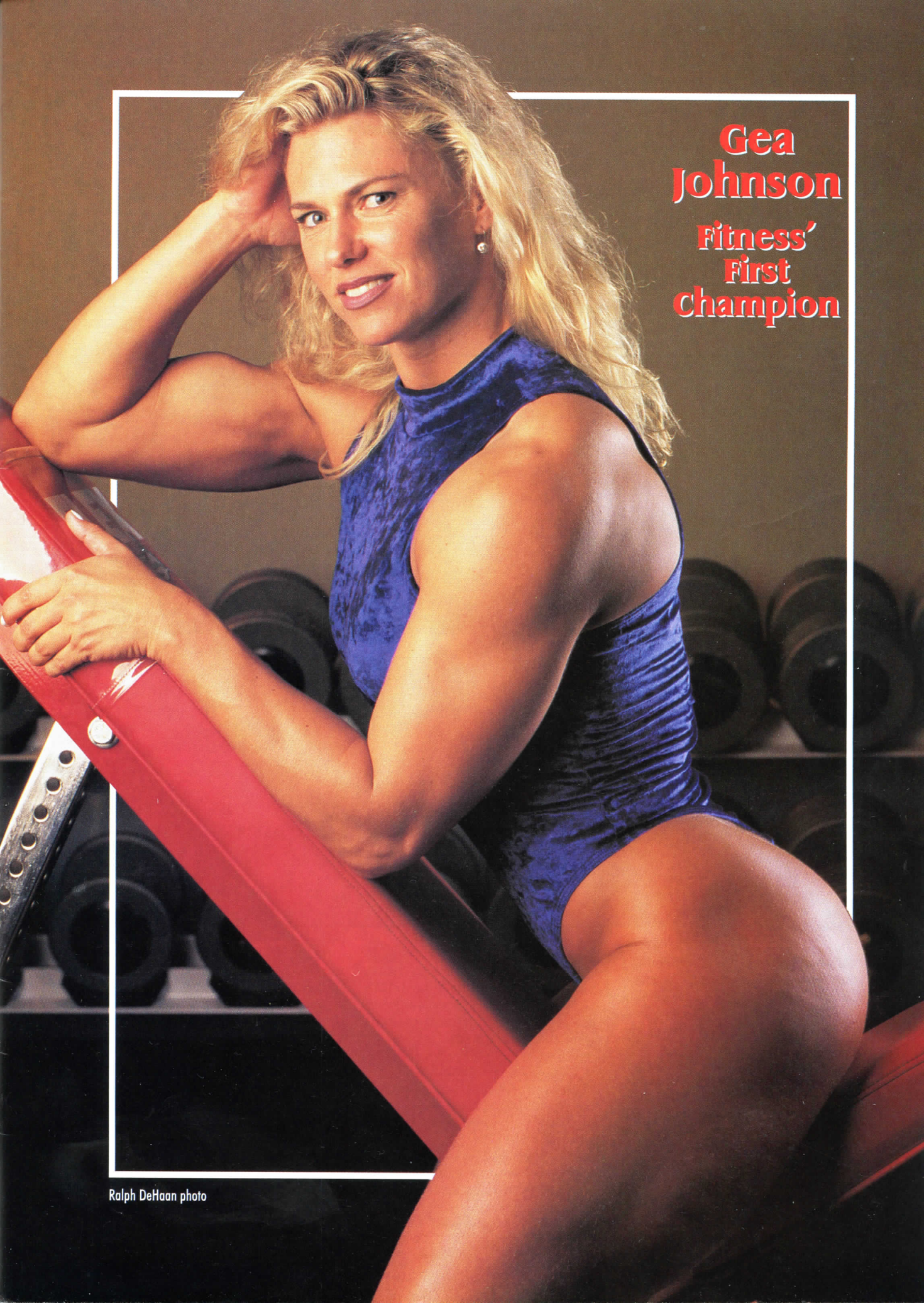
Olympic team in both sports for the 2000 Games in Australia. Her credentials in the heptathlon are among the best in U.S. history, and she's already shown tremendous potential in Olympic lifting, a relatively new endeavor for her.

Johnson began winning recognition for her accomplishments in the heptathlon in 1988, when she was The Athletic Congress' intermediate national heptathlon champion and record holder, as a freshman at Arizona State University. In 1989, besides placing seventh at the World University Games, Johnson broke all eight

ASU heptathlon event records, en route to being ranked first among the nation's intercollegiate competitions.

In 1990, Johnson set the Pac-10 heptathlon record, was the NCAA women's champion, and was awarded All-American status in track and field. That season, she recorded the third highest heptathlon score in intercollegiate history, and placed fourth at the Goodwill Games.

After college, Johnson recorded the fourth highest heptathlon score in U.S. history, and was ranked second in the nation from 1989-1993. That she was never able



**Gea
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Ralph DeHaan photo

to unseat the No. 1-ranked heptathlete comes as no real surprise. That spot belonged to Jackie Joyner-Kersey, the greatest heptathlete in history, and perhaps the greatest female athlete ever.

But, the one goal which eluded Johnson was the big one - the Olympics. She ruptured a tendon in her right knee in 1992, just before the Olympic Trials. She was ranked second in the nation, behind Joyner-Kersey, at the time. Then, in 1996, Johnson suffered a bout of mononucleosis during the trials.

"That's how I got into Olympic lifting," recalls Johnson. "I started doing it as one more means to recover from the mono, and it really was only for fun."

sport," Johnson says. "It's much more athletic and technical, and puts less emphasis on raw strength, than powerlifting. The

Although she'd been at the sport of Olympic lifting for less than a year, Johnson quickly recorded lifts of 165 pounds in the snatch and 220 pounds in the clean & jerk, earning a third place finish in the 154-pound class at the 1997 National Weightlifting Championships.

ing with Jackie Joyner-Kersey would still stand up and be in the top two or three in the country today. Women's heptathlon scores really haven't improved that much in the last couple of years," Johnson says. "What I would need to do is equal what I've done in the past. Those scores would be top three in every major meet and they'd even win some meets. But, of course, I'd like to improve on them too."

Johnson has not yet begun her heptathlon training. She's been concentrating on Olympic lifting, with August 23rd's World Team Trials in mind.

"I'll be honest, I had absolutely no intention of becoming a full-on competitor in Olympic lifting," she says. "But, I did



Wennerstrom

But, when you have the natural abilities of a Gea Johnson, as well as the determination and competitive instinct, nothing remains "just for fun" for very long, and Johnson soon found herself among the nation's elite Olympic lifters.

Although she'd been at the sport for less than a year, Johnson quickly recorded some exceptional lifts - a 75 kilo (165 pounds) snatch and 100 kilo (220 pounds) clean and jerk. Those lifts gave Johnson third place in the 70 kilo (154 pound) weight class at the 1997 USA Weightlifting Nationals, and began to give her thoughts about trying to join the first class of women weightlifting competitors ever at the 2000 Olympics.

"Olympic lifting is a very technical

heptathlon really gave me a good base as an athlete to learn Olympic lifting skills.

"But, you can also see the difference in skill level between me and the women who have been doing this for five or ten years. I power my way through stuff that I need to be using better technique on."

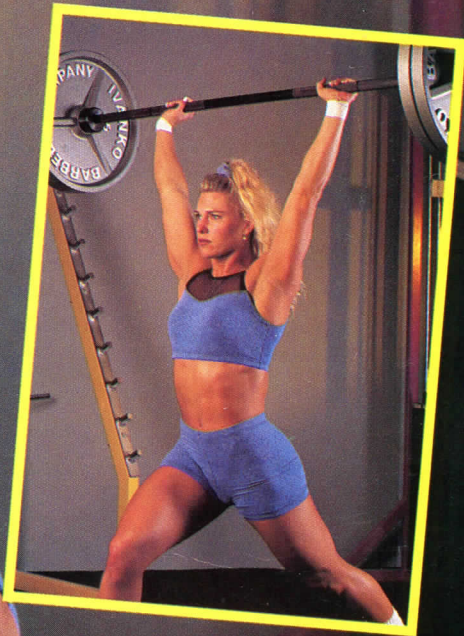
The problem for Johnson, of course, is that attempting to perfect both sports could possibly - even likely - detract from her performance in both. That's why no athlete has ever competed in more than one sport in any one Olympics, although a few have competed in both the Summer and Winter Games.

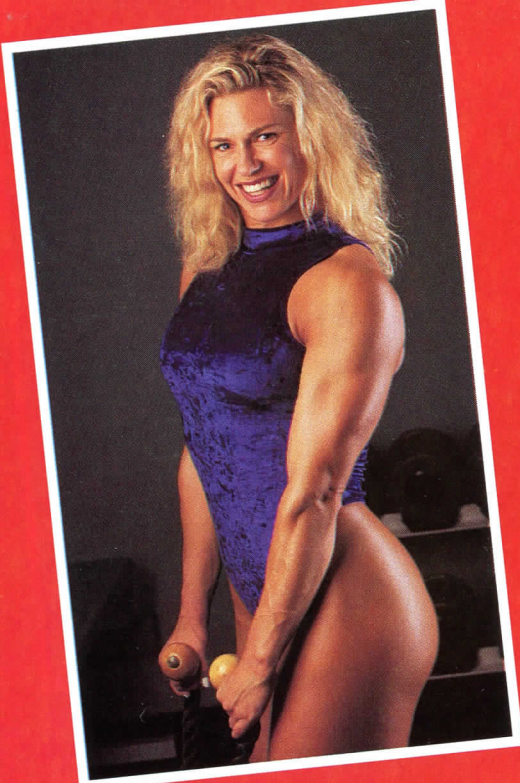
"I know my scores when I was compet-

have a lot of success early on, and I've really grown to love it.

"Still, the heptathlon is my first and my true love, and I'm not ready to give it up yet. So I'd like to try to do both. I recognize that I'll eventually have to give one up. One will have to take precedent over the other. Maybe the compromise is to adjust my goals...maybe the goals should be making the team in one (Olympic lifting) and being a medal contender in the other."

There is, of course, another possibility. At 29, Johnson is smack dab in the middle of her athletic prime. But, that prime does tend to last longer for weight lifters than for track and field athletes, whose bodies are

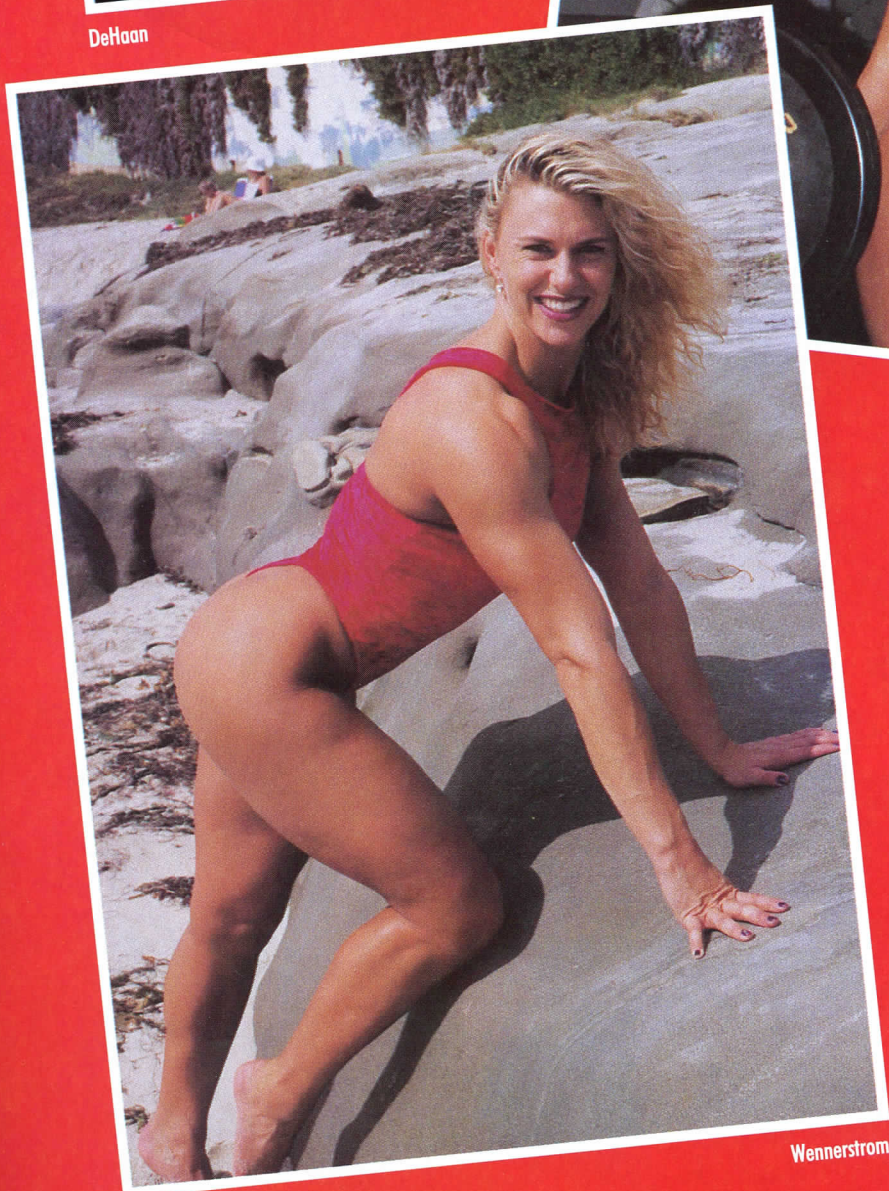




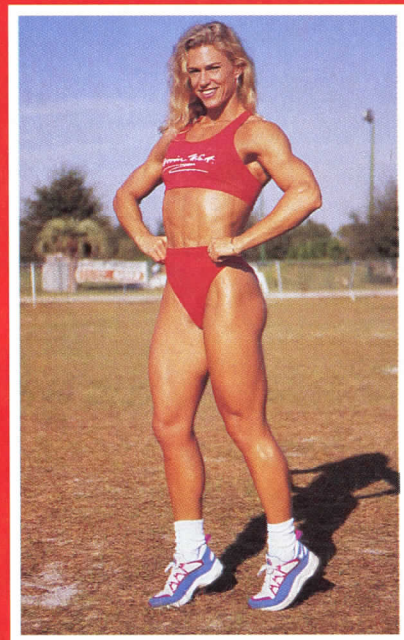
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