

# Gea Johnson:

## *The First Ms. Fitness Defies Logic!*

Whether She's Putting The Shot or Putting Heavy Barbells Over Her Head, Gea Johnson, The Winner of the First Ms. Fitness Event, Isn't Exactly The Girl Next Door!

by Jeff Everson

The weary loaders, having themselves collectively lifted nearly 100,000 pounds today, heft up the ends of the 7 foot, 20 kilogram Olympic Bar and slap a large 15 kilogram rubber plate, the size of a manhole cover, on each side and meticulously tighten down the collars.

Thud...clang. The jostling of the bar and collars as the loaders steady and ready it on the platform sends a cloud of chalky dust meandering slowly skyward, snaking through the heavy air. To mere mortals, the 220 pound barbell looks prohibitively heavy. If its ominous appearance weren't enough, the lifting platform is getting slippery, besides chalky.

Notwithstanding those distractions, the venue hall is hot and oppressive, devoid of air-conditioning. The air is thick from the perspiration of 400 die-hard, sweltering fans, and the laborious efforts of over 50 muscular athletes. They are all competing at the USA Men's and Women's Olympic Lifting Championships in Blaine, Minnesota.

Suddenly, the next athlete is up. She appears cat-like, moving quickly to the bar, seemingly mindless of its immensity. She is Gea Johnson, a woman who, if it were not for the sleek muscularity of her conditioned thighs, looks like the All-American blond beauty next door.

But, dear friends, Gea Johnson definitely isn't the girl next door! Unless, of course, your neighbor can high jump 75" and lift 200 pounds over her head! Point of fact, Gea Johnson is one of the most versatile

athletes ever gene-pooled by the Almighty! Yes, indeed, DNA gone wondrously, deliciously mad.

A former National Collegiate Heptathlon Champion at Arizona State University, a Magna Cum Laude graduate from the same, and a high school multi-sports superstar, Gea Johnson was also, decisively, the very first Ms. National Fitness and graced the cover of FLEX Magazine with bodybuilder, Shawn Ray, over a decade ago!

The inauguration of Ms. Fitness, Wally Boyko's brainchild event, was a happening and Ms. Fitness mania has been sweeping the U.S. landscape ever since. Gea Johnson led the way!

While fit beauty is one thing (and make no mistake, it's a very good thing), the gorgeous and personable Gea was already an athletic star in those days, throwing, hurdling and running circles around both men and women. Then, through the early nineties, Ms. Johnson was consistently ranked very high behind the great Jackie Joyner-Kersey (the Olympic Champion) in the seven event track Heptathlon.

The Heptathlon is the counterpart to the men's Decathlon (someday the sexism will give way, of course, and both sexes will do 10 events each). The Heptathlon consists of a grueling mix of strength, power and endurance events. The events are the 100 meter hurdles, high jump, long jump, shot put, javelin throw, 200 meter dash and 800 meter run.

### *EGADS, OLYMPIC LIFTING, TOO?*

Gea is leading the way once again, but this time in a different direction. With an aura of mystery, here she was in Blaine surprising everyone by appearing to compete for a spot on the U.S. World Team in Olympic

Weight Lifting.

"Gearthic," as she is affectionately known, is keenly aware that women's weight lifting will be part of the next Olympic Games in the Sydney Summer Olympic Games in 2000, and she wants in, having temporarily missed her chance in track and field — due to a couple of things beyond her control.

A case of severe Epstein-Barr viral-induced mononucleosis (concomitant with injuries) derailed Gea in her bid for the '96 Atlanta Games, and a case of International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF) Dinosaurosis, a condition of intellectual dullness that I shall describe shortly, derailed her in general.

But, I'm ahead of myself. Back to Blaine. This is Gea's third attempt in the clean and jerk and she has already finished her snatches. She is competing in the very competitive 70 kg. class (154 lbs.). In a sport where mere body ounces contribute pounds of momentum, she weighs in at a light 148 pounds.

Gea has been Olympic lifting for just 5 months, and most of the others here have been at it for an average of 5 years, yet Gea has moved into the Top 14 of all ranked U.S. athletes already!

Gea is raw strength and speed, perhaps too raw it seems. On her second attempt, muscles akimbo, Gea over-pulls and swings the 220 pound barbell, catching it high and hard at her throat (generally not a good place to catch anything). Still, on sheer will she grinds up out of the clean, but she is blacking out from the pressure of the bar against her trachea, and she instinctively pushes the bar away. A miss dictated by cerebral mechanisms.

Now she must do what Olympic lifters know as quadriceps-death —









*Gea with sister Tava Redd, a good buddy and aspiring Los Angeles actress.*

follow herself with a maximum weight. She has just 2 minutes rest, as no one else is lifting this weight. As every lifter knows, this won't be enough time to recover. But don't tell that to Ms. Johnson!

Two minutes pass. Her name is called. Gea now has 1 minute, but she is ready. With what seems only a nanosecond of sheer concentration, Gea sets herself, flings her blond locks backward, pumps her powerful glutes and thighs up and down quickly to activate her lumbar stretch reflex, accelerates the bar quickly, and in a flash she is under the mega

weight, standing up.

She has made the clean, but it's just half the lift. Now the jerk. (As an aside, although the clean and jerk does sound like a Vegas opening comedy act, it's really the ultimate test of a person's overall body strength and coordination.) A quick dip at the knees and her powerful butt and thigh muscles send the bar upwards. Boom! She splits under the weight, arms locked, legs steady, feet now brought in line.

Gea holds for a second to prove she has control, and the judges signal

her to bring the bar down. Three white lights — the lift is good. Gea Machel Johnson has just lifted 72 pounds over her body weight with only 5 months training, a feat that (maybe) only a handful of the best conditioned pro football players in the world could match!

If you've never Olympic lifted, then you will never understand the majesty of it all, the total joy of domination that can only come from lifting a barbell (which most men could only roll) 6-7 feet, clearing your head. No short-range biceps curls or 20" bench press movement here, boys and girls. This is defying the logic of gravity as Sir Isaac Newton never envisioned it.

But then, defying logic is what Gea Johnson's life has been all about.

#### *THE UNREQUITED QUEST*

Gea's almost 30 years of life have always involved serious athletics. Her career and life have been mostly ups, but a major down for her has been her inability to reach the absolute pinnacle in track — competition in the Olympic Games.

A few devastating injuries to her knees and ankle (all requiring major surgery), and even a bout of mono, may have slowed her down a bit, but they could not stop her. What has really stopped her has less to do with Gea than the utter stubbornness of some of the dinosaurs working in international sport/track, and this has nothing to do with Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* or *The Lost World* (although, in my opinion, many of these representatives are, indeed, in a lost world). While there are many exceptions, I'm talking about a few officials who pretend to administer centrally in, evidently, the unprincipled principality of Monaco, ignoring justice, forgiveness and honor.

A couple of years ago a supposed correct protocol random drug test procedure (unannounced) was carried out on Gea during the track off season. Gea complied and was later informed that a banned substance was detected in her urine. She was summarily disqualified for four years by the IAAF, whose headquarters



are located in Monaco.

Since the use of banned substances poses more than a slight conflict with her Christian background, Gea, knowing she was totally wronged, fought back. Lawyers have since determined that, at the time of the test, not only was Gea not given an official receipt with a witness signature guaranteeing that protocol was followed, but the collection agent and lab did not save the B-specimen for verification on re-test in case of a positive A-sample.

Thus, Gea was not able to have her sample re-tested with IOC facilities, and the international body would not accept all her negative follow-up tests, her offer to take a polygraph, or her offer to consent to DNA testing to see if the sample was really that of Gea Johnson. (Gea insists it could not have been her sample, as she swears she was not using any banned substances.)

Of course, the U.S. Court, having affirmation for proof beyond doubt, has agreed that this was a violation of drug collection protocol with numerous breaks in the chain of custody, and allows Gea to compete here.

But unfortunately, some maladroit IAAF officials in Monaco are more interested in maintaining illusion, in lieu of fairness and justice, and would rather be in touch with their fortunes, rather than be in touch with democratic procedures. Their well-intended organization neither seems to be able to forgive (Gea has already served more than two years of the ban), or acknowledge a possible error.

Life goes on. We all somehow learn to live with people in power, who forget the good, well-meaning people who placed them in power (the athletes). So, as Gea appeals that illogical decision and even has magnanimously dropped her \$12 million lawsuit against the IAAF, she now keeps the faith by switching to Olympic lifting and hopes to make the Olympic Games in lifting, in exclusion of, or with track, if she gets (an act of God required) reinstated in track!

### THE TRAINING

Training for Ms. Fitness, of course, involves doing many different conventional bodybuilding exercises to develop muscle size and shape, and to develop any weak areas cosmetically. Obviously, Gea had few weaknesses as she won the first ever Ms. Fitness. Her exercise sessions, then, were mainly a daily session of weights and a separate daily session of aerobics. Her repetitions varied between 8-15 generally, she rested very little between sets and did a few sets and a few exercises for each body part, as do conventional body builders and fitness trainees. Training is to the maximum and so is the nutritional aspect!

However, if you are in track and field, or Olympic lift-



*Gea met actor Martin Kove during her trip to Los Angeles for this story. Martin stars in the new series "Shadow Warrior," with Hulk Hogan, Carl Weathers, and Shannon Tweed. The series debuts on TNT October 24. Who knows? An action-adventure series could be waiting for her when her athletic career ends!*

ing, the premium is on the ability to develop total muscle tension quickly for meaningful power production and to apply said muscular power expression in a neurological skilled movement pattern coordinated with the dynamics of each event. Thus, one trains for power and strength using exercises to develop significant big muscles of major muscle groups. Muscle size or shape is of no consequence whatsoever.

Thus, Gea's effervescent, unpaid Olympic lifting coach, Joe Jolley, currently has Gea periodizing, stressing her butt, traps, low back and thighs, which is to say, he has her concentrating on strength by doing heavy squats, heavy pulls and front squats. Right now Gea trains two times a day, reminiscent of the Bulgarian-pioneered system. As the season progresses, Gea will work more on technique and power acquisition, probably once a day, all with the goal of increasing her lifts and peaking for both the Olympic trials and the games themselves.

Having observed Gea Olympic lift on my Prime TV show, *Training & Nutrition 2000*, and having been a former National collegiate Olympic Weight Lifting Champion and record holder myself, I think Gea, at 154 pounds, will lift over 208 pounds in the snatch and 270 pounds in the clean and jerk (or better), by the year 2000, provided she gives Olympic lifting 100% and stays injury-free.

And why not? After all, she is "Gearthic" not the girl next door!

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