

GEA JOHNSON: BODY BUILD- ING'S BEST BET FOR THE 2000 OLYMPICS?

Jeff M. Everson



Gea Johnson
Photo By Bruce Talbot

Like a well-muscled bodybuilding goldilocks, Gea Johnson, the first Ms. Fitness, aims to make the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney in two sports!

The perspiration-drenched loaders, having hoisted some 20,000 pounds themselves today for the men's Olympic lifting weight lifting competition, heft up the ends of the 20 kilogram Olympic lifting bar once more, and slap a manhole-sized 33 pound weight plate onto each side. As they make adjustments to the ponderous 242.5 pound iron barbell, the fans swelter, gasping for breath. This is Phoenix in late June. Can you say 110 degrees? Summer in Arizona, where oxygen is as precious as gold.

Meanwhile, if the weather is brutal on the fans, imagine the lifters today. Suddenly, Gea Johnson appears. The first ever Ms. Fitness, Gea Machel Johnson, all 138 sultry and regal pounds of her, has her golden Godiva-like tresses tied up, revealing so much intricate back muscle that it reminds me of an aerial photograph I once saw of the topography of Europe! Mindless to the oppressive humidity, Gea is in a psyched-up trance.

To a poet searching for irony, the juxtaposition is striking. To know Gea Johnson is to know a woman very much alive. An athlete's athlete, Gea is wondrously full of a real zest for life. Juxtaposed at her feet, a very dead barbell. Perhaps, wonderful in its own right, it rests stubbornly honoring the gravity of Mother Earth.

Gea Johnson is no illusion. She strides purposefully onto the platform, and if it weren't for a pair of striking 23" thighs

and a set of rock-hard glutes (looking as round as something Michael Jordan squeezes each day), Gea Johnson looks like the neighborhood girl down the street. Some neighbor.

Unless you live in an extremely desirous neighborhood, one where the girl down the street tosses an eight pound shot 53 feet, high jumps 72 inches and can lift almost twice her body weight over her head, this ain't no average girl next door.

No sir. What we have here is God's magic chromosomes, all 23 pairs gone wondrously and deliciously mad.

IS THIS BODY- BUILDER AT HEART THE BEST FEMALE ATHLETE IN THE USA?

Gea sashays up to the bar. Delicately and meticulously, rather like a micro-surgeon in preparation for the first cut, she hook-grips her calloused hands and fingers around the bar, respectfully mind you, but confident. With an expiration, deep inspiration, and a breath held, Gea quickly bobs her powerful glutes and hips tightening her erector spinae muscles to enlist the spindle-driven stretch reflex, and pulls. Oh, how she pulls.

With her ample trapezius and arms taught, with carotids bulging, Gea lets

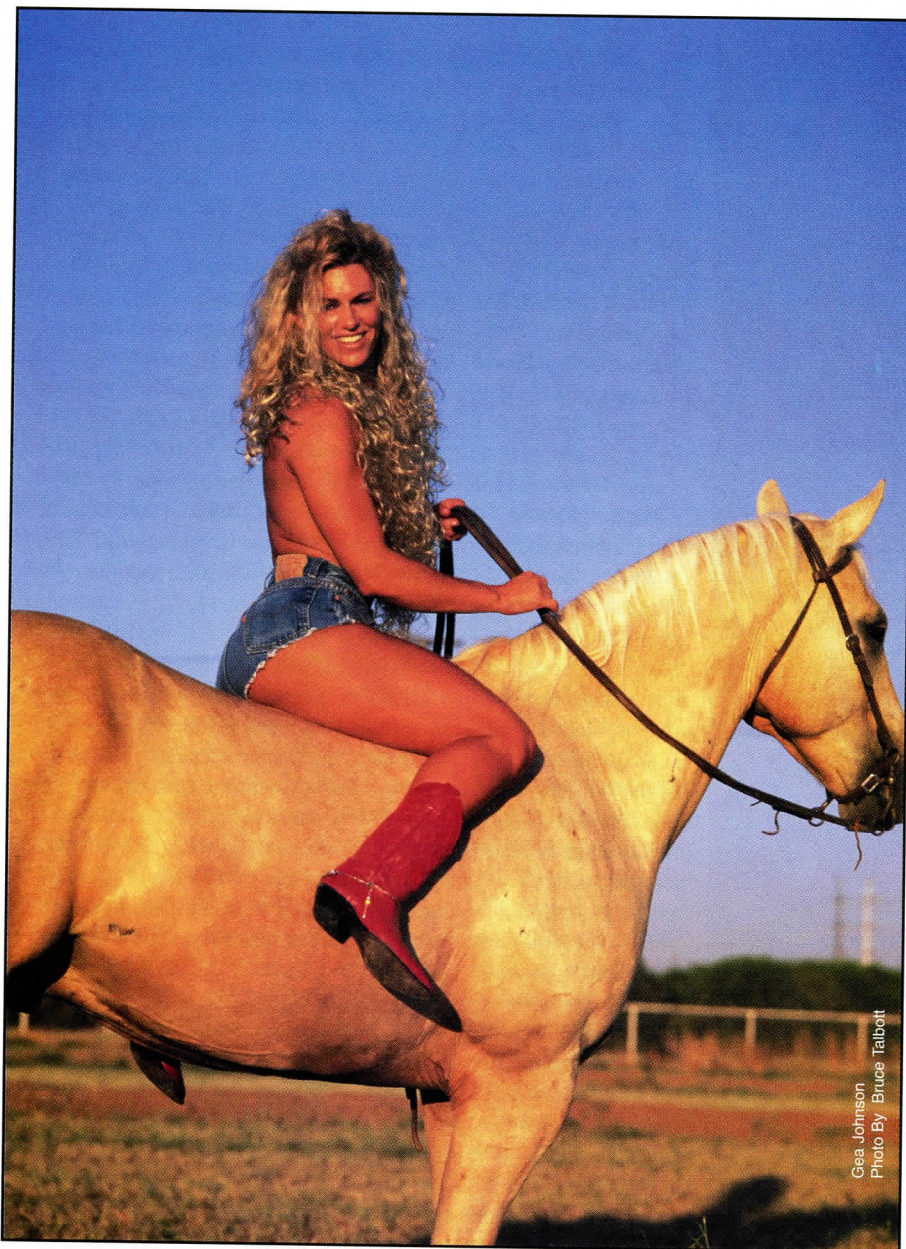
loose with a penultimate, throaty grimace (the lifter's call to arms), and begins to move the bar. Suddenly, swish -- boom -- clang, an incredible acceleration, and in a flash, Gea pulls herself underneath the noisy steel monstrosity, the bar landing heavily onto her chest. Chalk flies!!

Gea powers herself upright. At least she is now full height, but the bar still sits at her chest. She's only half done! Gea has made the clean, now comes the jerk (and I'm not talking about the irritating loud-mouthed guy who has just entered at the back of the hall).

With thighs shaming Xena, Gea Johnson's cleans are usually a piece of cake. The jerk phase of the lift overhead, well, that is the desirable frosting, remaining to be spread. She's tired, but only thinking of sticking the jerk. Legs tight, big thrust, drop deep, push hard, elbows up and out, lock and hold!

Gea has to process positive thoughts very fast, in only a second or two. If she waits any longer at the top of the clean, her body will lull her. Not only could she get dizzy from low oxygen with the heavy bar pressed against her throat, but her legs and back could fatigue as she stands, without her knowing it. Then, when she dips her knees to thrust for the jerk, there'll be no drive left, just a pair of dead quadriceps, without whip.

But, as is usually the case, failure is not



Gea Johnson
Photo By Bruce Talbott

to be! Gea dips, thrusts up and sticks the 242.5 pounds. She holds, controls and then disdainfully drops the loaded bar back to a vanquished Earth. Gea Johnson has just lifted from the floor, six and a half feet up, without the aid of steroids (Gea was tested eight times in one six month period) 105 pounds more than she weighs!

For muscle-buffs, who love those sexist comparisons, the very impressive 350 pound Greg Kovacs is known as the all-time, World's Strongest Bodybuilder. But, could big Greg match the neighborhood bodybuilder girl by clean and jerking 105 pounds over his weight, (455 pounds), and do it drug-free? I'd bet Twin Labs against him.

THE EGGHEAD TRACK AND FITNESS STAR WITH BODYBUILDING ROOTS!

Just where and how, did this alien specimen of femalehood come to be?

Gea, raised in Tempe Arizona, had already finished an all-around stellar athletic and academic career at Phoenix Washington High. (At Washington, Gea was the number one ranked GTE scholar-athlete winner and academic All-American several times). She enrolled at Arizona State on a full scholarship, concentrating on a very athletic and grueling event known as the heptathlon. In 1989 and 1990, she finished second each time in the US Championships.

The heptathlon is a series of seven events consisting of the 100 meter hurdles, high jump, long jump, 200 meter dash, shot put, javelin throw and 800 meter run. Then, while simultaneously bodybuilding (since early high school) and graduating magna cum laude in 1990, Gea won the overall NCAA track Heptathlon Championship, named All-American, made the fourth highest score in the events history and was awarded the title of the best collegiate female athlete in America! (And *Sports Illustrated*, the illustrious magazine edited by pot-bellied idiots, says bodybuilders are all losers?)

In 1991, Gea pulled up her spikes and left for LA to train with, or along side Flo Jo, Jackie Joyner Kersee, and the other track bigwigs and hotshots at the time.

Gea wanted to make the 1992 Olympic Team and from 1989-1993, she was ranked number two in the world behind Kersee! However, in the 1992 New Orleans Olympic trials, our super woman ruptured one of her patellar knee tendons.

Trouble in River City! This is a particularly onerous injury (the knee ligaments were rebuilt using cadaver tissue) and Gea was basically chair and bedridden for eight months. She then had two more subsequent surgeries and began a long, arduous specific bodybuilding rehabilitation process, an uneven journey, which took her all the way up to mid 1994. Then, just when there was a glimmer of light at the end of the physical tunnel, an emotional bombshell detonated.

In May of 1994, Gea entered into a legal nightmare and quagmire because she sued the International Amateur Athletic Federation over a failed urine screen, where a disputed banned substance, oxandolone, was supposedly found floating. Both Gea's doctor and the steadfastly religious Gea, disputed those results, arguing sabotage and several chain-of-custody breaches (the lawsuit was for over 15 million).

After detailed hearings, a United States judge and the USA track federation also disputed the international chain of command testing and determined that the protocol performed here, sucked royally. According to Ms. Johnson, the collection agent not only represented a competitive interest to Gea, but had violated almost every possible testing procedure and chain of custody design, including failure to allow testing of sample two at a different laboratory.



Gea Johnson
Photo By Bruce Talbott

While the USOC agreed and allowed her to compete in the US, Gea not only reinjured herself in trying for the 96 games, but she so badly overtrained that she induced mononucleosis through a compromised immune system, diagnosed right at the trials!

On the track things had not gone so well for our golden girl. But, I'm slightly ahead of myself. In bodybuilding, weight training and fitness, Gea has a story germane to all the women reading this article (and I hope it's just not guys reading).

BODYBUILDING: WINNING THE FIRST MS. FITNESS!

Today Gea is 31, but back in 1985, when she was a nubile teen, Gea decided to drop her heavy barbell strength training and shift to bodybuilding with dumbbells. and concentrate on entering a new form of training and competition, called the Ms. National Fitness.

The Ms. Fitness was the brainchild of Wallace Boyko, a fitness raconteur from California. Wally envisioned a new event where bodybuilders would be shapely, beautiful and be very athletic too. The event included the typical heel and gown round, a bikini and athletic presentation round and an interview. Guess who won the first fitness contest ever, caught Joe Weider's eye and subsequently appeared on the FLEX cover with Shawn Ray, back in 1985?

Yes sir, since Gea's landmark win, various permutations of fitness events have really exploded nationwide. Now, there's the Ms. Fitness, the Fitness America, the Ms. Fitness Universe, the Galaxy and the biggest, the NPC Ms. Olympia Fitness. Gea had actually entered the Galaxy a few years ago, but reinjured her knee after being in first or second place in the obstacle round of the event.

To get in shape for that first fitness event where not only is there athleticism, but also an emphasis on lean muscularity and bodybuilding shape, Gea used free weights and dumbbells, and radically switched her power training to bodybuilding training, where she hardly rested between sets (30 seconds vs. the 3-5 min-

utes she rests when training for strength and power for sports).

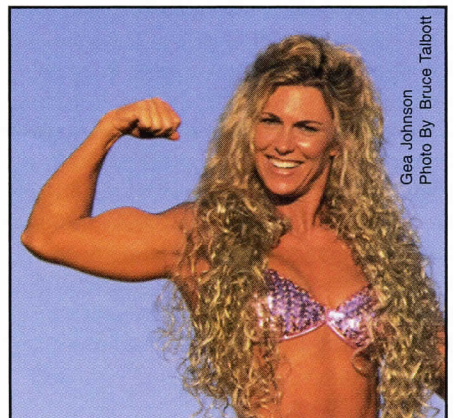
Instead of heavy squats, power cleans, push presses, deadlifts and bench presses with barbells, Gea shifted to dumbbell step-ups, dumbbell lunges, dumbbell squats and deadlifts, flyes, regular bench and dumbbell incline presses, standing dumbbell curls, concentration curls, dumbbell presses, triceps extensions, dumbbell rows, and other direct bodybuilding shaping movements.

Instead of her very high intensity, (brutally-heavy weights) and usual 2-5 reps (for power), Gea shifted to 8-15 repetitions using Split System. Naturally, she used less weight, but trained just as hard for her new repetitions. Along with using more (various) exercises for symmetry and shape, she used the Split System with a six-day-a-week program, rotating body parts, from lower body to upper body.

Gea also blasted through 30-60 minutes of aerobics each day to etch definition and cuts. And the final change, for muscularity and definition, a diet shifting from four higher caloric, mixed macro nutrient meals each day, to six nutrient-dense meals a day (smaller, and percentage-wise, higher in protein, while lower in carbohydrates and fats).

AYERS ROCK, WALKABOUT CREEK AND THE OLYMPIC GAMES DOWN UNDER!

The cute blond on the latest Aussie tourist commercial says, "You Americans work too hard." She should meet Gea Johnson! Work yes, but it's a labor of Love for Ms. Johnson. Today, Gea is concentrating on making the Sydney Olympic Games in two sports, track and field and Olympic Weight lifting!



Gea Johnson
Photo By Bruce Talbott

Thus, she's back to the grindstone of heavy squatting, front squatting, power and squat-style cleans, power and squat cleans from the hang position, clean and jerks, jerks from squat stands, pulls and flat-back deadlifts to the knees (these are general exercises all olympic-style lifters work on), usually for multiple sets of singles, doubles and ancillary exercises for 1-5 repetitions, at varying speeds for power and skill.

Gea also adds weighted back hyperextensions and weighted machine crunches, using the special Lean Abs Machine too, for complete rotational torso power!

My personal opinion, having competed in both track and Olympic lifting, is, like Sophia's choice, Gea will eventually have to choose one sport. Although the training is similar, it's not the same, and this is a world of increasing athletic specificity. I think a limiting concern might be Gea's past injuries from track and the unique stresses this two-tiered training makes upon her. At any rate, I think everything will play out in the next 12 months.

At a weight of 138.5 pounds, Gea might improve in the high jump, long jump and 800 meters, but be hurt in the shot, javelin, hurdles and 200, especially if she encounters event head-wind conditions, where a bigger, stronger runner usually does better, in sprints. I honestly believe that Gea, (and this is all drug-free), could lift 198-220 lbs. in the snatch, and 264-286 lbs. in the clean and jerk, by the Games, in the official 138.5 pound class, if she concentrates on Olympic lifting! This would be phenomenal and probably yield a medal, very likely gold. Since she has started Olympic lifting so late, I also think she could peak her body for Olympic lifting in the 2004 Games! Or maybe bodybuilding by then!

GEA JOHNSON'S SECRET WEAPONS

Gea has always been a bodybuilder at heart and I firmly believe it is this base of development that enables her to compete in many sports. As stated, she was the first Ms. Fitness in the USA and during that phase of her athletic life Gea trained almost exclusively with dumbbells. This period of her training (bodybuilding), was responsible for her great shape and symmetry, and consequently, she does not have the usual lopsided development of an Olympic lifter (all erectors, traps and quads). Additionally, the prime reason for

the dumbbell training was for a large share of that time Gea had to train at home, after school and track practice!

Unlike too many strength athletes, Gea has always sought good nutrition. On a regular ongoing basis, Gea has used protein powders, vitamins, minerals and digestive enzymes. Currently, Weider Health and Fitness is sponsoring Gea as an amateur athlete, with product and a monthly stipend to partially reimburse her for her numerous training expenses.

Gea's four meals per day are nutritionally dense and are small to moderate, low in calories, low in fats, moderate in carbs and very protein-wise. Protein sources include lean meats, fish, turkey, steak and chicken, plus she gobbles up vegetables and low glycemic carbs, such as yams and rice.

Gea believes that Olympic lifters really need a broad, thick and strong abdomen so she regularly uses the Lean Abs Machine. This unique power cruncher uses free weights to progressively overload the obliques and the rectus abdominis through a full range motion, including the anatomical movement produced by the obliques. Needless to say, strong abdominals are critical for the heptathlon and Olympic lifting!

LIFTING: ARDUOUS AND UNIQUE!

Bear in mind that Olympic lifters operate in a third world, a parallel universe of very low reps and funny sounding exercises. Thus, you must do your best to understand its strangeness. It's no where near what a bodybuilder does.

Here is a sampling of 5 GEA workouts this past May. The weights listed are kilograms (to convert to pounds, multiply by 2.2) and the designation sample, 2/50/x2

Date	Exercise	Reps
5/4/98	Power Snatch	3/50 X 2, 3/55 X 2, 3/57 X 2
	Jerks Off Stands	3/60 X 2, 3/70 X 2, 3/80 X 2
	Squats	4/60 X 1, 4/80 X 1, 4/100 X 1
	Snatch Pull	3/70 X 2, 3/80 X 2
5/6/98	Power Cleans	3/50 X 2, 3/60 X 2, 3/80 X 2
	Squats	2/60 X 1, 2/80 X 1, 2/100 X 1, 5/115 X 5
	Clean Pulls	3/90 X 2, 3/100 X 2
5/11/98	Power Cleans	3/50 X 2, 3/60 X 2, 3/80 X 2
	Jerks Off Stands	3/60 X 2, 3/70 X 2, 3/80 X 1
	Squats	2/60 X 1, 2/80 X 1, 2/100 X 1, 5/115 X 5
	Clean Pulls	3/100 X 2, 3/105 X 2
5/13/98	Power Snatch	3/45 X 2, 3/50 X 2, 3/55 X 2, 2/60 X 2
	Front Squat with Jerk	2/55 X 2, 2/65 X 2, 2/75 X 1, 2/80 X 2
	Snatch Pull	3/65 X 2, 3/75 X 2, 3/85 X 2
	Power Snatch	2/50 X 2, 2/55 X 2, 2/60 X 2, 2/62 X 1
	Jerk	2/60 X 2, 2/70 X 2, 2/80 X 2, 2/90 X 1
	Squats	2/80 X 1, 2/100 X 1, 2/108 X 6

means 2 reps with 50 kilograms done for two sets. There is always a basic warmup and stretch first, and some use of light weights for preparation and the workouts don't list remedial exercises such as weighted abdominal crunches, weighted hyperextensions, leg extensions and leg curls, done at the end of the workout.

Gea, at a natural 140 pounds bodyweight, can now do a set of five repetitions in the high bar squat (to the bottom, without wraps), with 130 kg. (286.5 pounds). *Planet Muscle* wishes former bodybuilder, Gea Johnson, much success in her lofty quest to make the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games in two events, the track and field heptathlon and weight lifting. If she does, Gea automatically becomes the fifth spice girl, as that would be real girl power! **PAM**

Jeff Everson, the 1992 NPC Masters Bodybuilding Champion, is also a former National Collegiate Olympic weightlifting champion, with lifts of 340 lbs. and 419 lbs. in the snatch and clean and jerk respectively. He still considers himself a jerk, and now has a national cable fitness show on Planet Muscle E! TV at 6a.m. Thursday Eastern and Pacific.