

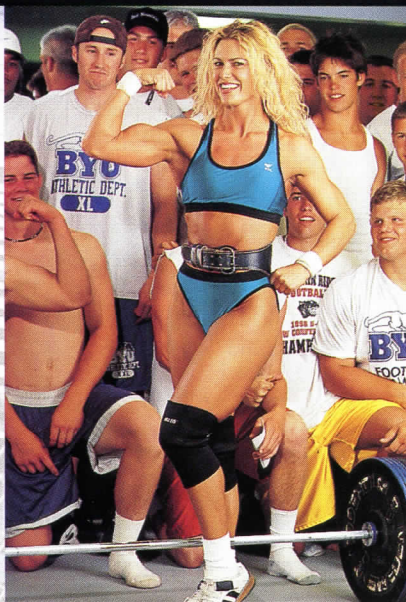
Golden Girl

By Michelle Basta Boubion,
CPT, Copy Editor & Jeff
Everson, '92 NPC Masters
Bodybuilding Champion

**Fitness pioneer, weightlifter
and heptathlete *Gea Johnson*
sets her sights on Sydney**

To reach the pinnacle in your chosen sport is truly an honor, often rewarded with fame, fortune and status. To achieve that distinction in two different activities — now that's remarkable! Only a handful of athletes have excelled in two sports, like the gifted Bo Jackson, who was both a powerful major-league baseball player and NFL running back.

Olympic hopeful Gea Johnson, 31, is aiming for membership in that elite group. To look at her, you might never guess; Gea appears to be better suited for, say, fitness competitions. In fact, she's already been there, done that — and won. Nowadays she's focusing her considerable training efforts on the heptathlon and Olympic weightlifting. As you can imagine, trying to excel in two such diverse sports includes one helluva training schedule. Our guess is that she's a little bit crazy. We'd also bet that she'll let nothing stand in her way of competing for a gold medal.

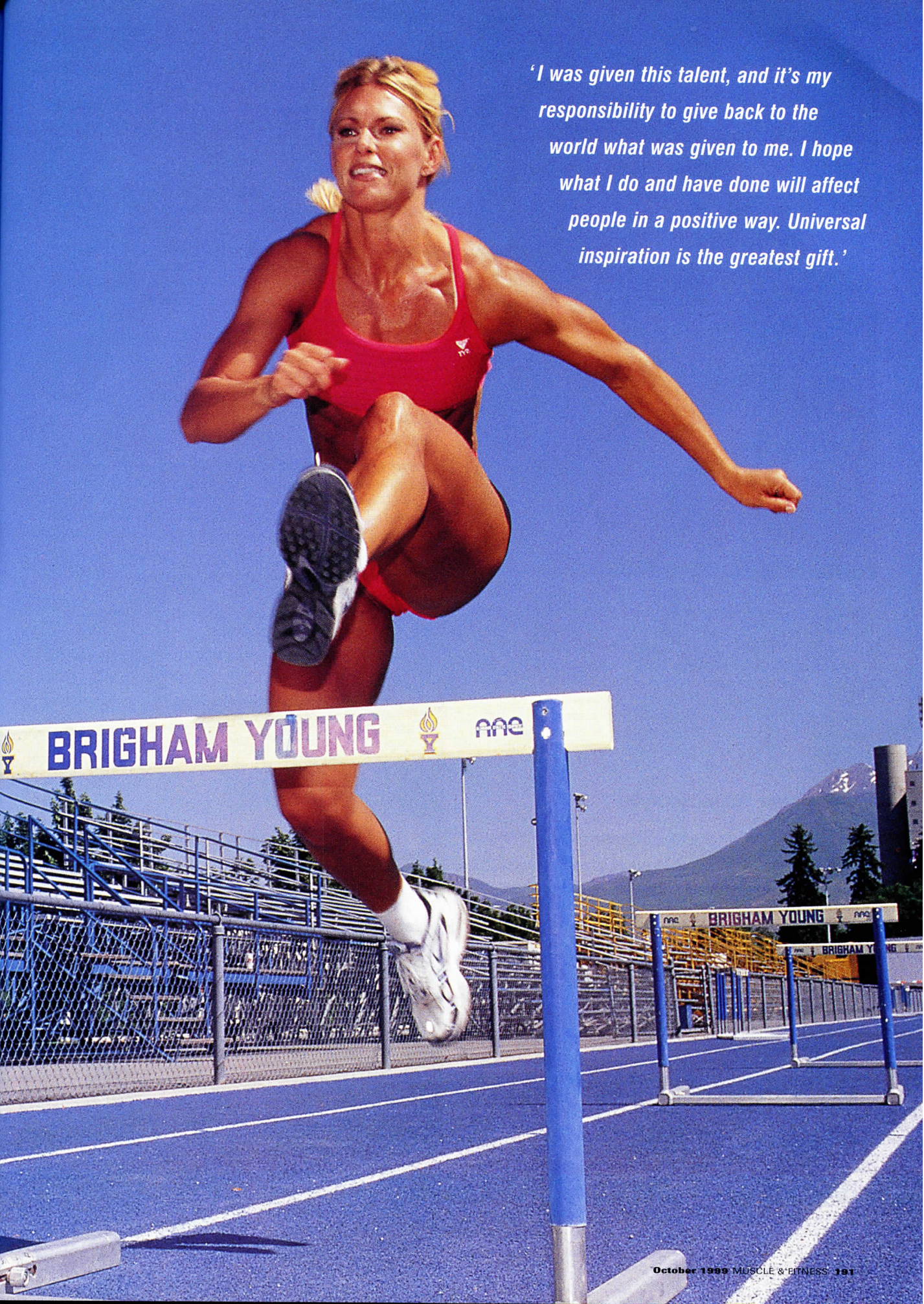


Born to Excel

To know Gea is to know an athlete's athlete who's wondrously full of zest for life. Raised in Tempe, Arizona, with her four brothers and sisters, Gea discovered early in life that she's truly gifted. She was swimming competitively by the age of 6; at 15, she was the best in the nation. When she decided to try her hand at other sports, she found a niche on her high-school track team, where she started training with weights to complement her track workouts. That's where we start our story. Pay attention; it moves quickly.

Gea found that her body responded favorably to iron, so she decided to step up her routine. In 1986 she captured the Teenage Arizona Bodybuilding Championship and, thrilled with her success, went on to enter a relatively obscure fitness competition — the first-ever Ms. National Fitness, a sport still in its embryonic stages. "I didn't know what to expect," says Gea of her

Photos by Per Bernal. Apparel by TYR Sport.

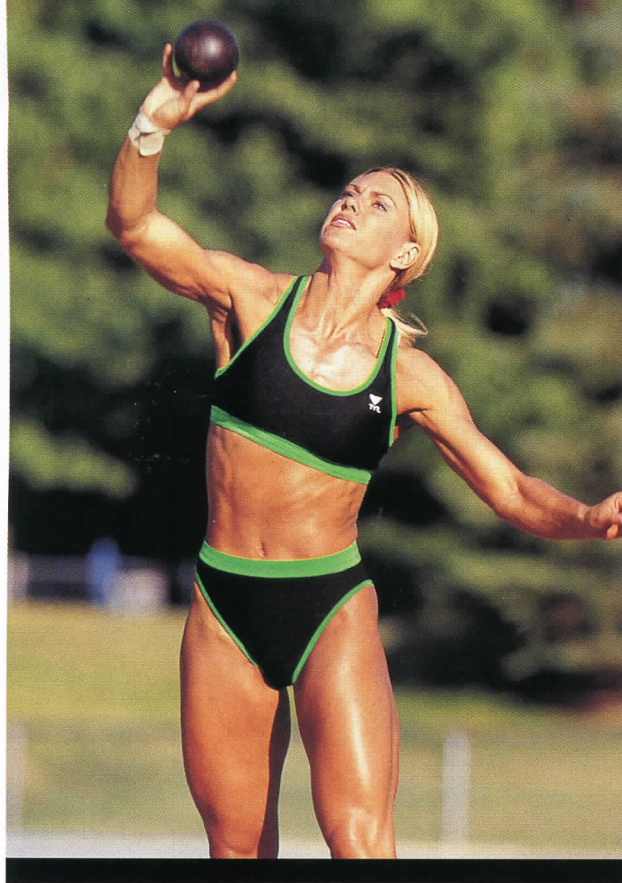


'I was given this talent, and it's my responsibility to give back to the world what was given to me. I hope what I do and have done will affect people in a positive way. Universal inspiration is the greatest gift.'

 **BRIGHAM YOUNG**  

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one and only fitness show in which she took first. "I did well with bodybuilding, but it wasn't exactly the direction I wanted to go with my physique. I thought fitness was a nice alternative. It allows women to be smart, athletic and feminine."

She also found that training for fitness required a totally opposite approach than how she was training for the heptathlon — a seven-event competition that includes the high jump, long jump, javelin, shot put, hurdle event, 200-meter dash and 800-meter run. "I dieted, got a routine together and just went for it," says Gea. "For most sports, it doesn't matter how you look; you train for performance."

Adversity or Opportunity?

On a full athletic scholarship to Arizona State University in Tempe, Gea concentrated on the heptathlon and finished second in both the 1989 and 1990 U.S. Championships. From there, she won the overall NCAA track heptathlon, which earned her All-American honors, and she was awarded the title of best collegiate female athlete in America. It seemed only natural that her ultimate goal would be the Olympics.

Next stop: New Orleans, host of the '92 Olympic Trials with the likes of Jackie Joyner-Kersey and the late Florence Griffith-Joyner. "I was having the best year of my life," Gea recalls. "Then, during a high jump, I ruptured a patellar tendon in one knee. The pain was so great I knew something was seriously wrong." Her dream almost ended when doctors told her she'd never compete at a world-class level again. "Almost everyone was telling me I'd had a great career — like it was over — but I knew in my heart I had more to do."

Gea found a doctor — Richard Emerson of the NBA's Phoenix Suns — who developed a surgical procedure that enabled her to rehabilitate her knee to near perfect. "I had three surgeries in four months, and it put me out for two years," she notes. "I have a huge scar on my knee, and every time I look at it, I'm reminded of what I've been through. That makes me proud." She patiently began her journey once again, and again, she didn't make it: After

Nuts & Bolts Training of a Two-Sport Athlete

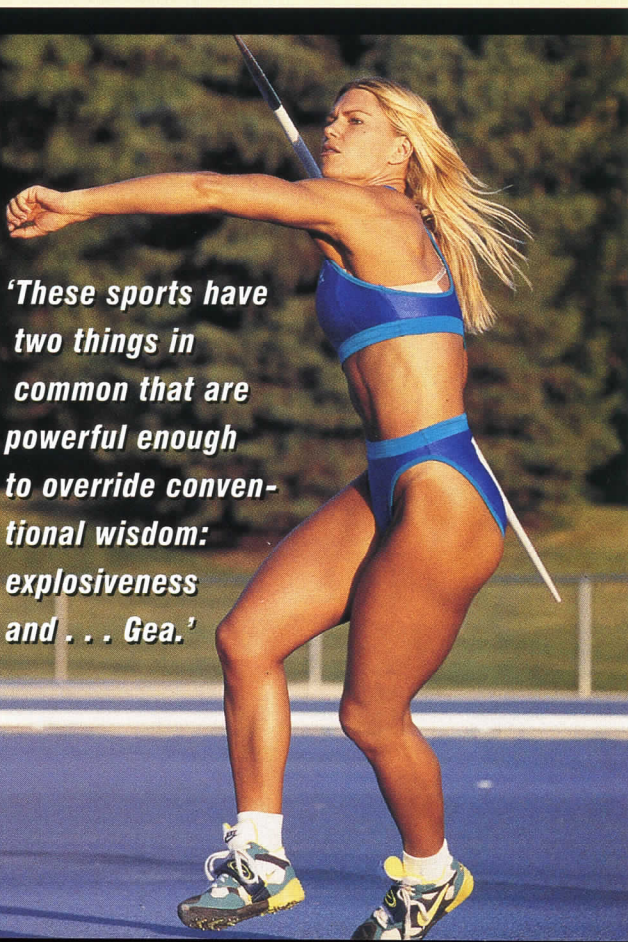
Whether you compete in Olympic lifting or the heptathlon, proper training is critical. Gea offers the following tips for both sports:

Olympic Lifting

- **Technique is paramount.** Work on going through each lift one step at a time, and break it down into first pull, second pull.
- Since Olympic lifting is very technical, **start with the bar only**, and go through the motions and movements. Learn how to do the lift correctly before adding weight. You'll be able to lift more in the long run if you get the technique down first.
- **Work with someone who has experience in Olympic lifting.** Also, read books and watch videotapes to learn how to do it right.
- Work on your **flexibility.** This will help your technique and prevent injury.

Heptathlon

- **For track-and-field athletes,** training in the weight room is vital. Power cleans and power snatches help with speed, explosiveness and the stretch reflex. Squats, military presses, pull-overs, incline presses, ab work, shoulder presses and hip flexor work are all necessary as well.
- **Get a good base by working on strength.** Do lots of drills. Get a good running base as well, then work event-specific activities.
- **Do an active warm-up** to get ready for your events. Don't forget to stretch afterward.
- **Keep everything in balance;** train everything equally, including your mind.



'These sports have two things in common that are powerful enough to override conventional wisdom: explosiveness and . . . Gea.'

'Having a bodybuilding background has helped me tremendously; bodybuilding is my roots.'



Gea's Weight-Room Workout Sampler

Bear in mind that Olympic lifters operate in a parallel universe to bodybuilders, with lower reps and a number of unfamiliar exercises.

The weights listed are in kilograms (to convert to pounds, multiply by 2.2). The designation 3/50 x 2 means three reps with 50 kilograms for two sets.

Gea always starts with an active warm-up and uses light weights to prepare for heavier lifts. The workouts don't list remedial exercises like weighted abdominal work and leg extensions, which are done at the end of each workout.

Day 1

| | |
|----------------|------------------------------------|
| Power Snatch | 3/45 x 2, 3/50 x 2, 2/60, 2/70 x 2 |
| Jerk | 2/60 x 2, 2/80 x 2, 3/90 x 2, 3/95 |
| Front Squat | 3/80 x 2, 3/100 x 2, 3/112 x 2 |
| Snatch Pull | 3/80 x 2, 3/90 x 2 |
| Speed Snatch | 3/45 x 3, 3/50 x 2 |
| Leg Curl | 15/50 x 4 |
| Back Extension | 15/25 x 6 |

Day 2: Rest

Day 3

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| Clean | 2/60 x 2, 2/80 x 2, 2/90, 2/100, 2/105 |
| Front Squat & Jerk | 2/60, 2/80, 2/90 x 4 |
| Clean Pull | 3/105 x 2, 3/110 x 2 |
| Speed Clean | 3/60 x 2, 3/65 x 2 |
| Back Extension | 15/25 x 6 |
| Front Quarter Squat | 5/300 x 2, 3/400 x 2, 3/450 x 2 |

Day 4: Rest

Day 5

| | |
|----------------|--|
| Squat | 3/80 x 2, 3/100 x 2, 3/110, 3/120, 3/130 x 2 |
| Military Press | 5/40 x 2, 5/45 x 2, 3/50 x 2 |
| Back Extension | 15/25 x 6 |
| Leg Curl | 15/50 x 4 |

Days 6 & 7: Rest



finally recovering from her ruptured patellar tendon, she tore the anterior cruciate ligament in her other knee.

But as she'd say herself, from adversity comes opportunity, and Gea's came in the form of Olympic weightlifting. Training to regain some of the muscle she lost during a subsequent nine-month bout with mono and to get stronger for her re-entry to track-and-field events, Gea went back to turning heads in the weight room. "Someone who'd been watching me told me that if I was going to lift, I might as well learn to do Olympic lifts," says Gea. "My first reaction was: 'No, I'm not a lifter. I'm a heptathlete.' But something changed somewhere along the line, and I ended up training for and making it to the Nationals. My first time up on the platform I did pretty well; I won three medals at the first Nationals and decided I really liked it. From there, I went on to win a gold and two silver medals at my first international competition, the NACACI games in El Salvador last December. It was really exciting since I haven't been in the sport very long."

Inside Gea's Mind . . .

What She's Thinking

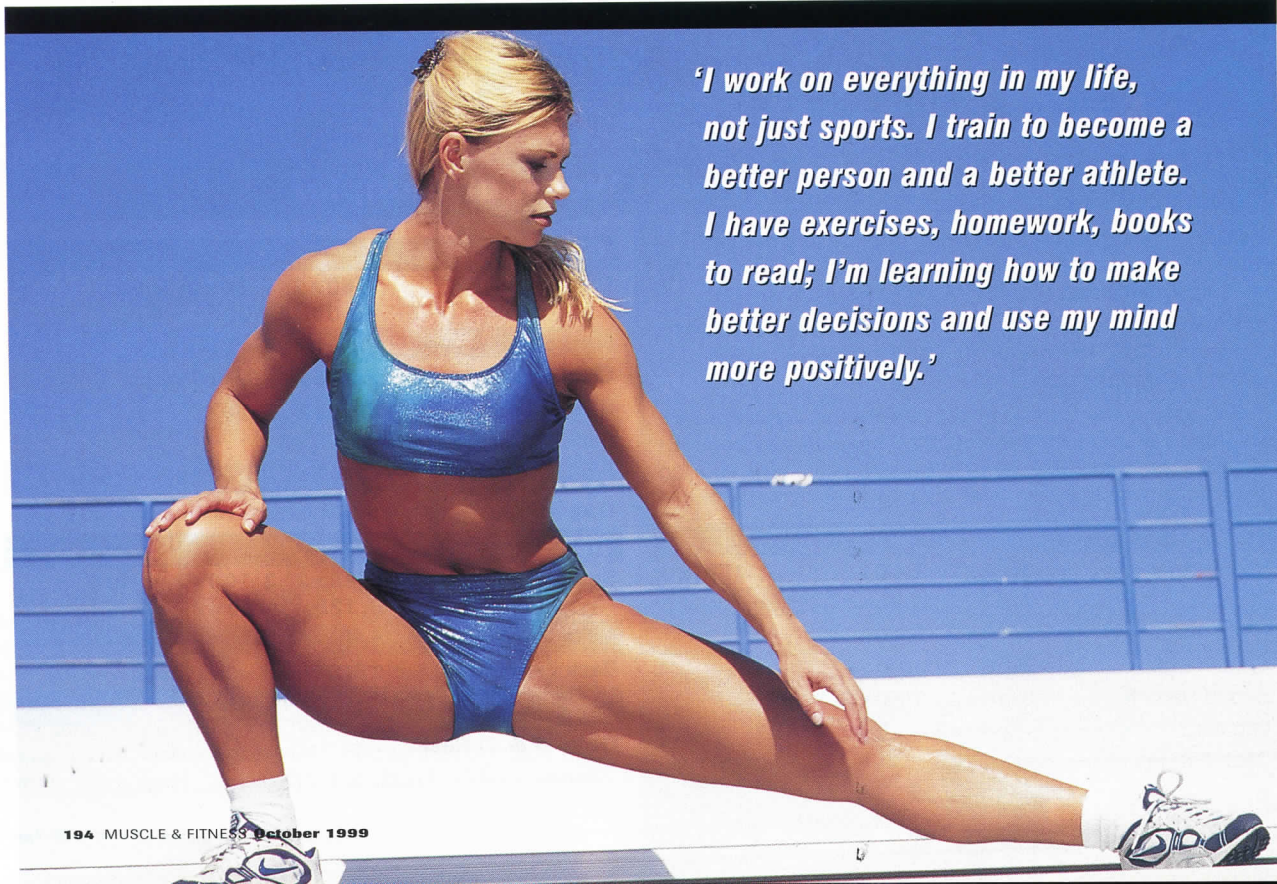
- Believe in yourself and your dreams.
- If you have a goal, see it in your mind.
- Be the best you can be. Don't let the world and other people limit you.
- Don't let your mind limit your body.
- Everybody has special talents and gifts. Discover what yours are and pursue them.
- Never quit. Never give up, and always believe in yourself.

Gold-Mettle Effort

Athletes around the world are struggling to make their Olympic teams in a single sport, and here's Gea looking to make it in two. How on earth does someone train to be the best in two different events with such uncommon training styles? Actually, these sports do have two things in common that are powerful enough to override conventional wisdom: explosiveness and . . . Gea.

"From about May to December of 1998, I focused on just Olympic weightlifting," she explains. "Now, I'm training solely as a heptathlete for the next year. Right now, my emphasis will be on the basics — strength, agility and speed work that will set me up for training in the events themselves. Since I'd usually lift three times a week for track anyway, I just replace Olympic lifting for the stuff I'd do for my heptathlon training."

She admits that going back and forth between the two training styles takes its toll. "My coach has the job of working out the details for me. I have to tone down the Olympic lifting and use it as a supplement to my track training. You lift for track and field, but not to the degree you would in Olympic lifting. Right now, my plans are to do the heptathlon in 2000 and weightlifting in 2004." *(Continued on page 220)*



'I work on everything in my life, not just sports. I train to become a better person and a better athlete. I have exercises, homework, books to read; I'm learning how to make better decisions and use my mind more positively.'

Golden Girl

(Continued from page 194)

But Gea hasn't given up the idea of competing in weightlifting events. "I'm constantly trying to find a balance," she states. "I dropped a weight class recently and actually did better [in Olympic lifting]. I can't be huge because I have to be lean to do the heptathlon. Lifting will supplement track and field, but it doesn't work the other way around. Yet it's all fast-twitch, explosive, stretch-reflex oriented movements. Hopefully, the two sports will cross over more," she adds with a smile.

The Secrets of a Champion

Gea finds that she can eat whatever she wants, but don't try this dream diet unless you're competitive in two Olympic sports. Neither should you misinterpret this approach as a complete disregard for aesthetics. "I may not eat to look a certain way, but I do eat for specific things, all relating ultimately to performance," Gea says. "If I'm trying to drop a weight class, for example, I'll reduce my carbs. I'm still learning, and the more I experiment, the better my chances of discovering what works best."

Gea used to wait for an hour or two after her workouts before she'd eat anything. Then she realized the

enhanced benefit of taking in calories immediately following a tough training session. "I love the Super Shake by American Body Building mostly because it tastes so good," says Gea, who is known to eat for taste when she can get away with it. "I also use Critical Mass, which is perfect for me because of its 2:1 ratio [protein:carbs], and Metaform's Hyperdrive 360." Additionally, Gea takes an enzyme supplement from Infinity2, for which she is also a spokesperson.

To keep on the cutting edge in mental training, Gea elicits the help of a coach. She explains: "At the top level, you also need to develop your mind. It's not like sports psychology; I work on everything in my life, not just sports. I train to become a better person and a better athlete. I have exercises, homework, books to read; I'm learning how to make better decisions and use my mind more positively."

Nothing has stopped Gea for very long in her quest to compete in the 2000 Olympics in Sydney, Australia. Yet she holds more than just the sight of a dream coming true in her heart; she celebrates the journey, the adventure of this thing called life.

"My ultimate goal is to win medals in both sports, but in my life, it's the path, the process it takes to get there. That's

what we learn from, how we become who we are. I feel that this is my purpose in life. I was given this talent, and it's my responsibility to give back to the world what was given to me. I hope what I do and have done will affect people in a positive way. Universal inspiration is the greatest gift."

Gea hopes to return to the fitness arena eventually, but not necessarily to compete. "I want to come back full circle to speak and teach the importance of health and fitness," she says. No doubt, she'll never forget the road she has traveled to get there. "Having a bodybuilding background has helped me tremendously; bodybuilding is my roots. I feel very fortunate to have helped pioneer fitness competitions. Hopefully it demonstrates that women can be tough, strong athletes, but still very feminine."

You do, Gea! **M&F**

To get in touch with Gea, call her manager Tom Branch at 801-553-1500 or e-mail him at TBranch@WebTV.net.

Fitness writer Michelle Basta Boubion is certified by the American Council on Exercise as a personal trainer and group-exercise instructor. After earning a degree in journalism, she decided to combine her two passions — fitness and writing. Jeff Everson, a former M&F editor, is also a former national Collegiate Olympic Weightlifting champion. He now has a national cable fitness show on The Knowledge Network called Everfit.

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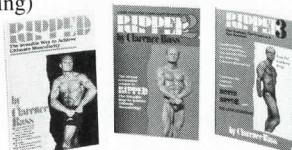
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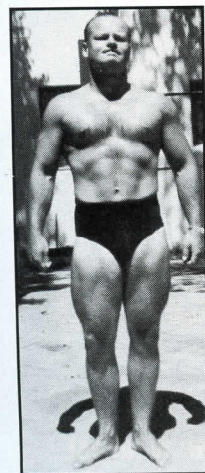
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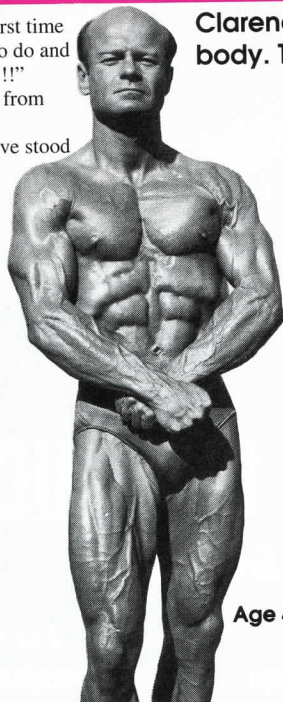
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