

## VITALS

**Words to Live by:** Always believe in yourself and your dreams; never give up.

**Place to Chill:** "I love north Scottsdale and the desert out here."

**Truth:** "There are no seats—it's just metal and fiberglass. My coach was like 'get in there—this is bobsledding!'"

# Gea Johnson FIRE AND ICE

**G**ea Johnson is so fast, the English language just can't keep up with her. If you saw Johnson at the Salt Lake Winter Olympics in 2002, then you remember her during the bobsled event as the "brakeman." That's because prior to Salt Lake, there was no Olympic bobsled event for women—and the term is still "female brakeman."

Johnson was already setting a high pace from the time she graduated summa cum laude from ASU, ranked as an NCAA top six most outstanding collegiate scholar athlete. Her event was the heptathlon, a seven discipline track-and-field event that she excelled in until knee problems and surgeries culminated in a career-ending injury in 2000. While such adversity might have halted most athletes, it actually accelerated Johnson's career as it brought her into the world of bobsled racing.

How did a native Arizonan make the transition into an athletic event that seems to be all about ice? "Most of the training is actually dry land

training, as far as just preparing and getting in shape," she explains. "My coach, Ian Danney, moved here from Edmonton, Can., and he has a facility in Scottsdale, so we do all of our lifting and running here."

Although she suffered a major hamstring injury at Salt Lake, Johnson is set to re-enter the arena she relishes. With extensive rehab and "more metal in my body" (as she wryly puts it) getting her back on the training track, she is now readying for bobsled trials later this year.

Meanwhile, she enjoys speaking engagements for community organizations around the Valley. "Along with my family and support group, Arizona has been so good to me," she notes. She will also share her undiminished Olympian enthusiasm as a commentator for Channel 12 during the August 2004 coverage of the Athens Summer Games.

—HAL PEAT