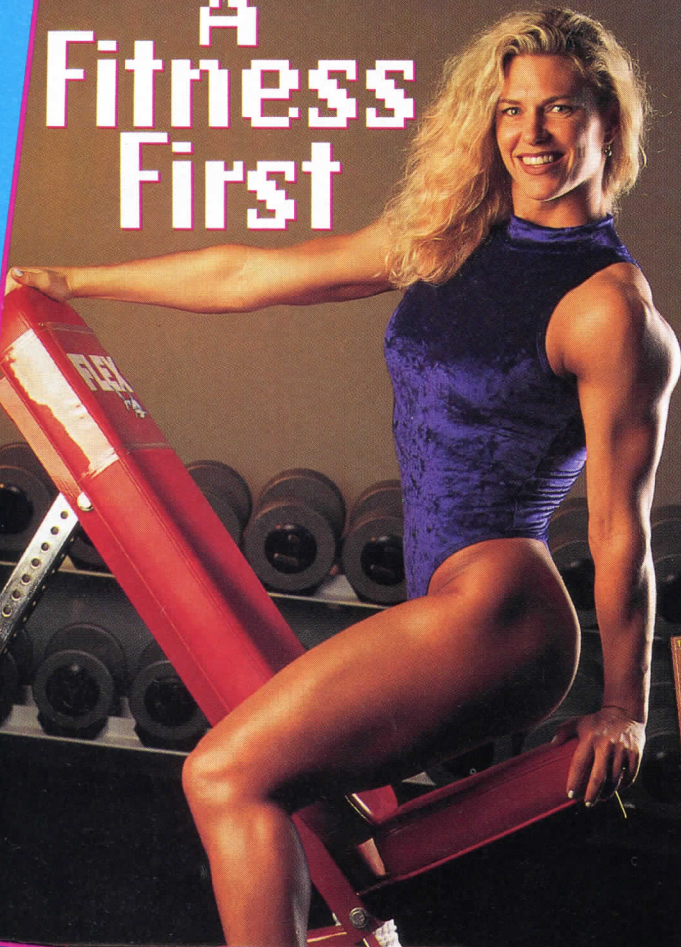


A Fitness First



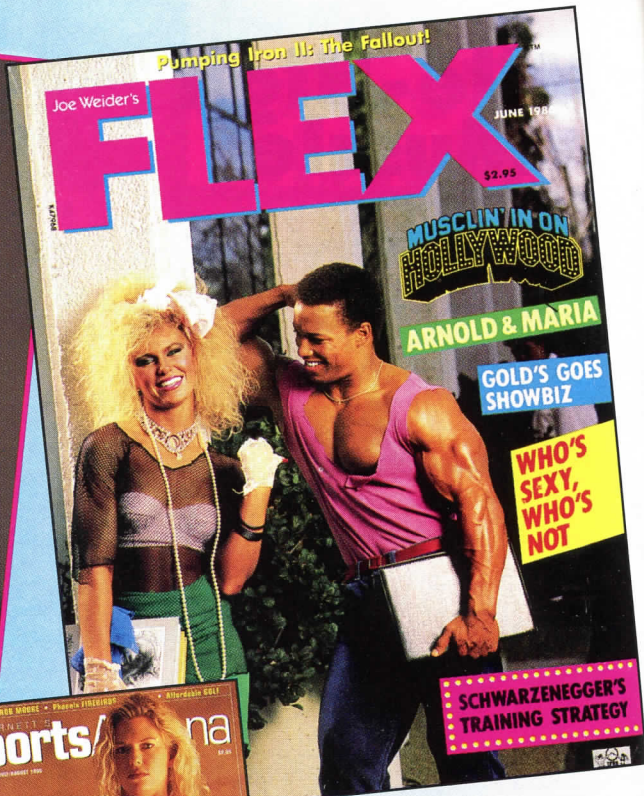
Most of us are quick to remember who first accomplished a notable feat: Sir Edmund Hillary was the first to conquer Mt. Everest. Roger Bannister ran the first sub-four-minute mile. Larry Scott and Rachel McLish are legendary as the first winners of the Mr. and Ms. Olympia titles.

You can put **Gea Johnson** into that elite did-it-first category. Though many fail to give her

proper credit, Johnson was the first fitness champion, winning the 1986 Ms. National Fitness contest at the Tropicana Hotel in Las Vegas.

Although capturing this title may not have seemed particularly monumental at the time, it's safe to say that Johnson paved the way for subsequent fitness competitors to flip, tumble and cartwheel their way to success.

At the time of her victory, Johnson was an 18-year-old high-school scholar/athlete from Tempe, Arizona. The editorial gurus at FLEX were so



inspired by this blonde beauty that they put her on the cover with an aspiring young bodybuilder by the name of Shawn Ray.

Since her debut in FLEX, she has appeared in many other magazines, including *Elle*, *Sports Illustrated* and *Runner's World*. Johnson's résumé as a track-and-field star is impressive:

She won the NCAA heptathlon and finished fourth at the 1990 Goodwill Games; she was the top-ranked heptathlete in 1989-90 and became an All-American in 1990; and she ranked second nationally in the event, trailing only Jackie Joyner-Kersey, from 1989 to 1993.

No slouch in the classroom, Johnson graduated from Arizona State University in 1991 with a 3.97 GPA in her major — organizational communication — and was named the most outstanding graduate from the Department of Communication.

Still competing in track and field with an eye on making the U.S. Olympic team in 2000, Johnson recently branched off into the exciting world of Olympic lifting. In her first National Weightlifting Championships, held this May, Johnson placed third in the 154-pound class, recording lifts of 100 kilos in the clean and jerk and 75 kilos in the snatch. Not too shabby, considering that she's been in the sport for only nine months.

"[Women's] Olympic lifting will be a recognized sport at the Olympic Games in 2000 and I feel I have a strong chance to make the team," says Johnson. "But I also feel I could make the Olympic team in track and field as a heptathlete. I'll need to make a decision about what direction I'm taking very soon so that I can concentrate on my preparation — regardless of which sport I select." **F**

Contact Steve Wennerstrom at P.O. Box 421431, San Diego CA 92142.

