

# INTERVIEW

## GUNDA FIONA VON BACHHAUS Team Germany with a US Passport Interviewed by Thomas Klose

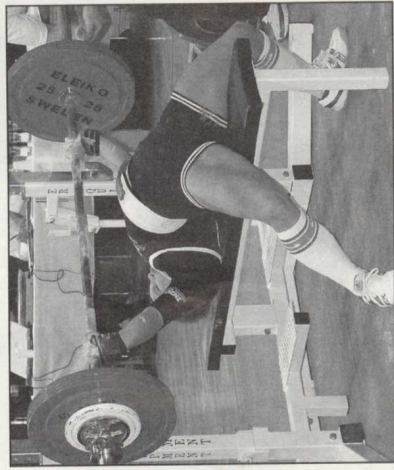
**B**eing involved in German Powerlifting for close to 25 years, I have met many of the best athletes over here. I consider Gunda von Bachhaus the most talented female athlete I have ever seen and hope you like the following interview that was done in early 2006.

**TK:** Gunda, as you are just back from the IPF bench Worlds, what was your impression of the meet and how do you feel about your performance?

**GB:** The World Bench Press Championships in Stockholm was the first international competition in the bench press for me. Stockholm is a very nice and interesting city. Our hotel was an exhibition center, and our competition was right there too, how comfortable!

The performances of the athletes were very stunning. I saw a lot of world record attempts and very strong weight classes. A lot of third attempts were so close together that the rankings were shuffled again and again. Most exciting was the men's 67.5 kg class. My buddy Markus Schick participated in this class. The first place clearly went to Oromon @ 230 kgs., but the lifters from second through fifth place all totaled 220 kgs. What a challenging class!

Concerning my own competition, I must say that I feel very proud and thankful, but I also have some feelings of regret. Let me explain. My third attempt was called invalid. Two of the referees decided that my stop at the chest was too short. When Markus objected and I was granted another attempt, three white lights and a silver medal rewarded my second chance. I was so happy and



Gunda's debut at the IPF Bench Press Worlds was quite auspicious.

thankful, but I also wished I could have performed more solidly and consistent, so I would not have needed more than three attempts to prove what I was capable of in the bench.

I met legendary Hiroiyuki Iragawa, whom my Dad introduced to me at the World Games of 1989 when I was a little girl. It was a great honor to talk to him, he is such a nice and helpful person. One of the most touching moments for me was to see him at his victory ceremony so emotional that his eyes were filled with tears.

**TK:** You competed for Team Germany at the World Games 2005. Have you noticed a boost for Powerlifting since then. I saw there were lots of media there to broadcast the event?

**GB:** Maybe yes. Powerlifting is quite unknown in Germany. In the States nearly everybody knows what a bench press is and it is likely that one trained squats during college football workouts. Recently I was asked to give a talk about powerlifting in my hometown. The woman inviting me explained me that my speech would be so interesting, because a lot of athletes of many sports ought to train with weights. I thought it was very insightful of her, and to me it is a great opportunity to present my sport.

**TK:** You lifted for Team Germany but you have an American passport. Please explain?

**GB:** I was born in Charlottesville, Virginia, USA. I was still a baby, in fact only seven weeks old, when our family moved to Germany. My brothers and I went to German schools and universities. Our family has German and American ancestors, so we feel equally grounded.

When Rudi Kuester, the National coach for the German junior team, came up to me and asked me if I was interested in competing in international meets, I was overwhelmed and felt honored to be asked. My Mother was German and became an American citizen later, but used to lift for the German National team as well. I was proud to follow in her footsteps.

**TK:** Your parents are considered Powerlifting pioneers in Germany. Please tell us a bit about this?

**GB:** Prior to 1981, when I was born, my parents trained and competed in the US. My father was a weightlifter at first, but became a powerlifter in the Sixties and knew so much about powerlifting's development, it's history, and the people involved. My mother just trained for fitness at first but after reading "Iron Man" or "Missland Fitness" that also women compete in powerlifting and visiting the first World Championships for women in Laurel, Mass., she directed her activities more towards powerlifting and became State Champion in Virginia. Pam Meister, and Terry Dillard were her

the guitar, and other sports. Wotan, my dog, and I enjoy taking long walks in the forests. Twice a week I play volleyball.

**TK:** What were your early activities? **GB:** When I was three years old I went to gymnastics in our local sport club, but when I was five, I did not want to go to sports anymore because the boys always pulled my long hair. My mother thought that I was gifted in sports so I had to do something. Ballet was decided as something for me to do. I did ballet until I was thirteen. My back certainly got strong doing it. "Your little back muscles stood out like cables!" I hear my Mom still say with amazement. "Your dresses were always hard to button in the back!" Most of the times I was out in the woods running around, climbing trees, jumping into over creeks. When I was thirteen I started to play handball, and that was a lot of fun. I was the fastest girl on the team, but still had to learn lots of tactics and tricks. Watching the Olympics on TV, Track and Field athletes like Carl Lewis, Jackie Joyner-Kersey and Michael Johnson hypnotized and thrilled me with their elegance, power, and speed. I fell in love with Track and Field and quit playing handball. My first track coach was very supportive of my interest, ambitions, and talent. A few weeks later I was sent to my first track meet, were I finished third. In the first year of track and field I participated in eighteen track meets and in thirteen of them I finished in first place. I was great. Training hard was great and fun, too. However, after two years of training for track and field I realized that though I was a quick learner and quite a fast runner, but I was not tall enough to run the real fast times and jump over great heights. My shot put was rather awful and so the idea began to grow that if I increased my strength, I could run, jump and throw better. My Dad showed me how to bench, squat, and do power cleans. My track & field got

better because of my workouts with weights. These workouts progressed much more than I expected, but I did not want to change sports. I never lost my excitement for track and field, but there were times when I did not enjoy my hard training. I was always the first and the last on the track. I was best in my club, but my coach was "hard and demanding on me while he was mild with the others. Back then I did not understand why he treated me that way. When I increased my workouts with weights further, my Dad suggested that I enter the State Championships in powerlifting. I did really well, 80 - 50 - 115 kg and no equipment. That was in 1998, and I was 17 years old.

**TK:** When did you start serious power training?

**GB:** As stated I did some weight training to improve my track & field abilities at first and could even win State Championships with this little bit of training. Nevertheless I still did not want to make Powerlifting my chosen sport. My love was Track & Field. I had to admit that I could reach further goals in Powerlifting than in Track and Field, due to my build and natural strength. So, little by little, Powerlifting became my priority. For a while I even trained Olympic Lifting. It

influence competitors before a race and I know how I can fire up myself to help me reach specific goals. Freshening up this knowledge once in a while helps me to understand and prepare my athletes better.

For eight years I have played volleyball in a club nearby. It is fun to train with friends and without an enormous pressure. I do not need to coach anyone. I do not have to prepare for a very important competition. It is very relaxing to train regularly like this. By doing all this running and jumping my fast twitch muscles get trained as well. They are important for Track and Field as well as for Powerlifting.

**TK:** Give us a breakdown on your training program.

**GB:** Three to four times a week I am in the gym. One of the workouts will be a powerlifting squat, alternating the width of my stance each set, the other is a front squat routine. Normally I follow the front squat with some sumo deadlifts.

**TK:** For six years I have been a coach for Track and Field. I stopped competing and training in this for a while because of the Powerlifting. However, I missed Track and Field so much, that I started running, throwing and deadlifting and head on up with the weights.

**GB:** Thanks Thomas. I really try hard to stay lean. I love to eat and I can't stop easily once I started.



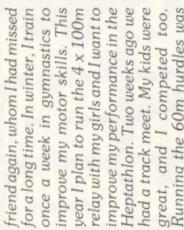
Gunda is a three lift performer

is a great sport! Such speed and perfection of technique is required, but after two years of snatches and cleans, I went back to powerlifting. My joints seemed too weak for the dynamic high impacts of the Olympic sport.

**TK:** I know that besides being a world class powerlifter you are still participating in other sports. Tell us about this.

**GB:** For six years I have been a coach for Track and Field. I stopped competing and training in this for a while because of the Powerlifting. However, I missed Track and Field so much, that I started running, throwing and deadlifting and head on up with the weights.

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Gunda with author Thomas Klose (left) and German Oler Flaminio

program for a day. I usually start with bench presses, somehow they are a good starter for the rest of the workout.

I always vary in my bench routine. Sometimes I warm up with dumbbells to train each side separately. After three heavy sets with the dumbbell press I bench another 3 heavy sets. One workout I press with a narrow grip, sometimes with Jump Stretch bands. The third bench workout is with a normal grip, but I do the first 5 warm-up sets with my feet on the bench. This way it makes everything a lot heavier than pressing with an arched back.

For all exercises I train three sets, deducting the warm-up sets. I call them work-sets. If there is no competition in sight each set will be completed with eight to twelve reps.

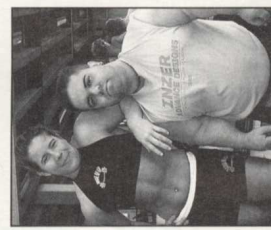
I add some assistance exercises too, like hamstring curls, lunges, leg press, flies, bent row, chin-ups, and abdominal exercises after the three lift workout. If I have time for a fourth workout of the week I only train weaker muscles like the rotator cuff that need some extra attention and I stretch a lot.

**TK:** You train with legendary benchmarker Markus Schick. Most know that he is a great benchmarker, but what is his influence as a coach.

**GB:** Naturally I have learned a great deal about the Bench Press from Markus. He also really supports me and believes in my abilities and I am grateful for this. However, I like it best and have best results when I am my own coach. A coach would never accept my other activities and would take the time of powerlifting too seriously. It is only a hobby for me, I do not earn money for being strong. A lot of my training routine is based on my own experience and on sport sciences I learned about at the university. It is good, however, to have someone to work out with who can push you to new limits and help avoid mistakes.

**TK:** You have an athletic appearance. Do you follow a special nutrition program to achieve this look?

**GB:** Thanks Thomas. I really try hard to stay lean. I love to eat and I can't stop easily once I started.



Gunda trains with Markus Schick

friend again, whom I had missed for a long time. In winter, I train once a week in gymnastics. This year I plan to run the 4 x 100m relay with my girls and I want to improve my performance in the Heptathlon. Two weeks ago we had a track meet. My kids were great, and I competed too. Running the 60m hurdles was fun. Performing and training in Track and Field makes me better. Coach as well, because I experience all the small things my kids are confronted with in a competition. I know how it is to feel nervous, I know how I can

influence competitors before a race and I know how I can fire up myself to help me reach specific goals. Freshening up this knowledge once in a while helps me to understand and prepare my athletes better.

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**HARDCORE  
INTENSITY!**



**STRENGTH TRAINING**

Strength training is a form of exercise that involves using resistance to build muscle mass and strength. It can be performed using free weights, machines, or resistance bands. Strength training is beneficial for improving bone density, metabolism, and overall health. It is also a key component of many fitness programs.

**RESISTANCE TRAINING**

Resistance training is a type of strength training that uses external resistance to create tension in the muscles. This tension causes the muscles to adapt and become stronger. Resistance training can be done with a variety of equipment, including dumbbells, barbells, and resistance bands.

**WEIGHT TRAINING**

Weight training is a form of resistance training that uses weights to provide resistance. It is a popular method for building muscle and strength. Weight training can be performed using free weights or machines. It is important to use proper form and technique to avoid injury.

**PULL-UPS**

Pull-ups are a compound exercise that targets the back, shoulders, and arms. They are a great way to build upper body strength and endurance. To perform a pull-up, you should grip a bar with your hands shoulder-width apart and pull your body up until your chin is over the bar.

**RESISTANCE BANDS**

Resistance bands are a versatile piece of equipment that can be used for a variety of exercises. They are a great way to add resistance to your workouts and improve your strength and flexibility. Resistance bands can be used for both strength and conditioning exercises.