

# Gill vs. breast cancer Continued from Page 1

Originally from Coos Bay, Gill played field hockey for Oregon State University, where she was a four-year letter winner. Being an all-around sports aficionado, this self-proclaimed dyke also competed in Amateur Softball Association games during the summers.

Incredibly, this accomplished powerlifter didn't become serious about the sport until she was in her 40s. Moreover, she did so on a dare.

Gill had been working out and lifting with a friend for more than 10 years, and when they went to the gym they would size up others pumping iron. "The mentality was like, 'Well, if you think you're so good, then why don't you do something about it?'" she remembers. "So we picked Vancouver [British Columbia] to be our first lifting meet. I figured I'd try it in another country first, so that way if I made a fool out of myself no one would know."

She had nothing to worry about. As part of Team Oregon at Vancouver's 1990 Gay Games—her first competition ever—the powerhouse took the gold medal in the Masters division for her weight class, which includes women between 40 and 50 years old.

"It was great and a lot of fun," she exclaims. "We were treated like celebrities in Vancouver, and after I got my medal I wore it around to show it off, of course."

After competing, Gill found she had a real passion for the sport—both the camaraderie and the challenge enticed her.

"One thing I love about lifting is it's one of the only sports that I know of where everyone cheers for you, no matter what," she says. "Lift-

ing is a competition between that individual and the weight. When you see someone struggling, you want them to win because you know what they're going through. It really makes for a close group of people."

Gill kept competing. At 1994's Gay Games in New York she placed third with a lift that was only 5 kilos less than the eventual winners.

"After New York my goal was to get better," she reveals. "And I'm usually pretty goal-oriented."

Within the next few years Gill took the powerlifting world by storm, not only winning a few prestigious international events but again striking gold at the '98 Gay Games in Amsterdam. However, this time she won in the Open division for her weight class. "I was competing with women 20 years younger," she beams.

Gill, who was in peak physical condition, was also equipped with an impeccable attitude. "I knew that if I was anyplace close, I would win. I was that confident. There's a lot of psychology involved. I've seen people talk about their injuries before lifting and then go out and fall apart."

Then in early 2000, Gill received the devastating diagnosis of breast cancer. She was told

it had already spread and immediately underwent surgery and began chemotherapy.

Gill did not want to stop lifting but knew she had to take the time to recover. "When you go through chemo, you lose a lot of energy. I attempted to do things, but it was just too hard."



Gill outlifts her competitors in New York

With rest and, most importantly, patience, she made a full recovery and began lifting again. Now she's gearing up for the November Gay Games in Sydney, Australia. She'll be competing in the Masters II division, which includes women ages 50 to 60 in the 165-pound-plus weight class.

"This one will be special because two years ago I didn't think that I would do it," Gill admits. "I'm still coming back from where I was, and I still get tired, but I think I have a good chance for gold.... I'm lifting against other women in their 50s, and I think I can beat them."

The great Vince Lombardi, coach of the Green Bay Packers, once said, "Mental toughness is essential to success." Gill appears to be the embodiment of this testament and is an inspiration to Team Oregon and, really, all athletes. But at this year's Games, while she is genuinely grateful for her recovery and to have the opportunity to compete again, the only thing she'll let you know is

that she thinks she can win. **JM**

The GAY GAMES VI SPORT & CULTURAL FESTIVAL is Oct. 25 to Nov. 9. For more information visit [www.sydney2002.org.au](http://www.sydney2002.org.au) or [www.teamoregonusa.com](http://www.teamoregonusa.com).

COURTNEY PERKINS is a Portland free-lance writer.

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