T H E C H A M P



Once you start singing the praises of Bev Francis, its hard to know when to stop. First of all, she's an amazing athlete. Good at almost any sport she's tried, worldclass at more than one. She's agile and well coordinated -- enough to have been a professional dancer at one point. But above all she's strong-enough to have been six times World Powerlifting Champion (1980-1985) and during that period, pound for pound the strongest woman in the world.

She's also bright, funny and a real straight shooter. If you come across anyone who knows Bev personally and doesn't like her, keep your distance. Something's wrong with that person.

Bev came to the attention of the bodybuilding world in 1983 when she was brought to the United States by George Butler to compete in the Pumping Iron II Contest that was staged and filmed in Las Vegas. There was still a lot of residual controversy back then regarding the muscular - versus-femininity question in bodybuilding for women.

Bev was still a powerlifter, of course, and had hardly trained for body building at all. At that time, she was thick and blocky, with little of the kind of proportion and symmetry associated with bodybuilding excellence -- exactly, in fact, the kind of physique that's required when you're in a sport that involves hoisting huge chunks of iron. And the presence of Bev in the film provided the kind of drama and tension the film makers were looking for.

But then Bev decided to pursue bodybuilding with the same seriousness and dedication she'd given to powerlifting. The result? In 1987, going up against lovely Anja Langer, Bev won the title of IFBB World Pro Professional Champion.

There was no question of her symmetry or aesthetic excellence. No controversy surrounded the outcome. Bev and Anja. as a matter of fact, were very evenly matched, with Bev pulling out the win largely by her stage presence.

Bev has since had excellent finishes in the Ms. Olympia -- she was third three times and finished second in 1990 but her taking the World Pro title in 1987 was a significant milestone in the sport. It was the day the controversy ended. When "may the best bodybuilder win" be came the rule ~ the day, rather than "we can't let the sport go in this direction," When the judges clearly opted for the aesthetics of bodybuilding over other and often irrelevant standards of female beauty.

It was a kind of revolution, and Bev Francis helped make it happen. But with everything else she's been able to accomplish in her life, we could hardly expect any less of her. -- Bill Dobbins