



LADIES FIRST

The reigning Fitness O,
Ms. O and Figure O
blast back and biceps



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You'll never mistake one for the other.

A talkative and hypermuscular African-American, a spirited and diminutive Latina and an unassuming and athletically slender Caucasian — when Iris Kyle, Adela Garcia and Nicole Wilkins-Lee team up for a back and biceps workout three months before their respective Olympia contests, it's as if Hollywood cast them in a summer action flick because of their attitudinal, physical and cultural diversity. And yet they share one crucial thing in common: each is a reigning Olympia winner preparing to defend her title (Kyle in bodybuilding, Garcia in fitness and Wilkins-Lee in figure). And, despite the fact that each employs a unique training style befitting her specific discipline, on this June day, they found common ground, trading sets and tips throughout a back and bi's workout worthy of three Olympia stars.



CONTRAST IN STYLES

Rachel McLish, Cory Everson and Lenda Murray are among the Ms. Olympias smiling down at them from the wall of fame in Gold's Gym Venice when Wilkins-Lee suggests the workout's first exercise: pullups. The others concur. Pullups regularly occupy the lead position in Wilkins-Lee's weekly back workouts, and she knocks out 10 fluid reps with an overhand, wider-than-shoulder-width grip. "They're a great way to stretch out the back and get you warmed up and ready to go," she explains.

As Kyle tightens her shoelaces, Garcia eggs her on: "Come on, Iris, let's go. We wanna see you doing pullups."

Kyle: "You wanna see me do one pullup."

Just out of the starting blocks, it's evident this workout will be a revealing contrast in styles. Wilkins-Lee does her reps quickly, while Kyle goes slow, holding each contraction. After four reps to the front, the bodybuilder knocks out eight more behind her neck, pausing for three to five seconds in up positions, so long it sometimes seems she's forgotten to lower herself. Garcia's pace is somewhere between the bodybuilder's and the figure competitor's, as she does 10 front pullups, pausing briefly at contractions.

By the third go-around, Kyle is offering encouragement on every rep: "There you go. Get up higher. That's it. All you, baby." Garcia and Wilkins-Lee also toss out words to fuel extra reps, but, for all three, the volume and vocabulary remains soothing and reassuring, as opposed to the shouts, insults and curses of male workouts we've documented in FLEX. What's the opposite of "Bloody Hell"?





DO IT DIFFERENTLY

Between exercises, Garcia sips some of Kyle's workout drink, and when Kyle hits a biceps shot, Garcia strikes one too. Wilkins-Lee joins in. Garcia kisses her right biceps, Hulk Hogan-style: "Yeah, baby." They all laugh. "I like that mirror there," Garcia notes.

"Oh, that mirror makes me not look so fat," Kyle agrees. "I still got a little hamstrings."

Far removed from the quarter turns of figure competition, Wilkins-Lee crunches a most-muscular for the mirror. All three crack up and crank out most-musculars.

Garcia: "Nicole, you look good. Did you see that?"

Kyle: "Oh yeah. I won't be stepping on a stage with you, woman."

Kyle selects the second exercise: one-arm dumbbell rows. Using a heavier dumbbell than the others, Kyle rows with her body elongated, one foot forward and the other back so far she's on her toes. Then, while gripping the dumbbell rack or a bench, she pulls the dumbbell from forward and down (under her shoulder) to backward and up (near her hip) and holds contractions.

In contrast, Wilkins-Lee keeps her feet closer together and pulls the dumbbell essentially up and down, staying more rigid and working faster. Garcia assumes a similar position, but her torso is more upright, and her pace is in between that of the other two. Each does it differently, but not incorrectly. They find the range of motion and speed they're comfortable with.

"I like that forward-to-backward motion," Kyle says. "It gives me that long stretch at the bottom, and then I can really contract all through my back at the top."

As the others go, Kyle encourages them: "Squeeze, good job, there you go, good job. Come on, mama. I like it. I like it a lot. You got some more in you."



GARCIA
 "I usually superset a lot for back, and I add some plyometrics. It's more athletic, with high reps and supersets, and combining some upper body plyo — which helps with the moves I do in my [fitness] routine. I rarely train b's."

GIVES AWAY A SECRET

It's Garcia's turn to pick an exercise, but, because Kyle is most concerned with maximizing muscle, the world's best fitness competitor asks the world's best female bodybuilder about her usual back workout. The five-time Ms. Olympia answers, "I'll start with pullups, and then I'll go right into pull-downs. But what I do with pull-downs is really three exercises in one. I'll do my heaviest set for 10, and then a medium set for 10, and then my lightest set for 10 [for 30-rep drop sets]. After that, I'll do my cables [cable rows]. And then I'll pick another exercise — maybe one-arm dumbbell rows or T-bar rows."

Garcia: "OK, so we'll do the bent-over [straight-arm] pull-downs, and then some cable rows."

Wilkins-Lee nods and asks Kyle, "Is that what you'd normally do?"

"I'm just trying to do some of my exercises, because one workout, I'll do bent-over rows and the next I'll do T-bar rows," Kyle answers. "I'm always switching up. One day, I'll do close-grip pull-downs, and the next I'll do them with a wide grip. One day, I'll do my rows overhand and the next underhand. And I always do deadlifts for this here." She points to her lower back. "Every [back] workout, deadlifts."

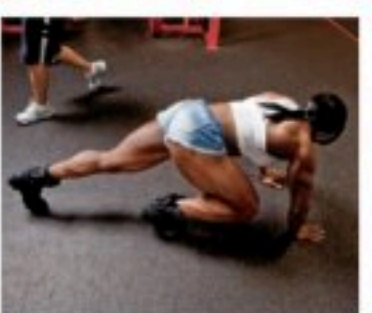
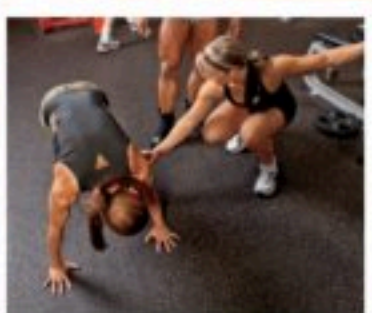
"Do you do hypers?" Garcia asks, using the slang term for back extensions, a.k.a. hyperextensions.

"Oh yeah, all the time for my hams and my glutes and my lower back. I love those," Kyle effuses.

"Those are one of my favorites too," Wilkins-Lee agrees.

Kyle gives away a secret for the phenomenal detailing in her rear shots: "Starting six weeks out, I do those pretty much every day for high reps."

KYLE
"I usually do more exercises and more sets. Deadlifts would be one, and either barbell rows or T-bar rows. I do five to seven exercises for back and I do six sets of each exercise, and I like higher reps — 15-20 per set. I'm a freak. I train for size and definition, and I train each bodypart twice a week."



FEELS GOOD, RIGHT?

The three women who won the most recent bodybuilding, fitness and figure Olympia and International contests walk to an overhead cable, from which dangles a straight bar. Taking a wider-than-shoulder-width grip, Garcia knocks out 15 reps of straight-arm pull-downs, keeping her butt back throughout and arching her back on contractions. Wilkins-Lee uses similar form but leans into her reps more and goes slightly faster.

This is not an exercise Kyle normally does, so Garcia coaches her. Using a heavier weight than the previous two, she stays slightly more upright than Wilkins-Lee, uses a slower pace and, as usual, holds contractions, flexing her lats.

Between sets, Garcia takes a gulp of Kyle's workout drink, which she had ear-

lier said tasted like a piña colada. This time, she convinces Wilkins-Lee to try it, and the figure champ nods her approval with a smile. "It's like dessert. Dessert during your workout."

Garcia makes her next set a drop set, 10 reps followed immediately by 10 with a lighter weight. Then, after Wilkins-Lee does her set with a closer grip (shoulder width), Kyle tries the same form.

Kyle: "Oh, I like this width. I like it." Wilkins-Lee: "Feels good, right?"

While Garcia knocks out her third and final set, Kyle lays out a steady stream of encouragement, instructing her to squeeze contractions and control the weight's descent: "Good job, mama. Squeeze. Control. And squeeze. Control. Squeeze. Control. Feeling those lats. Don't fly away from me, girl."

GARCIA, KYLE AND WILKINS-LEE BACK AND BICEPS WORKOUT

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS
Pullups	3	10-12
One-arm dumbbell rows	3	10-15
Straight-arm pull-downs	3	12-15
Low-cable rows	3	10-15
EZ-bar curls	3	10-12
Dumbbell curls	3	10-12
Hammer rope curls	3	10-15

KYLE'S STATS

BIRTHDATE August 22, 1974
BIRTHPLACE Benton Harbor, Michigan
CURRENT RESIDENCE Cypress, Texas
HEIGHT 5'6"
WEIGHT 160 pounds
CAREER HIGHLIGHTS 2004, 2006-2009 Ms. Olympia winner; 2001 Ms. Olympia heavyweight winner; 2004, 2006-2007 and 2010 Ms. International winner

I CAME TO WIN

Throughout the workout, Garcia and Wilkins-Lee have been discussing favorite exercises unique to fitness. When they mention one called mountain climbers, Kyle is as dumbfounded as you probably are. "What's that?"

Garcia demonstrates. With her toes and hands on the floor and hips up, she essentially runs in place horizontally. Kyle tries, but her hips are too low, and she goes in slow motion. Garcia cracks up, because, like jumping rope, the whole point is to rapidly move your legs. "OK, show me again," Kyle says. Garcia does, even faster than before, and Wilkins-Lee offers pointers. "Oh lord," Kyle exclaims. "I don't know about that one."



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Kyle is much more comfortable at the low cable row station, and after Wilkins-Lee does the first set, working quickly as usual, Kyle wraps straps around the V bar.

Garcia: "What is it, seven Olympias?"

"Six," Kyle answers, counting 2001, in which she won the heavyweight class, but lost the overall to Juliette Bergmann.

Garcia: "Well, you're going for number seven, right? Let's go! Let's go, you gotta win, Iris!" Again, Kyle goes slow and holds contraction. The reps are deliberate, with long stretches forward and a focus on pulling her elbows far back at contractions.

Per usual, Garcia's range of motion and rep speed falls somewhere between the tight rapidity of Wilkins-Lee and the elongated deliberateness of Kyle. She raps before her second set, throwing in the appropriate gangsta hand motions: "Pack it up, pack it in, let me begin, I came to win. That's what we gotta say when we go to the Olympia this year." And she repeats House of Pain's opening verse of "Jump Around," making it a mantra of sorts for the three champs, warning off all challengers.

GARCIA'S STATS

BIRTHDATE December 1, 1971
BIRTHPLACE Dominican Republic
CURRENT RESIDENCE Pflugerville, Texas
HEIGHT 5'1"
WEIGHT 110 pounds
CAREER HIGHLIGHTS 2004, 2006-2007 and 2009 Fitness Olympia winner; 2004-2006 and 2010 Figure International winner

SOMETHING TO SHOOT FOR

Earlier, while Garcia was repping out low cable rows, just after offering up her House of Pain rap, Kyle encouraged her by referencing Garcia's Fitness Olympia victories. "Five and counting, right? Five and counting. Number six. Number six." It's something to shoot for, but, as with her own tally, Kyle has generously added one to Garcia's total. On this day, Garcia is tied with Susie Curry for most Fitness Olympia titles: four. Even at 38, the Dominican-born, 5'1" dynamo has yet to show signs of slowing, so maybe she will get to six, but the record-breaking number five is the one she covets.

Likewise, maybe Kyle will top Lenda Murray's record of eight Ms. O wins, and even a double digit total seems possible before she hangs up her posing suit. This year will be her 12th appearance on the Olympia stage, but at 36, Kyle will still be a youngster in a sport where 50-something women win pro shows.

In comparison to today's workout partners, Wilkins-Lee is a relative newcomer, and yet she's already established her dominance. Maybe the 26-year-old beauty can top Davana Medina's three Figure Olympia crowns. And maybe she'll compete in fitness again. Winning begets winning. Their differences have been duly noted, but there's one more thing these O champs have in common. On this June day, three months before their respective Olympia



contests, all three seem unstoppable.

On the final reps of the final set of an historic workout that united the world's best in three fields, Garcia curls up the rope, splitting the ends at contractions to maximize the range of motion. Kyle tells her, "Light weight, baby. Ronnie Coleman. Light weight."

"Nothin' but a peanut," Garcia says.

"Apples and oranges," Kyle adds.

"Yeah, buddy," Wilkins-Lee says.

If you don't understand, don't worry. It's an Olympia thing. **FLEX**

WILKINS-LEE'S STATS

BIRTHDATE February 5, 1984

BIRTHPLACE Royal Oak, Michigan

CURRENT RESIDENCE Sterling Heights, Michigan

HEIGHT 5'5"

WEIGHT 127 pounds

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS 2010 Figure International winner; 2009 Figure Olympia winner; 2007 Team Universe Fitness Championships winner and Figure Nationals winner

ALL ABOUT THE FORM

Between back and biceps, after discussing their respective shoe collections, Garcia and Wilkins-Lee try to get Kyle to attempt a handstand pushup.

Wilkins-Lee: "I bet she could do it. What about a one-hand pushup?"

Garcia: "She can do those."

Kyle: "I'll probably break an arm."

Wilkins-Lee: "Try it. It's all about technique."

Kyle: "Let me see you do one first."

As one-arm pushups are one of the six mandatory moves of fitness, Garcia drops to the floor and knocks out a few easy reps. Kyle seems doubtful about her own one-arm prospects, for it's another exercise standard to fitness but foreign to bodybuilding.

Wilkins-Lee: "It's all about the form," Wilkins-Lee assures her, noting the legs-splayed technique.

Before getting egged into trying, it's time for Kyle's first set of biceps curls.

WHAT KILLS YOU

Kyle knocks out a dozen reps of EZ-bar curls, followed by Wilkins-Lee. Before Garcia's first set, she admits, "I don't usually train biceps. I train them whenever I feel like they're getting kinda small."

Wilkins-Lee: "I do them like every other week."

Kyle curls 60 while the other two use half as much, and by this time in the workout everyone is encouraging each other and helping with forced reps.

"Control on the way down, up and control, up and control," Kyle preaches, and she remains the most vocal. After all, forget the mountain climbers and one-arm pushups, she's most in her element with her hands wrapped around cold steel.

For their second exercise, Garcia leads with dumbbell curls. When Wilkins-Lee follows, alternating arms and supinating her wrists, Kyle tells her to keep her wrists straight throughout, holding the dumbbells with her palms facing forward even in the arms-down position. Supination is a



WILKINS-LEE
"Normally, I do about four or five exercises in my back workouts, and my rep range is between 12 and 20. I train back once a week, and biceps, usually, every other week."



function of the biceps, but no one is going to argue with the five-time Ms. Olympia. The reigning Figure Olympia winner does it Kyle's way, and, true to form, Kyle's palms face forward throughout her sets. She claims the supination action tires out her forearms before her biceps. She also curls both arms simultaneously instead of alternating them.

Kyle: "That negative is what kills you. You gotta really fight on the way down on every rep."

On her third and final set, Garcia alternates her arms and supinates her wrists, as if to say, I'll do it my way.

WONDER WOMAN

"I always wanted to be Wonder Woman," Garcia states. The iconic TV series aired from 1976-79, when Garcia and Kyle were kids but before Wilkins-Lee was born.

"Everyone did," Kyle agrees.

The Fitness O winner and Ms. O strike the forearms-up Wonder Woman pose, laughing, and the Figure O champ joins in.

"She's Wonder Woman," Garcia says, motioning to Wilkins-Lee. "She got her pro card in figure and fitness in the same show."

Wilkins-Lee won the overall fitness and figure titles at the 2007 Team Universe and

National Fitness Championships, becoming the first and only competitor in history to win overall titles — and, simultaneously, pro cards — in two divisions at the same contest. In 2008, she qualified for the Fitness Olympia, as well as the Figure O, and chose to compete only in the latter.

"That's incredible," Kyle effuses. "Just stay out of the bodybuilding part, OK?"

They all laugh. And by the time they get to their final exercise, rope hammer curls with a low cable, the wonder women, so different and yet each the best in the world at what they do, are joking between and sometimes during sets.