

Core of Duty

RISING FITNESS AND FIGURE PRO
NICOLE WILKINS SHOWS YOU HOW
TO SCULPT SHOWSTOPPING ABS

By Carey Rossi | Photos by Jim Purdum

“BRITNEY SPEARS IS EVERYWHERE, and as much as I hate to admit it, I always want to know what she’s doing now.” So says self-professed tabloid junkie Nicole Wilkins, which leads me to ask her what she thought of the pop princess’ appearance at the 2007 MTV Video Music Awards: Were her abs that bad? ♪ “I don’t think she should’ve worn that outfit, but I didn’t think she looked bad,” Nicole replies. “Her body is definitely better than average, especially after having two babies.”

SNAPSHOT

BIRTHDATE Feb. 5, 1984
CURRENT RESIDENCE Sterling Heights, Michigan
HEIGHT 5'5½"
WEIGHT 128 pounds contest, 140 off-season
OCCUPATION IFBB fitness and figure pro, co-owner of Top Shape Fitness Personal Training Studio in Sterling Heights, Michigan
CONTEST HIGHLIGHTS:
2008: New York Pro Fitness, 3rd; Figure International, 11th.
2007: Team Universe overall fitness and figure champion



I agree: Britney's choice of wardrobe could have been better. In fact, the black sequined bikini and fishnet combination was more appropriate for the fitness or figure stage — a place where Nicole herself is very comfortable. The 5'5½" dynamo earned her pro card in both divisions on the same stage at the 2007 Team Universe contest in New York City, marking the first time that a competitor has swept both overalls at the same national-level show — and the feat still stands as one of her proudest accomplishments.

Another gratifying achievement for Nicole? Her invitation to participate in the Figure International competition at the Arnold Schwarzenegger Sports Festival earlier this year. "I remember [in 2007] watching prejudging with Alan [her fiancé] and I said, 'I'm going to be on the stage next year — watch.' He just kind of smiled at me."

At the Figure International, where she made her professional debut, Nicole placed 11th. She didn't compete on the fitness side, but that doesn't mean she has abandoned the sport. "I'm going to do both," she promises. "At the professional level you can't cross over and do both at the same competition — you have to pick one or the other. My next contest is the New York Pro Fitness on April 12 [she finished third, which qualified her for the 2008 Fitness Olympia this fall], but I have a good time doing both."

When it comes to training, Nicole also takes a multifaceted approach. "All my workouts are different," she says. "I rarely do the same thing twice." Constantly changing her exercise order helps Nicole avoid hitting a plateau, and the modifications keep her from getting bored.

As for the routine presented here, it represents a typical ab workout she may perform. "I incorporate the upper and lower areas of the abdominals as well as



NICOLE'S 15-MINUTE AB ROUTINE

Exercise	Sets	Reps/Time
Plank	3	30 seconds
Exercise-Ball Pass With Leg Lift	3	15–20
Crunch on BOSU Ball	3	15–20 each side
Swimmer	3	15–20 each side
Figure Eight	3	30 seconds

TRAINING SPLIT

Day	Bodypart(s) trained/Routines
1	Shoulders
2	Chest, arms
3	Gymnastics
4	Legs
5	Back
6	Gymnastics
7	Off

Nicole usually trains abs and calves every other day, so she hits those about three times a week. She does cardio 5–7 days a week for 45 minutes, but she'll go as long as two hours when she's close to a contest.

PLANK

TARGET: Entire core musculature

START: Get on all fours on the floor with your forearms directly under your shoulders. Extend your legs and flex your feet so your toes touch the floor. Keeping your abs pulled in tight and your back flat, support your bodyweight on your forearms and toes. Your body should create a straight line from your shoulders to your heels.

MOVEMENT: Hold the position for 30 seconds. Lower your hips to the floor to rest, then repeat for reps.

NICOLE SAYS: "Keep your abs tight and your body in a straight line from your ears to your heels. The most common mistake is for people to pop their glutes up in the air."

HOLDING FORM

Stay tight by drawing your navel in toward the ceiling





A

EXERCISE-BALL PASS WITH LEG LIFT

TARGETS: Upper and lower abs

START: Lie faceup on the floor with your legs extended, holding an exercise ball overhead with your shoulder blades just off the floor.

MOVEMENT: Lift your legs and place the ball between your lower legs. Return to the floor; your torso remains still throughout the movement. Reverse the motion to return to the start and repeat for reps.

NICOLE SAYS: “It’s important to keep your back in contact with the floor during this exercise. If you find that your low back is arching off the floor or you’re losing the contraction in your abs, don’t lower your legs as far. It’s the contraction that’s important, not how far you can lower your legs.”



B

FULL COVERAGE
To further engage your upper abs, raise your torso off the floor as you transfer the ball



C

obliques in the same exercise,” Nicole explains. “During all of my abdominal routines, I train the upper and lower parts of the muscle as well as the obliques. I also added a back exercise near the end of this routine because you have to have a strong back to have a strong core. It’s extremely important so you reduce your risk of injury.”

Nicole also manipulates time during these workouts. Sometimes, instead of choosing a particular rep range, she’ll perform an exercise for 30 seconds for three sets; otherwise, she usually keeps her rep range pretty high — 20–30 reps. She’ll also toss in a weighted abdominal movement every once in a while to add depth to her abs.

“I was actually very fortunate because it took me only a few years to get my pro card,” Nicole says when asked about her quick rise to the professional ranks. “I know it has taken a lot longer for other girls, and although good genetics are important in this sport, you still have to put in a lot of work if you want to get your physique to look a certain way.” Yep, hard work can lead to a stage-worthy physique — Britney, take note. **hers**

CRUNCH ON BOSU BALL

TARGETS: Upper and lower abs

START: Lie faceup on the dome of a BOSU ball with your hands behind your head and your legs bent, feet on the floor.

MOVEMENT: Crunch straight up while bringing your right knee toward your chest. Reverse the motion and repeat with your left knee. Alternate legs for reps.

NICOLE SAYS: “Make sure your lower back is pressed into the dome and your abs are contracted throughout the movement. To avoid overextending or flexing your neck, pretend there’s a ball under your chin.”



LIGHT TOUCH

Make sure you don't pull on your neck on the way up



CONSTANTLY CHANGING HER EXERCISE ORDER HELPS NICOLE AVOID HITTING A PLATEAU OR GETTING BORED

SWIMMER

TARGET: Low back

START: Lie facedown on the floor with your arms extended overhead and legs straight.

MOVEMENT: Quickly lift your right arm and left leg, then immediately reverse the motion and repeat using the opposite arm and leg. This swimmer's motion is usually performed more quickly than standard reps are.

NICOLE SAYS: "Keep your head neutrally aligned throughout this movement. The impulse is to look forward, but you should maintain that straight spine and neck."

EASIER START

If the swimmer is too difficult, start by raising just your torso off the floor

A



B



FIGURE EIGHT

TARGET: Entire core musculature
START: Sit on the floor with your knees bent, holding a medicine ball in front of you. Lean back slightly and lift your feet off the floor.

MOVEMENT: Bring your left knee toward your chest while straightening your right leg. Pass the medicine ball under your left leg, then bend your right knee toward your chest while straightening your left leg. Pass the medicine ball under your right leg. Repeat for 30 seconds.

NICOLE SAYS: "If you have difficulty balancing on your glutes, touch the foot of the straight leg to the floor during the passes until you can develop that core strength and balance."

MAKING PROGRESS

As you become stronger, increase the time and weight of the ball for an added challenge



A



B