Nicole Wilkins Lee
How I Won the Figure Olympia

SNAPSHOT
Name: Nicole Wilkins Lee
Age: 32
Height: 5’11”
Weight: 125 Pounds
Birthplace: Royal Oak, Michigan

Current residence: Sterling Heights, Michigan
Career highlights: 2008 IFBB Figure Olympia Amateur, 1st Overall, 1st in fitness
Figure Championships, 1st IFBB Florida Show of Champions, and Figure National Championships, 1st overall

Muscle & Fitness Hers Jan/Feb 2010
Great competitors have that seemingly impossible intention that never quite the same. While they change, whether Nicole Wilkins Lee won over, she certainly seems to be o

On Sept. 25 in Las Vegas, Nicole made history by becoming the youngest competitor in IFBB history, the youngest to win the figure Olympia. In just her second year as a pro, the 25-year-old former gymnast put herself in position to set the sport's biggest title as a pro. The 25-year-old former gymnast put herself in position to set the sport's biggest title for figure competitions in 2018. But Nicole wasn't the only one to make history. She became the first amateur in the NPC, then the first pro in the NPC, then the first pro in the Olympia. But

The diet and training that made her a champion

BY BRAD McCRAY

PHOTOS BY MARC ROYCE
Great competitors change the game. They have that seemingly innate ability to raise expectations, and when they’re done, things are never quite the same. While it’s still too early to tell whether Nicole Wilkins Lee will do that in her sport, she certainly seems to be on the right track.

On Sept. 26 in Las Vegas, Nicole made history by becoming the youngest competitor in IFBB history to win the Figure Olympia. In just her second year as a pro, the 25-year-old former gymnast from Sterling Heights, Michigan, managed to win her sport’s biggest title and put herself in position to set the standard for figure competitions in the foreseeable future.

And although Nicole wasn’t the odds-on favorite entering the Olympia, the signs were there: most notably, the first time she made history as an amateur in 2007 by becoming the first NPC competitor to win her pro card in both fitness and figure in the same contest.

So yes, she has always been good. But this year, due in large part to a few specific changes in her training program, Nicole managed to go from good to great, starting with her first professional win last April and culminating with her Olympia win.

“My first year competing as a pro, I really didn’t know what to compare myself to because I had never been onstage against the other girls,” Nicole says. “So I just did the best I could. This year, I knew what I needed to do, and everything came together to help me look the best I ever have.”

Here’s how she did it.

CHANGING HER GAME

FOUR KEY CHANGES TO NICOLE’S NEW AND IMPROVED PHYSIQUE

1. SHOULDERING THE LOAD.
   Feeling the need to round out her delts for an improved shoulder-to-waist ratio (already a strength), Nicole trained shoulders twice a week, alternating light and heavy days. “The benefit of working shoulders is to create the illusion of width,” Nicole explains. “Paired with a small waist, [muscular delts] lend symmetry to your physique.”

2. GETTING A LEG UP.
   “My legs used to be too big for my upper body,” she admits. “Most of the changes I made this year were geared toward lean- ing out my lower half.” So Nicole increased the number of plyometric movements she performed during leg training.

3. EAT RIGHT, BE TIGHT.
   It takes an ultra-strict diet to get in shape for the Olympia. Nicole started eating clean in the off-season, which helped her keep her weight down and allowed her to come in tighter and leaner at contest time.

4. POUNDING THE PAVEMENT.
   Nicole added outdoor distance running to her cardio routine, in addition to increasing overall cardio time. “I started implementing outdoor running this year. I had two knee surgeries in high school, so I didn’t run much before.”

SNAPSHOT

Name: Nicole Wilkins Lee
Age: 25
Height: 5’5’’
Weight: 125 pounds
Birthplace: Royal Oak, Michigan

Current residence: Sterling Heights, Michigan
Career highlights: 2009: Figure Olympia, 1st; New York Pro Figure Championships, 1st; Orlando Show of Champions, figure, 1st. 2007: Team Universe Fitness Championships and Figure National Championships, 1st overall
1. **SHOULDERING THE LOAD**

**THE PLAN:** Train delts twice a week, alternating heavy and light days.

**THE REASON:** “I wanted to give my physique more balance by making my shoulders nice and round.”

**THE WORKOUT:** “I always do a press, and front, lateral and rear movements. Rest for as long as it takes you to complete a set, about 45 seconds.”

**MIX IT UP:** “Light days are higher reps, about 30.”

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**SAMPLE HEAVY SHOULDER DAY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXERCISE</th>
<th>SETS</th>
<th>REPS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plate Front Raise</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Standing One-Arm Overhead Press</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12–15 per arm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lying Lateral Raise</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12–15 per arm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seated Reverse Cable Flye</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12–15</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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**Plate Front Raise**

**Get Ready:** Stand erect and grasp a weight plate with both hands as you would a steering wheel in front of your thighs.

**Go:** Keeping a slight bend in your elbows, raise the plate to about eye level, then lower slowly to the start position.

**Alternatives:** Dumbbell front raise, one-arm cable front raise, barbell front raise

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**Standing One-Arm Overhead Press**

**Get Ready:** Stand erect and grasp a dumbbell in one hand. Hold it at about ear level with your upper arm parallel to the floor, palm facing forward.

**Go:** Extend your arm toward the ceiling and overhead, leaving a slight bend in your elbow at the top of the movement. Lower the weight slowly. Repeat for reps, then switch arms.

**Alternatives:** Seated military press, machine overhead press, band overhead press

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**NICOLE SAYS:**

“There are a lot of variations. Try them all to keep your body from hitting a plateau.”

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**OLYMPIA-Winning PERKS**

Being at the top has its advantages. Nicole proved that last fall when she signed two endorsement deals in the weeks following her Figure Olympia win: She became one of very few female competitors to sign a publication contract with Weider Publications and inked a multiyear supplement contract with Nutrigenix.

“It’s such a great feeling to have all the years of hard work pay off,” she says. “Never did I think all of this would happen when I began competing in 2003. Winning the Figure Olympia was a dream, and then to be signed by Weider and Nutrigenix in the same month, I’m still trying to soak it all in. It’s very surreal.”
Lying Lateral Raise
Get Ready: Lie on one side on an incline bench set at a 30-degree angle, with your knees together on the seat. Grasp a dumbbell at your hip, palm facing down.
Go: Lift the weight out to your side in an arc until your hand is in line with your shoulder. Slowly lower the dumbbell to just above your hip. Repeat for reps, then switch arms.
Alternatives: Standing lateral raise, band lateral raise, leaning one-arm lateral raise

Seated Reverse Cable Flye
Get Ready: Sit on the floor between two high-pulley cable stations. Reach both hands across your body to grasp the opposite handles. Start with your arms at shoulder level, palms facing down.
Go: With your arms extended but elbows bent slightly, pull your elbows back and down in a wide arc behind you. At the end of the rep, your upper arms should be parallel to the floor. Maintaining the same bend in your elbows, return along the same path to the start position.
Alternatives: Bent-over lateral raise, reverse pec-deck flye, high-cable row

Nicole says: “Make sure your hand doesn’t go above your shoulder, because that takes the load off the middle delt.”

Nicole says: “This is a great exercise to isolate the lateral head of the shoulder because there’s no way to cheat.”

Nicole says: “Lead with your elbows and pull the handles back so your hands are in line with your shoulders.”

Muscle & Fitness Hers readers will see more of Nicole in coming months, as she’ll begin her column in the Mar/Apr issue. Nicole is currently answering questions on the Muscle & Fitness Hers message boards, so log on to muscleandfitnesshers.com and ask away!
2. GETTING A **LEGG UP**

**THE PLAN:** Lean out your legs while maintaining muscle.

**THE REASON:** “I’ve always had very muscular legs, so this style of training not only helped lean out my lower half but also increased my endurance. It’s more of a total-body workout. Rest for as long as it takes to do a set. These are advanced moves, so you definitely need to warm up beforehand.”

**THE WORKOUT:** A heavy dose of plyometric movements, where the muscle is loaded, then contracted in rapid sequence

**START SLOW:** “Beginners should do strength-training exercises before they jump into plyometric moves.”

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**Medicine-Ball Bound**

**Get Ready:** Begin in a squat position with your feet about shoulder-width apart, eyes forward and back arched slightly. Hold a medicine ball in front of your chest with both hands.

**Go:** Pushing through your heels, jump up and out as far as you can. As you jump, extend your arms overhead. Lower the ball in front of your chest as you return to the floor.

**For Beginners:** Medicine-ball squats or bounds without a medicine ball

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**Traveling Split Squat**

**Get Ready:** Stand erect with your feet together, then step forward with one foot and descend into a lunge, keeping your front thigh parallel to the floor. Don’t lean forward.

**Go:** Jump forward by pushing off with both feet. Switch legs in the air so you land with the opposite leg in front. Repeat and continue to move forward, or do in place.

**For Beginners:** Walking lunges
**SAMPLE LEG DAY**

Warm up for 5–7 minutes on the treadmill.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXERCISE</th>
<th>SETS</th>
<th>REPS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Medicine-Ball Bound</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15–20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Traveling Split Squat</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15 per leg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOSU One-Leg Glute Raise</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20–30 per leg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Band Side-Step Jump</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15 per leg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOSU Stiff-Legged Deadlift</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15–20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**BOSU One-Leg Glute Raise**

*Get Ready:* Lie faceup on the floor with a BOSU ball close to your glutes. Place one heel on the ball and lift the other so it’s perpendicular to the floor. 

*Go:* Press your foot into the ball and raise your lifted leg as high as you can. Slowly return to the start position, stopping inches from the floor. 

*For Beginners:* See “Nicole Says” at right.

**BOSU Stiff-Legged Deadlift**

*Get Ready:* Flip a BOSU ball upside down, and stand on it with your feet slightly outside shoulder width. Grasp a medicine ball and lift it overhead. 

*Go:* Keeping your knees slightly bent, your back straight and the medicine ball overhead, bend at the hips until your upper body is parallel to the floor and lower the ball so your arms are hanging straight down. Keeping your back flat, return to the start position with the ball overhead. 

*For Beginners:* Stand on the floor instead of the BOSU.

**Band Side-Step Jump**

*Get Ready:* Secure a band around your ankles and stand erect with your feet shoulder-width apart and your hands in the “ready” position. Descend into a squat. 

*Go:* While squatting, step to your left, bring your feet together and jump as high as you can, extending your arms overhead. Squat as you land. Repeat for reps, then switch sides. 

*For Beginners:* Side steps without jump

Nicole Says:

“This advanced variation works the hams and glutes along with the stabilizers and calves.”

Nicole Says:

“You want to be quick. Jump as soon as your legs come together. Don’t lock out your knees when you land; make sure they’re bent.”

Go to muscleandfitnesshers.com for video tips of selected exercises!
### 3. EAT RIGHT, BE TIGHT

Below is a sample daily meal plan similar to what Nicole used 12 weeks before the Figure Olympia. Foods will vary, but the most significant change is in how Nicole cycles her carb intake during the course of the program. “Carbohydrates get pretty low toward the end, depending on how things are shaping up,” she says. “I cycle my carbs so I don’t hit a plateau and my bodyfat continues to decrease.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PROTEIN</th>
<th>CARBS</th>
<th>FAT</th>
<th>CALORIES</th>
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<tr>
<td>5 egg whites, scrambled</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>85</td>
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<tr>
<td>½ cup oatmeal</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>27.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 egg whites, scrambled</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 oz. ground turkey</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>90</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 Tbsp. salsa</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>160</td>
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<td><strong>1:30 P.M.: LUNCH</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>4 oz. chicken breast</td>
<td>35.2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>187</td>
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<tr>
<td>⅛ cup brown rice</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>165</td>
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<tr>
<td>Salad + tomato + onion</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>49</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Tbsp. balsamic vinegar</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>44</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>401</td>
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<td>4 oz. turkey breast</td>
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<tr>
<td>15 plain almonds</td>
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<td>1 Tbsp. natural peanut butter</td>
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<td>1 scoop whey protein</td>
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<td>7-inch corn tortilla</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>45</td>
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<tr>
<td>Salad + tomato + onion</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>14.25</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>73.50</td>
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<td>1 Tbsp. balsamic vinegar</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
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<td>31.27</td>
<td>6.89</td>
<td>390.54</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>9 P.M.: SNACK</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1 scoop casein protein</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 cup strawberries</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>60</td>
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<td><strong>DAILY TOTAL:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>PERCENT TOTAL CALORIES:</strong></td>
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</table>

Nicole says: “I eat breakfast after cardio. After an overnight fast, glycogen, blood glucose and insulin levels are low, which makes this the best time for burning fat.”

Nicole says: “Not only does salsa taste good, but it’s also a great source of lycopene, an antioxidant that protects against cardiovascular disease and cancer. It does contain sodium, however, so I cut it the week before a show.”

Nicole says: “It’s important to keep some fats in my diet. I take out the peanut butter about six weeks out to create a calorie deficit, so I can continue to see results as the show gets closer. If my weight drops too much, I add fats in accordingly.”

Nicole says: “I remove all sugar from my diet 6–8 weeks out. Strawberries contain fructose, which is a simple sugar, and sugars can inhibit fat loss.”

Nicole says: “Since casein is a slow-digesting protein, I won’t lose any muscle while I sleep if I have a shake before bed.”

Nicole says: “Six weeks out, I eat brown rice every other day. Two weeks out, I drop that to every 2–3 days.”

Nicole says: “I alternate between green beans, broccoli and zucchini. The week before a show, I eat only asparagus as my vegetable because it’s a natural diuretic, meaning it’ll help me get rid of any excess water.”

Nicole says: “I eat breakfast after cardio. After an overnight fast, glycogen, blood glucose and insulin levels are low, which makes this the best time for burning fat.”
4. **POUNDING THE PAVEMENT**

**THE PLAN:** Combine outdoor distance running (endurance) with high-intensity interval training (HIIT).

**FREQUENCY:** Once a day, six days a week, Weeks 13–10; 1–2 times per day, seven days a week, Weeks 9 to contest

**THE REASON:** “Running was the No. 1 cardio I did. Normally I’d do only one session per day, whether it was HIIT or long-distance. I never did HIIT on plyometrics day because plyo is already a high-intensity workout.”

**HIIT IT:** Alternate between high-intensity cardio such as running and low-intensity cardio such as walking or even complete rest. The best way to do HIIT is at a ratio of 2:1 of high to low intensity. For example, run fast for one minute, then walk slowly for 30 seconds. Repeat pattern for a set amount of time.

**START SLOW:** Outdoor, treadmill and incline treadmill running, and elliptical trainer or StepMill for 4–6 miles in 45–55 minutes.

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**WEEKS 13–10:** Six days a week, 45 minutes (a.m.)

**WEEKS 9–7:** Seven days a week, 30 minutes (a.m.)/30 minutes (p.m.)

**WEEKS 6–5:** Seven days a week, 35 minutes (a.m.)/35 minutes (p.m.)

**WEEKS 4–2:** Seven days a week, 45 minutes (a.m.)/45–55 minutes (p.m.)

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**NICOLE’S SAMPLE MINIMUM CARDIO SPLIT**
(One session per day, six days a week)

- **MONDAY:** 25 minutes HIIT, 20 minutes distance
- **TUESDAY:** 45–55 minutes distance
- **WEDNESDAY:** 25 minutes HIIT, 20 minutes distance
- **THURSDAY:** 45–55 minutes distance
- **FRIDAY:** 25 minutes HIIT, 20 minutes distance
- **SATURDAY:** 45–55 minutes distance
- **SUNDAY:** Off

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**NICOLE’S SAMPLE MAXIMUM CARDIO SPLIT**
(Two sessions per day, seven days a week)

- **MONDAY:** 25 minutes HIIT, 20 minutes distance (a.m.); 45 minutes distance (p.m.)
- **TUESDAY:** 45 minutes distance (a.m.); 45 minutes distance (p.m.)
- **WEDNESDAY:** 25 minutes HIIT, 20 minutes distance (a.m.); 45 minutes distance (p.m.)
- **THURSDAY:** 45 minutes distance (a.m.); 55 minutes distance (p.m.)
- **FRIDAY:** 25 minutes HIIT, 20 minutes distance (a.m.); 45 minutes distance (p.m.)
- **SATURDAY:** 45 minutes distance (a.m.); 45 minutes distance (p.m.)
- **SUNDAY:** 25 minutes HIIT, 20 minutes distance (a.m.); 45 minutes distance (p.m.) **hers**