

# Nicole Wilkins Lee How I Won the Figure Olympia



at the stand-  
the fore-  
And altho-  
on favorite en-  
signs were there: i  
time she made history  
2007 by becoming the  
editor to win her pro card  
ness and figure in the same con-  
So yes, she has always been good  
this year, due in large part to a few sp-  
cific 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.

## SNAPSHOT

Name: Nicole Wilkins Lee  
Age: 25  
Height: 5'5½"  
Weight: 125 pounds  
Birthplace: Royal Oak, Michigan

MUSCLE & FITNESS **hers** JAN/FEB 2010

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

DAY	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Shoulders	Abs	Back, biceps	Shoulders (light)	Chest	Legs	Off
Nicole typically alternates training biceps and triceps every other week.							

in-  
person  
informa-  
nicolewilkinslee.com



Great competitors...  
They have that seemingly  
expectations, and when they  
never quite the same. While it's  
whether Nicole Wilkins Lee won  
sport, she certainly seems to be o

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 gym-  
nast 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.  
Though Nicole wasn't the odds-  
on favorite, she was notably the first  
NPC competitor to win both the  
title and the NPC competition. But

bodyparts) TRAINED  
hers (heavy) triceps

The diet and  
training that  
made her  
a champion

BY BRAD McCRAY

PHOTOS BY MARC ROYCE

# GREAT

## 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.



DAY	BODYPART(S) TRAINED
1	Shoulders (heavy), triceps
2	Abs
3	Back, biceps
4	Shoulders (light)
5	Chest
6	Legs
7	Off

Nicole typically alternates training biceps and triceps every other week.

## 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 leaning 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:** 5'5½"  
**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

Nicole is available for in-person and online personal training. For more information, go to [nicolewilkins.com](http://nicolewilkins.com)





# 1. SHOULDERING THE LOAD

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

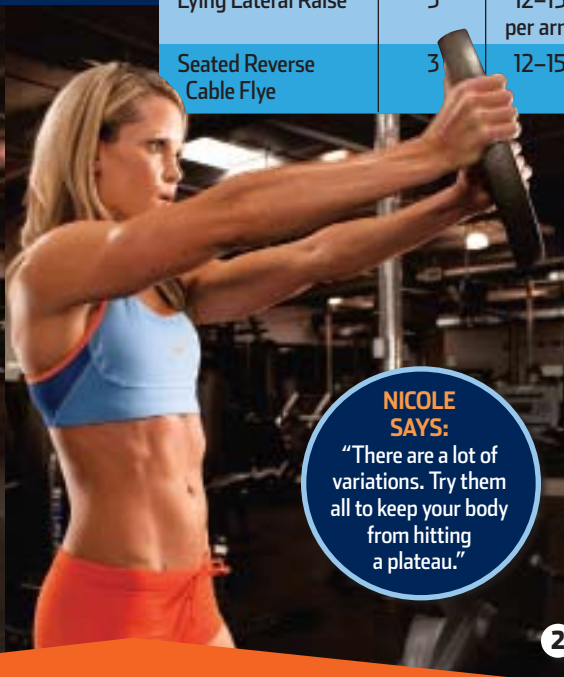
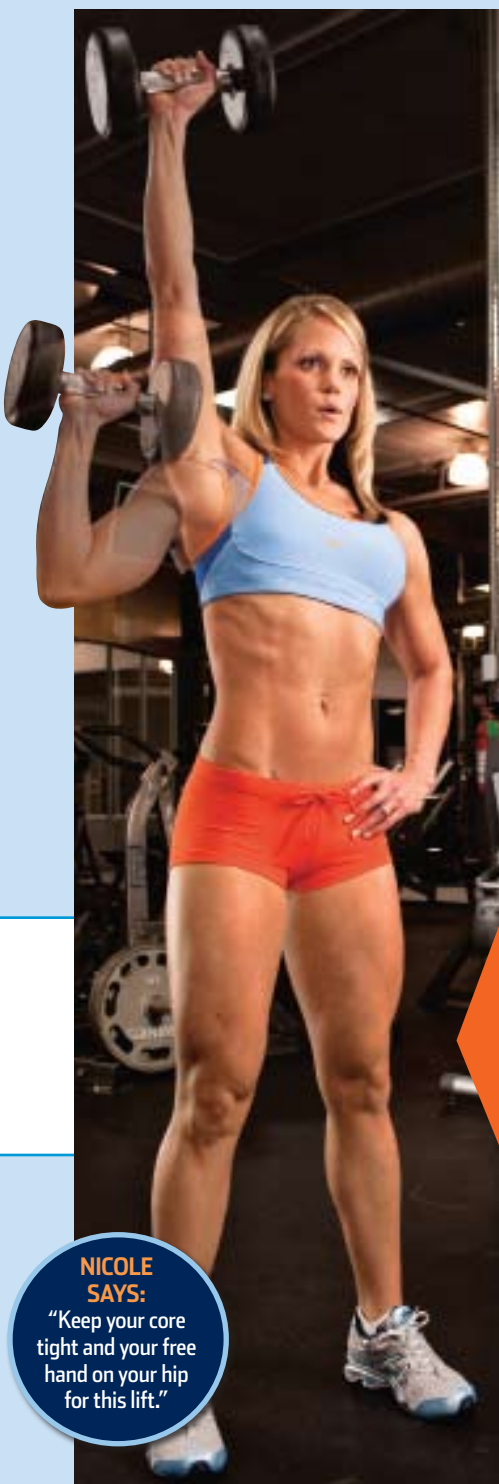
**THE REASON:** "I wanted to give my physique more balance by making my shoulders nice and round."

**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."

## SAMPLE HEAVY SHOULDER DAY

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS
Plate Front Raise	3	12-15
Standing One-Arm Overhead Press	3	12-15 per arm
Lying Lateral Raise	3	12-15 per arm
Seated Reverse Cable Flye	3	12-15



**NICOLE SAYS:**  
"There are a lot of variations. Try them all to keep your body from hitting a plateau."

### 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

### 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

## OLYMPIA-WINNING PERKS

**NICOLE SAYS:**  
"Keep your core tight and your free hand on your hip for this lift."

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



1

**NICOLE SAYS:**

"This is a great exercise to isolate the lateral head of the shoulder because there's no way to cheat."

2



**NICOLE SAYS:**

"Make sure your hand doesn't go above your shoulder, because that takes the load off the middle delt."



1

**NICOLE SAYS:**

"Lead with your elbows and pull the handles back so your hands are in line with your shoulders."



2

## Seated Reverse Cable Fly

**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



### 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](http://muscleandfitnesshers.com) and ask away!



## 2. GETTING A LEG 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."



1



2



3

### 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



#### NICOLE SAYS:

"Be very fluid when you land and spring right back up. You shouldn't spend more than one second on the floor."

### 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

#### NICOLE SAYS:

"Pause for a second before each leap — it's harder that way. You want to be like a spring."

## SAMPLE LEG DAY

Warm up for 5–7 minutes on the treadmill.

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS
Medicine-Ball Bound	3	15–20
Traveling Split Squat	3	15 per leg
BOSU One-Leg Glute Raise	3	20–30 per leg
Band Side-Step Jump	3	15 per leg
BOSU Stiff-Legged Deadlift	3	15–20

### NICOLE SAYS:

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



## 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.



### NICOLE SAYS:

"This can be a beginner or advanced exercise. The higher your foot is on the ball, the harder it is. To add difficulty, wear ankle weights."

## 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:

"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](http://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."



IAN LOGAN

		PROTEIN	CARBS	FAT	CALORIES	
<b>NICOLE SAYS:</b> "I eat breakfast after cardio. After an over-night fast, glycogen, blood glucose and insulin levels are low, which makes this the best time for burning fat."	<b>7:30 A.M.: BREAKFAST</b>					<b>NICOLE SAYS:</b> "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."
	5 egg whites, scrambled	17.5	1.5	0	85	
	1/2 cup oatmeal	5	26	3	140	
	<b>Totals:</b>	<b>22.5</b>	<b>27.5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>225</b>	
<b>NICOLE SAYS:</b> "Six weeks out, I eat brown rice every other day. Two weeks out, I drop that to every 2-3 days."	<b>10:30 A.M.: SNACK</b>					<b>NICOLE SAYS:</b> "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."
	4 egg whites, scrambled	14	1.2	0	68	
	3 oz. ground turkey	19.5	0	1.13	90	
	1 Tbsp. salsa	0	0	0	2	
	<b>Totals:</b>	<b>33.5</b>	<b>1.2</b>	<b>1.13</b>	<b>160</b>	
<b>NICOLE SAYS:</b> "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."	<b>1:30 P.M.: LUNCH</b>					<b>NICOLE SAYS:</b> "Since casein is a slow-digesting protein, I won't lose any muscle while I sleep if I have a shake before bed."
	4 oz. chicken breast	35.2	0	4	187	
	3/4 cup brown rice	3	34.5	0	165	
	Salad + tomato + onion	1.3	9.5	0.4	49	
	3 Tbsp. balsamic vinegar	0	0	0	0	
	<b>Totals:</b>	<b>39.5</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>4.4</b>	<b>401</b>	
<b>NICOLE SAYS:</b> "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."	<b>4:30 P.M.: SNACK</b>					
	4 oz. turkey breast	34	0	0.8	153	
	15 plain almonds	3.59	3.67	9.4	106	
	1 Tbsp. natural peanut butter	4	3.5	8.15	95	
	1 scoop whey protein	18	1.5	1	87	
	<b>Totals:</b>	<b>59.59</b>	<b>8.67</b>	<b>19.35</b>	<b>441</b>	
<b>NICOLE SAYS:</b> "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."	<b>6:30 P.M.: DINNER</b>					
	5 oz. chicken breast	44	0	5	233.75	
	1 cup zucchini	2.59	8.02	0.29	38.29	
	7-inch corn tortilla	1	9	1	45	
	Salad + tomato + onion	1.95	14.25	0.6	73.50	
	1 Tbsp. balsamic vinegar	0	0	0	0	
	<b>Totals:</b>	<b>49.54</b>	<b>31.27</b>	<b>6.89</b>	<b>390.54</b>	
<b>NICOLE SAYS:</b> "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."	<b>9 P.M.: SNACK</b>					
	1 scoop casein protein	23	1.5	4	120	
	1 cup strawberries	1	9	0	60	
	<b>Totals:</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>10.5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>180</b>	
	<b>DAILY TOTAL:</b>	<b>228.63</b>	<b>123.14</b>	<b>38.77</b>	<b>1,797.54</b>	
	<b>PERCENT TOTAL CALORIES:</b>	<b>52.34</b>	<b>28.82</b>	<b>18.84</b>	<b>—</b>	

## 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

**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.)

### 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

### 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**

