



PHOTOGRAPH BY CARLOTTA MOYE

ALL HAIL QUEEN KAYLA

She's built a digital empire with a legion of adoring fans from New York City to Dubai – WH meets the Australian personal trainer who became the world's biggest fitness star



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It's a sunny Friday morning in Dubai, and I'm sat in a quiet, dark room, my heart pounding slightly as the phone rings. I'm waiting for Kayla Itsines to pick up, and I am, if I'm being honest, a little nervous. A small-town Aussie personal trainer, this is the woman who has inspired legions—and I mean *legions*:

She has 4 million followers and counting on her Instagram account, a following so loyal that they've even given themselves the name #KaylasArmy—of women across the globe when it comes to their health and fitness. And, to put it simply, I am a fangirl—I've been one of them ever since that very first breakfast at Baker and Spice a year and a half ago when my best friend told me about this girl on Instagram that I simply *had* to check out, straight after one of my other friends had told me just the day before that this new online Bikini Body Guide she had been doing was transforming the way she looked, not to mention how she felt about her body. Click on any of the photos on Kayla's account—be it of herself, her clients' transformation photos or photos of her man—and the comments are endless, with girls tagging friends saying "This is her page! Creep this Insta, you'll be busy for hours" and "This is the workout I was telling you about!" or things like "#CoupleGoals", "O.M.G. —doing it now!", "These abs are perfect", and "Kayla, thank you for being a real person." It's exactly this kind of word-of-mouth that has propelled Kayla out of Adelaide, where she's from, into the limelight. The daughter of two regular hard-working parents—her mother worked in a fish shop while her father taught English as a foreign language—this is, believe or not, just another normal girl trying to make her way in the world. And that's part of her huge appeal: This isn't someone who was born with a silver spoon in her mouth, nor is she a genetically gifted athlete who lives a life that seems unachievable to the average woman. She's just a girl who grew up loving an active lifestyle, who became a personal trainer passionate about

sharing her clients' success stories as a way to motivate them, and just happened to start what can now only be called a revolution. Kayla is so grounded, genuine and relatable, in fact, that I'm almost taken aback at how easy she is to talk to, and how *real* she is. There isn't a hint of snobbery there, and I am relieved to see within the first few minutes of our call that this voice crackling through my Etisalat line sounds exactly like what I imagine when I read the captions on her daily posts. So what is it that makes her stand out when nowadays, so-called Instagram stars seem to be a dime a dozen? Well, it's that endearing normalcy for starters, not to mention the way that Kayla firmly believes that her fame isn't just about her, it's about her followers. She doesn't even show her face in many of her photos, which is an intentional decision—"I try to make it not about me, and everything that I do," she says, continuing: "I know a lot of celebrities will make their page just about themselves and it's not something that I want to do; I want to focus on the community. So I just sort of snapshot my legs or my abs or my arms or the back of me doing a chin-up—it's not because I'm self-conscious, and I do TV interviews where I've got my face in front of the camera... it's nothing to do with me personally. It's more about joining the community together and making it less about me and more about them. I'm really just there to motivate them, rather than take selfies of my makeup for instance."

Kayla is, and always has been, all about the community of strong women that she has built (and continues to build), and that's the key to her enormous success. Her refreshingly down-to-earth attitude is all the more impressive when you consider what a breakneck rise to fame she's

KAYLA IS, AND ALWAYS HAS BEEN, ABOUT THE COMMUNITY SHE'S BUILT



THIS PAGE: PHOTOGRAPHY: COURTESY OF KAYLA ITSINES.





had: It was only back in 2013 when she began posting her famous before-and-after pictures on Instagram, yet she hasn't let it go to her head. "I didn't even know how to use the app when I first downloaded it!" she laughs, explaining that since she was a mobile personal trainer at the time, it was a decision made for convenience's sake. "I was storing my clients' transformations on my phone, and I didn't have a place to store them. It just grew from there." And grow it did—a regram from a larger fitness account led to an onslaught of new followers, and suddenly, boom. The avalanche began, spurred on by encouragement from Kayla's boyfriend and business partner Tobi Pearce to collate her workout and nutritional wisdom into an e-book. Tobi is an essential part of her team (and her family, who she still lives within 20 minutes of, are her ever-present cheerleaders, always there to keep her grounded), and she's adamant that everything they have achieved has been a result of their mutual support. Together, they compiled her 28-minute workouts of high-intensity, plyometric resistance training into an easily downloadable PDF, along with an optional nutrition guide that could be purchased separately, and the rest, as they say, is history. The Bikini Body Guides spread like wildfire, across Australia and the rest of the world, and thanks to Kayla's initiative to build a community, Kayla's Army began to bloom. "The girls made up that name for me!" she laughs—by the girls, she means her BBG followers, of course—continuing: "I consider myself to be more like family to them—if you've seen the hashtags like #BBGSisters, and that's what I consider the girls to be to me."

Hundreds and thousands of downloads later, it was time to take her show on the road, and in spring 2015 Kayla embarked on her first world

tour. Starting out in Australia—where their expectations were already exceeded, with 4,000 showing up in Perth rather than the anticipated 700—Kayla has travelled from Amsterdam to London and New York City to lead her loyal followers. The reactions that she's usually met with involve crying (tears of joy, of course), hugs, and plenty of raw emotion from fans who claim that she's changed not just their bodies but their lives. It's not just weight loss success stories either—with Kayla's main focus being on reminding women that being strong and healthy is the goal, she takes care to showcase stories of fans from every age group, who have overcome everything from anorexia to body dysmorphia, alongside all of those who have lost weight and gotten fitter. "Originally I thought that the girls following [me] were my age, anywhere from 18 to 30 years old. I really thought that's where the majority of them were... but as the community grew, [so did the type of women joining it]. On the world tour, lots of mums came up to me and said that they had been suffering from post-natal depression, and they were hugging me and holding me and telling me how they've changed and feel so much better now. Another lady came up to me and said 'me and my mum did the guides,' and I said 'if you don't mind me asking, how old's your mum?' and she said, 'Oh, she's 68!' There are so many women and there's no specific age group that it's targeted at—it's just [for] any woman who wants to feel good, and be confident and happy. I want to showcase how girls feel, rather than how they look," she explains.

If it's all about how you feel, then why call her e-book the Bikini Body Guide then, one might wonder? "When I first started out training people, I asked the ladies at the gym what their goals were. What they wanted to feel. And they said,

'I want to feel good in my bikini.' So when I made my guides, I called them the Bikini Body workout, thinking in my head that that's when you feel confident in a bikini. But now that I've been on social media and I've seen the marketing tactics that other people put out there when they say bikini body this and bikini body that, I didn't want to call it 'Bikini Body' anymore, because it meant so much more to me," she says. That's precisely why she's named her newly-launched app "Sweat With Kayla". "It makes women feel more comfortable, because not every woman knows what I stand for. When they first go on my page and see 'bikini body' they might go 'oooh' and not know what that means, but for the girls who have been following me for a while, they know that when I say that, I mean confidence with yourself and feeling good."

As long-time followers ourselves, we certainly know that's true, and Kayla is all about making women feel good, whether that's through her own life or those of her BBG girls. "Since I'm in Australia, obviously I can't motivate the world by myself because what I do, what I eat and what I say isn't necessarily relevant to [all women] in their [different] countries, so for example if I can upload someone in Dubai that does the guides, then women in Dubai will feel motivated because they'll think 'oh if she lives here and she can do it, then I can do it too.'" When I mention the fact that many women here have found solace in her guides thanks to the unique cultural restrictions that can make some Muslim women feel uncomfortable about hitting a regular gym, she is ecstatic, and emphatic about how much she understands and appreciates a situation like that. "I've experienced that myself, actually—because I'm a female-only trainer, and I had my own personal training centre, I did have a lot of the Muslim community come and train with me. They're some of the most amazing women that I've ever met, and they felt comfortable because they were able to take off their jackets. Some of them would come with gloves or their scarves on, and they would feel comfortable taking that off with me. I really understand that, and that's why I've designed my app the way it is—so it can be done in the comfort of your own home,

or wherever you need to be." Thinking about women's realistic needs is at the heart of every new venture she and Tobi take on, be it her line of foam rollers—which they released because Kayla herself uses them daily, and is so firm about encouraging her girls to take a rest day that she's even incorporated that into her new app—or the nutrition plans. When putting together the e-book, she made sure that the diet was approved by an accredited nutritionist, and would never try and make a follower feel bad about enjoying the foods they do. She's not keen on diets, and instead cares about making sure people can enjoy delicious food that happens to be healthy, with the occasional treat here and there. "I'm not hard on people at all about cheat meals, although I don't agree with a cheat day—I don't think most people want to or have a full day of eating junk. I think some girls go to an extreme when they are craving or have cut out foods, but what I recommend doesn't involve that. It's just about being realistic. You can't say 'You've got to do this because I do it. I believe food can be delicious and healthy, you don't have to choose one. I grew up in a Greek family, so food is important to me!" she says, admitting that she, too, has her guilty pleasures. "I love cake!" she laughs, adding: "Tiramisu, coffee cake—if that's on the menu of any restaurant that I go to, I'll get that 100%. It's about being honest. When you're in the public eye, you've got to make sure that the advice you're giving is going to benefit

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KAYLA'S MENU



"I usually work out at around 11am so I'll tend to have eggs on toast then wait for an hour or so and then go and work out. I don't have a specific meal that I eat pre-workout, I just make sure that I'm eating throughout the day. Post-workout I'm always hungry, so just something that has carbs in it, like rice and tuna—I'm so boring! I include protein and carbs at every meal, or almost every meal. I don't like ice cream and stuff like that, but cake is my guilty pleasure. I was lactose intolerant as a baby and lactose sensitive when I was growing up, so whenever I had ice cream it made me feel sick, so I think that's why I had bad associations with it when I was growing up."





women all over the world, and it just comes down to honesty.” Food is an important part of it though, and that’s why although the guides were originally sold separately, Kayla and Tobi have now incorporated both into the app. “It is important that you do both. I know that often goes over women’s heads when people say that, but it really is a combination of healthy eating and working out,” she says.

Unintentional world domination doesn’t leave much room for activities outside of that, so it’s a good thing that Kayla eats, sleeps and breathes with passion for what she does. “My hobbies are pretty boring, they’re almost all based around fitness! It’s kind of why I love personal training, because my hobby turned into a career.” A keen basketball player, Kayla would love to challenge herself with a military-inspired obstacle course sometime, but in between all of the accolades, international trips, and plenty more awesome plans in the pipeline for her business, finding the time won’t be easy. This isn’t a girl who will spend hours fretting over what dress she’s going to wear for her next event, or spending half a day in the salon: “I’ll be honest and say that every [non-fitness-related] outfit that you ever see me wear, I hire—my friend owns a store you can hire outfits from, so she has these beautiful dresses and you go in there and hire them. I’m actually terrible with fashion—I mean, I pick the dresses so I guess I’ve got some sort of fashion sense, but my own wardrobe is basically just fitness stuff!” she laughs. Her beauty routine is just as simple: After suffering from bad skin problems that left her feeling really self-conscious when she was younger, she’s now very dedicated to her skincare routine. “I’m just big on hygiene. I have a shower every time I work out, I clean my skin morning and night, I moisturise and wear sunscreen during the day, and I wear tinted moisturiser instead of foundation. It’s just little things. [Otherwise], I’m a personal trainer and I don’t have beauty tips!” she says. Clearly it’s working for her, since she glows from the inside out.

It’s hard to believe that this remarkably thoughtful, ambitious and debonair woman is just 24 years old, and we can only imagine what’s to come. One thing is for sure: Her unique brand of female empowerment is just what the world needs in terms of modern-day girl power. She may not have ever imagined where she’d come —It’s just amazing—I’ve only really been doing this for like a year and a half, so to hear [about the impact it’s had on women around the world] is mind-blowing... it’s awesome” she says—but with her new app set to see her reach an even wider audience than ever before, there’s no turning back now, and she couldn’t be happier about it. “Confidence, discipline, conquering fear—it’s about [building] a community of like-minded women who feel the same way, and have come together and are stronger in every way possible,” she says.