

silver linings

As elegant as the woman you see on your right is, she's no shrinking violet: She may take pride in her femininity, but she could also kick most people's butts. Meet Shadia Bseiso, the bilingual TV presenter and Brazilian Jiu Jitsu enthusiast who was hand-picked by the WWE during their visit to Dubai for their global try-outs this year.

By Yi-Hwa Hanna



In April this year, the WWE—yes, as in the globally renowned World Wrestling Entertainment—held one of its world wide recruitment efforts in Dubai, hosting 34 athletes—27 men and 7 women—from 18 countries in a historic four-day tryout. The hopefuls' backgrounds spanned everything from martial arts, collegiate wrestling and boxing, to strongman competitions, bodybuilding, CrossFit and more. And among them was Shadia Bseiso, a Brazilian Jiu Jitsu athlete and CrossFit enthusiast by night, and a bilingual TV presenter (the Jordanian native works in both English and Arabic), events host and voice-over artist.

It's not something you'd expect from someone who works in the media industry, or who spends a majority of their career getting dolled up in glamorous dresses, professional hair and makeup, and in front of crowds of people, be that on TV or in real life. But Shadia's never been one for sticking to the status quo anyway.

Growing up, Shadia always dreamed of being on the radio. It would have been a considerable shame to have her sequestered away in a faceless studio given the stunning natural looks she was born with, but it's clear from the moment you meet her why this is where she got her start with aplomb: Quite possibly one of the most laid-back people we've ever met (or indeed had on a photo shoot here in the sometimes hectic flurry of our studio), her voice is calming, sure of itself, and intelligent, much like Shadia herself.

Even before completing high school in her home in Amman, Jordan, Shadia joined a local radio station as an intern for two years. And her hard work, drive, and passion paid off: In 2004, she landed her first-ever radio show on Play 99.6FM by the time she was 18 years old, fresh out of her high school graduation, and spent that

WHAT A KNOCKOUT
The crop top and killer abs aren't so bad, either.



summer working on it. She then moved from Jordan to Lebanon to study at the American University of Beirut. One year later, her radio show became the first syndicated radio show in the Middle East, broadcasting weekly in two countries (Jordan and Lebanon).

After she graduated from university, her first full-time radio job came along in a heartbeat—and on one of the biggest radio stations, to boot. She began working on Virgin Radio Dubai, then continued to work in radio with stations including Virgin Radio Jordan, until she decided it was time for a new challenge.

In 2011, Shadia moved to Dubai to begin presenting live events. In 2013, she set up her own company right here in the city, which now represents her as a live events and television presenter and voice-over artist. “And here I am!” she laughs.

Now, Shadia’s voice is pretty distinctive, but in many a gym in Dubai, she’s known more for her keen athleticism as a sportswoman, than she is as a media glamour puss. A passionate Brazilian Jiu Jitsu and CrossFit athlete and competitor, Shadia has perfectly nailed that delicate balance between true grit and strength (both on the inside and outside), while always retaining her femininity in spades. Don’t let the thick, glossy locks and incredible skin—it’s practically poreless, so healthy that it looks like she’s been Photoshopped in real life—fool you: This is a woman who could most definitely kick your, or any man’s, butt. “Sports have changed my life!” she says, continuing: “I am absolutely fascinated with what the human body can do and learn, and how much you can push yourself to transform your body and mind through sport. I started training Brazilian Jiu Jitsu (BJJ) in 2013. Jiu

Jitsu is such a beautiful sport. I fell in love with the art of grappling. My goal is to be a black belt one day. I train at Team Nogueira in Dubai—the coaches are great, and they have supported me throughout my journey in this sport. [As for CrossFit], I started training CrossFit with the intention of getting in top shape for Jiu Jitsu competitions. I train at InnerFight in Dubai. Our coaches [there] really lead by example! They are world-class athletes,” she says.

Ever a good student, Shadia is clearly a keen, patient, curious, and dedicated learner: Always patient and extremely respectful, be that in a new sporting discipline, new media outlet, or any clients or situations she comes across for work, this is a key trait that’s probably taken her this far. And it’s paying off: Aside from killing it in her career, the 30-year-old is in the kind of enviable shape that would have many 20-year-olds blaring heart-eyed emojis out merely from the state of her abs, or how simply strong her body is. Her go-to workouts? CrossFit and Jiu Jitsu, of course—and a really healthy mentality when it comes to her body, its abilities, and what it looks like. “My body started to change when I stopped thinking about how I look and just focused on performing better in sport. My favourite CrossFit workouts are the ones with a lot of weightlifting. As for Jiu Jitsu, I really enjoy technique and drills,” she says. Nutrition-wise, Shadia is dedicated, but she likes to keep things simple: “I cut out all bread and sugars, and everything is homemade. I only eat out once a week. I still haven’t figured it all out though, and I’m planning on consulting with a sports nutritionist over the summer,” she says. When she’s super busy, it’s even more important for her to



stay on track, though if Shadia could pick any superpower in the world, like many of us, she wishes she could be able to eat anything she wanted and not gain any weight. “That should be a superpower!” she laughs, adding: “I’m loving Smith St. Paleo products [at the moment]—they are available at InnerFight. I know that what is on the label is in the product, and they are my snacks on the go.” Her guilty pleasure? Chocolate, chocolate, and yet more

chocolate!

Sticking to her dedicated training and nutrition programme is no easy feat for a woman who is always on the go, sometimes working events that can last for four days straight with very little sleep in between, but it’s important to her, and that’s what keeps her going. “It’s not easy,” Shadia admits, continuing: “Especially when I get booked on stage in other countries. Training is a priority for me. I consider it as part of the

preparation for a live event, to get both my mind and body ready for the job.”

It’s not a common path for many Arab women, and Shadia is both humbled and honoured to be seen as a role model by many women across the region. And getting more women involved in sport is a topic she’s passionate about: “Growing up, I don’t remember seeing any Arab women in sport. At all. In 2012, every country participating in the Olympics was required to send female athletes—including Saudi Arabia. For the first time, we saw a large number of Arab women competing on TV, on the highest level in the Olympics, and this was a truly inspiring moment. Male or female, Arab athletes across a number of sports need the support of their communities and countries to get ahead and make the Middle East proud.” Shadia herself has a pretty good support system: Aside from a great and close relationship with her assistant, she’s also found an excellent community of like-minded women through her sporting activities, and

her family. “[Some of the women I look up to are] my mother, my sisters, my best friends Rania and Zaina, and my female CrossFit coaches Carmen and Mia. I’m surrounded by strong and very inspiring women!” she says. “By definition, being strong is having the power to move heavy objects. Being a strong woman, however, is having not only the power to be physically strong, but [also to be] emotionally strong, independent, confident, and fearless, when it comes to setting ambitious goals and going after them.” Even the sports she has chosen are seen by many as being more traditionally masculine, Shadia doesn’t let that faze her. “I think Jit Jitsu might come off as a bit intimidating [to some women] because it’s a contact and combat sport. But as with everything in sport and life, you need to give it a chance. You can’t rule it out just because it looks intimidating. I would absolutely love to see more females in Jiu Jitsu in the future. I think positive exposure on media can play a good role in making the sport more accessible,” she says.

Who better to have involved in that WWE try-out than a woman like Shadia, then? “The WWE Dubai try-out was an amazing experience! I was part of a group of 40 athletes from 18 different countries and we were coached by the WWE team for four days in the ring. Getting the opportunity to work with the WWE would be an incredible opportunity,” she says, adding: “I would love to explore wrestling!”

Motivation and drive is a key factor in achieving your goals, but when Shadia’s in need of a boost, she knows who to turn to: That ever-important support network. “I call my sisters, I call my parents, I hang out with my friends. If I need a super boost, I do a CrossFit session. I know I will feel a great sense of achievement the moment I’m done, so that helps,” she explains. Shadia also retains a keen sense of perspective, which is an important attitude to have especially during the age of social media, where for a lot of women, comparison is rife, and quite often, their downfall when it comes to self-belief, confidence, and

the celebration of your body. “Not everything you see on social media is real. Athletes across different sports are my role models; they are who I look up to and follow on social media,” Shadia says.

Despite her killer confidence, Shadia remains ever humble, polite, and patient, just thankful that she has the chance to help inspire other women chase their own goals, be that in their careers or in sport, or elsewhere. “It’s very humbling. I wasn’t born with any special skills, or any specific athletic ability,” she says. “Everything I have, I worked for. I honestly believe that we are all capable of doing whatever we want. The key is finding out what your priorities are, setting goals, and going after them. I believe in positive thinking as long as it’s backed up with a high work ethic,” she adds. And if you’re struggling to do the same thing, Shadia can break her advice down into a few simple tips for you: First, focus on yourself. “Things started to take off for me in both work and sport when I focused on my own goals rather than what other people are doing,” she says. Second,



A Natural Beauty

“Good skin is essential for my job,” Shadia says, continuing: “The best base for make-up is clear skin. Therefore, the moment I’m done working, I remove all of my make-up so that my skin can breathe, otherwise I will quickly get breakouts. The best tip I can give girls [in terms of a beauty regime or must-do] is to never do sports with make-up. I see some girls do it sometimes, and I can honestly tell you from experience, it’s the quickest way to bad skin and breakouts.” Balancing her undeniable femininity with her absolutely badass self when it comes to sports is a simple fix: Just know that each has its own place. “I’m a girl! I love everything to do with hair and makeup, skin care, you name it. But on the mat, and in the CrossFit box, I mean business. I invest a lot of time doing sport and it’s very important to me to get a good workout in,” Shadia says.



STYLIST: YI-HWA HANNA. THIS PAGE - TOP: VERO MODA AT NAMSHI. OPPOSITE PAGE - DRESS: THREADZ AT NAMSHI. MAKEUP: ANGELIQUE TURNER (ANGELIQUETURNER.COM). HAIR: DENNY CELMENTS (FACEBOOK.COM/MUADXB)

prioritize. “We can’t do it all, especially in a city like Dubai, [where] there is so much happening and you can get distracted. Find out what is important to you and pursue it,” she says. Third, Shadia says you need to set yourself up for success in your diet by planning your meals and packing snacks on-the-go. Fourth, don’t be afraid to make mistakes. “No-one gave me a manual on how to set up a live presenting business in Dubai. I made all the mistakes you can imagine, and learned a lot of valuable lessons [in the process]. The only way is to go for it and learn,” she says. And last but not least, Shadia says you shouldn’t be afraid to try new things. We’re convinced.

And it looks like Shadia’s hopes to see more women becoming involved in traditionally male-dominated sports may be coming true, with more and more women jumping on the Jiu Jitsu train, turning to boxing, and perhaps even wrestling soon. Netflix, for instance, is soon set to release *GLOW*, an upcoming American comedy-drama TV series created by Liz Flahive and Carly Mensch revolving around wrestling, starring Alison Brie (who has acted in *Mad Men* and *How To Be Single*), Betty Gilpin (Nurse Jackie), and comedian Marc Maron. The show’s first season, consisting of 10 episodes, will be released on the hugely popular streaming service globally—including here in the Middle East—on June 23rd, with its storyline a fictionalisation of the characters and gimmicks of the 1980s syndicated women’s professional wrestling circuit, the Gorgeous Ladies of Wrestling (GLOW).

If this gorgeous lady—who we have no doubt will try her hand at wrestling sooner rather than later, and most likely ace that, too—is anything to go by, then we’re pretty sure it’ll be one to watch, just as Shadia is. ■

