



Shaikha Al Qassemi, Redbull Athlete and Crossfit Level 1 Coach, Gym Owner of Platform Gym, and a proud Lululemon Ambassador.

Bright Sparks

The UAE is known for its visionary achievements as a country—and the people in it are no different. We celebrate three Emirati women who are blazing their own trails of outstanding work, ahead of the 45th National Day.

of the East competition in 2015 and I was failing on the last one in the first round—I got it in the last 30 seconds. The most rewarding thing is the fact that I have made so much of an impact on people's lives. I've empowered women and I've inspired so many including my family and friends. So many women from all different nationalities have told me that I inspire them day in and day out. Coming from no athletic background at all, with no school athletics or competitive sports, it just proves that our bodies are capable of incredible things that we haven't discovered yet. Emiratis are comfortable with lifting weights and some have also come out of their shell and started to compete.

One of the most valuable lessons that I've learnt so far is that loving yourself is the most important, as well as focusing on yourself, and not being afraid of change and growth because amazing things come from it. Love yourself, find what makes you happy and follow your heart. Everything else will fall into place. Don't take life too seriously, find a balance and focus on YOU. Love the body that God has blessed you with! We all come in different shapes and sizes, whatever the media puts out there isn't a reflection of what YOU should look like. If you want to get fit and healthy, start your journey with what you love to do! It doesn't have to be Crossfit, it could be running, cycling, boxing, dancing, parkour and even yoga. As for what makes me proud to be Emirati—what's there not to be proud of?! We are the fastest growing country in the world! We have advanced so drastically in a short amount of time. Most importantly, women empowerment has come so far in the UAE; we have incredible support from our leaders that keeps us motivated and inspired to aim beyond the stars.

I started Crossfit in early 2013. I did my first competition and got hooked! When I first started, I enjoyed the fact that I was learning something new every day. Even today, nearly four years into my journey, I am still signing up for courses, listening to my coaches cues, and researching whenever I want to educate myself on something I don't know much about. Crossfit creates a

support system for those who are on their fitness journey and want to stick to a healthy lifestyle, and that's what helped me to keep going! My first competition was in August 2013 and I did the weekly DFC at the end of 2013 as well. I never imagined myself being a competitive person, nor [had] I ever thought of myself being a sponsored athlete [before], but I became one!

Everything is a challenge, that's why I love to do it! My main challenge is getting my fat percentage to where I want. My weight has been up and down due to my hormonal imbalances. Burpees, running and gymnastics are always a challenge. I feel like burpees never get easier! The highlight of my career would have to be when I didn't practice my rope climbs before the Battle

Omaira Farooq Al Olama, Managing Director of ALF Administration

After returning to the UAE in 2000, graduating with a Masters in Criminology, I worked in various organizations from government to private. It's there that I discovered there was a lack in the market specializing in specific training for UAE nationals, and that there was no training company to date that was solely run by UAE national trainers and only training UAE nationals. No company was able to bridge the gap between home environment and work environment, and this is where we come in—being Emirati we are able to relate to our people, to those trying to find their way in the work force. The hardest part we faced was convincing corporations that though we are small, we are able to do the job. Finally, we have proven that we are able to the job and do it well. Today we are a small team but still a team. We employ interns from all universities in the UAE where we give them a chance to understand the training environment and if this is something that interests them. And then we coach them until they receive their degrees and join us full time. Its all about giving back to my community and my people.

When I run into students that I have taught and they tell me what they have achieved and where they are today, it's the most rewarding aspect of what I do—watching my nationals grow from where they began to solid, decent career positions... and that they are so much more motivated and focused on their career path and where they are today, as opposed to before when they were given trainings that never really dealt with issues or showed them that they have a path, and that everyone has a

place in today's society.

I'm so fortunate and honoured in that the reactions I have gotten from both my nationals and expat have been truly fantastic. I have been met with support and the willingness of everyone to help me continue my dream, and my journey has been phenomenal. I think to be a pioneer, and I'm really far from that, is to be true to yourself, to stay humble and to be honest. To make sure that what you are doing is

something you well and truly believe in. There are so many great people here today and so many amazing women that are changing the way people think and that is also what we are doing. We are changing the mindset and making our nationals employable.

To my children and the next generation, I'd say to appreciate all that is given. Especially Emiratis—we are given so much, and have a tremendous leader that not only wants

every Emirati to succeed but that supports them in every way possible. Where else can we work full time and still open our own business and watch it flourish and have support from government entities? And to value hard work. Those have achieved will always tell you that they have worked so hard to get to where they are. Those that rise very fast, sadly fall very fast as well. It takes perseverance and dedication to make things work.



PHOTOGRAPH: EFRAIM EVIDOR.

Nashwa Hamad, Owner of Adagio Dance and Fitness Studio

I was very much into exercising when I was younger but when I started working and spending really long hours at my desk, exercise became the last thing on my to-do list. As time went on, I knew I needed to get back into something but didn't want to go to a traditional gym as they aren't motivating to me. One day my friend was talking about Aerial Hoop, so we decided to sign up to a class together and I became addicted. It's such a fun way to stay fit and in each class you can feel your body getting stronger as you try new poses and moves. I decided to open up Adagio as I wanted there to be a place in Dubai where people could go and enjoy classes no matter their fitness level or dance experience. Although we have professional dance teachers, all the classes are fun and are about learning new skills, getting fit and working out... but in a fun and addictive way!

The hardest part of the start-up was coming up with funding for this idea that had been brewing in my brain for so long. Banks ended up being a dead-end for me, so I had to make it work by myself and fortunately some of my family and friends who believed in my idea also contributed. The challenge now is keeping up with the new fads and making sure clients are never bored. We want to be the first to bring over every dance from around the world.

The most rewarding and important thing for me is when I see students who have arrived to Adagio a little shy but then walk out of a class with confidence, walking tall and smiling. It's also so nice to see students making friends with each other; it helps the studio feel more like a social community. Before I opened Adagio, I found that most dance

and fitness studios didn't really cater to the Emirati community because they focused more on professional dancers. I also felt that they didn't target Emiratis, especially for aerial classes, due to silly stereotypes perhaps making people think they wouldn't be interested. There should never be a stigma around dancing to get fit! There are also a lot of women-only classes but very few for men, so we recently added a Men's Anti Gravity class where guys can come and use the Hoops, Poles and Silks. I have been so lucky and am very grateful to have so many people encourage and applaud what I am doing, both Emirati and non-Emiratis alike. Just like all Emiratis, I'm proud that we are blessed with a beautiful country and great leaders who are passionate about innovation whilst also making their people's happiness and comfort a priority. Opportunities are always around and being part of this country and culture always makes me proud!

