

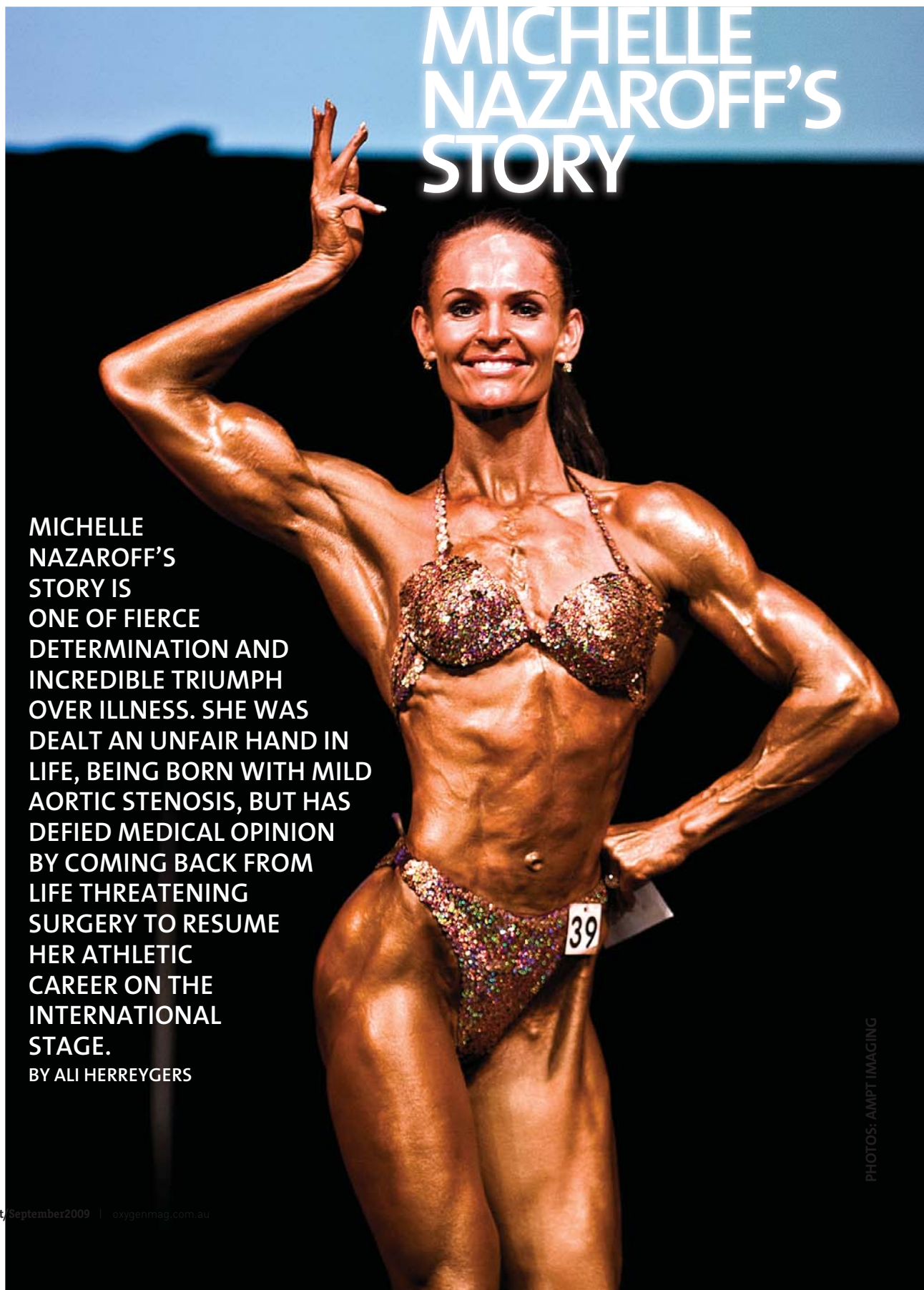
# FITNESS IDOL

## PERSONAL VICTORY

### MICHELLE NAZAROFF'S STORY

MICHELLE NAZAROFF'S STORY IS ONE OF FIERCE DETERMINATION AND INCREDIBLE TRIUMPH OVER ILLNESS. SHE WAS DEALT AN UNFAIR HAND IN LIFE, BEING BORN WITH MILD AORTIC STENOSIS, BUT HAS DEFIED MEDICAL OPINION BY COMING BACK FROM LIFE THREATENING SURGERY TO RESUME HER ATHLETIC CAREER ON THE INTERNATIONAL STAGE.

BY ALI HERREYCGERS



PHOTOS: AMPT IMAGING

Michelle has had an insatiable passion for Figure competition since her very first show at the 2001 INBA State Titles. She has had to battle through tough times to reach her goals, but her love for the sport has given her the opportunity to compete overseas and represent Australia on the international stage.

Michelle is a believer in old school hard work and consistency. You won't see any quick fixes or gimmicks in her routine. Real foods, basic heavy weight training and consistent cardio are what she is all about. Michelle is living proof that physique competition can be fantastic for your health; you just have to make the right choices and be prepared to fight through tough times.

## A MAJOR SETBACK

Michelle has a condition in which the aortic valve becomes narrower than normal, impeding the flow of blood. In some cases this illness can cause heart failure. People who suffer from aortic stenosis must carefully evaluate everyday activities as they could easily become detrimental to their health.

After completing her third year of natural figure competitions in December 2003, Michelle recalls feeling very fatigued. She was usually bouncy and full of energy but now found that she was having trouble with everyday activities like climbing stairs. Coping with her intense training regime became a struggle.

As a precautionary measure Michelle consulted her cardiologist. Her worst fears were realised when the test results revealed that her heart was severely enlarged. Michelle was asked to immediately cease doing anything strenuous. When her cardiologist advised that her aortic valve would need to be replaced with a mechanical version, all the positive energy and momentum built through her figure career turned into apprehension and fear.

Michelle was told that she should forget competing altogether as she would no longer be able to train hard. She was

also delivered devastating news that starting a family would be too risky due to the medication she would be required to take for the rest of her life.

Dreams shattered, the month-long wait for surgery saw Michelle withdraw and become depressed. She began to lose sleep because her heart was constantly racing, causing her to struggle for breath. She would watch television mindlessly each night, becoming less and less the confident and competitive person that she usually was.

Then one day it hit her. She wasn't about to wallow in fear or despair. Her competitive spirit awakened and she refused to be beaten. Michelle put her initial shock behind her and was determined to change negative thoughts to positive ones; she

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undertook to find an alternative solution to the proposed surgery.

After four long days of searching the internet, Michelle found a doctor in Melbourne who had been performing a new surgery called the Ross Procedure. While it was clear that this surgery was more risky, the resulting quality of life would give her the opportunity to continue her figure career and even become a mother.

Being the dedicated athlete that she is, Michelle's only request while in post-surgery intensive care was that she could have a photo of her victory at the National titles at her bedside for motivation to get well.

After her two-week recovery Michelle was able to fly home to WA. Within days she insisted on starting her physiotherapy stretches at her regular gym, keen to get back in the saddle. Michelle felt that her gym was a place of triumph and would prove to be instrumental in her mental and physical recovery from the surgery. It was the beginning of her journey back to



the Figure stage and she was determined to emerge even stronger than before.

## THE ROAD TO TRIUMPH

After tying the knot with her long-time partner David Nazaroff in 2005, the vision of winning an international title was Michelle's central focus. Through progressive training, Pilates and a mainly organic diet she went from not having the strength to open a bottle of water to winning the 2006 INBA All Women's Tall Class Figure Title. Michelle was over the moon.

After winning the 2006 INBA Australian Intermediate Figure Class Title in that same year, Michelle was given the opportunity to compete at the INBA Olympia World Titles in Las Vegas. She was forced to travel solo as her husband was away with work, but she refused to submit to the fear of a relapse that had haunted her since she first heard the terrible news.

Alone in a foreign country, Michelle

kept her focus on the competition at hand, pushing through any doubt with all the positive energy she could muster. She won the silver medal at the World Titles and was ecstatic with the result. This confirmed her belief that her goals were still achievable as long as she was willing to work hard and believe in herself.

Despite her incredible success she was not entirely satisfied. The goal of winning a World Figure title was still paramount. Michelle continued her intense training and began preparing for the 2007 competition season. With the surgery further and further behind her, Michelle felt she could give it her all with her sights set on winning the INBA Olympia World Title that year. With her infallible determination and the support of her entire family, Michele Nazaroff won the IBNA World Title in the Figure Tall class, and admits with a smile that this was the most emotional and exhilarating moment of her life.

## HOW TO BE AN INTERNATIONAL CHAMPION AND A MUM

Two months after winning the INBA World Title, Michelle fell pregnant. Defying the original prognosis of being unable to go through the rigors and physical stress of childbirth, Michelle gave birth to a healthy baby girl; Sierra Skye.

Of course, being a new mother, wife and an international athlete is not as easy as it sounds, but try telling Michelle that. She immediately went to work getting back in shape. She often used a front harness to hold her baby while walking on the treadmill. She was determined to get straight back into training without sacrificing precious bonding time with her baby girl.

Michelle's morning ritual remained as tough as always, only now she had the support of her new little cheer squad. Upon rising Michelle walked for one hour while pushing her daughter's pram.

Easy, you say? Michelle thought so too, that's why she put weight plates at the bottom of the pram. Following that, she took the little one to day care for an hour while she did her weight session, followed by another hour of cardio. By lunchtime, with three hours of intense training behind her, the rest of her day was devoted entirely to Sierra.

## 2009 BEYOND BELIEF

2009 so far has proven to be another year of achievements for Michelle. With nothing holding her back she continued her intense training leading up to the mid-year season. She has begun taking a different approach to her preparation this time around. Instead of eating less and training less, she is eating more and training more, meaning that although she is taking in more calories she is also burning more. Michelle explains that this has resulted in a much fuller physique and a healthier look on stage.

Leading up to the competition season Michelle consumes up to 2.5kg of fruit and vegetables every day. Her local organic grocer, Malibu Fresh Essentials, has got to know her face so well that they offered to help with the cost of her competitive career.

The first show Michelle entered in 2009 was the IFBB Elite show, and won the overall title against fierce competition. Michelle continued her winning streak at the NABBA WA Tall Class Figure title, NABBA/WFF Southern Hemisphere Tall Class and overall, earning herself an invite to the WFF Universe titles in Germany. Can anything stand in her way?

Michelle and her husband David (who also qualified for the show) travelled excitedly to Germany to take on the international stage together. Graham Lancefield from NABBA Australia was so happy with Michelle's performance that he offered to pay for her flights and accommodation so she could keep her focus on her performance at the show.

While Michelle considered the opportunity to compete at the Universe a blessing, it did not come without its

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complications. Being in a foreign country and following a lengthy flight, Michelle and her husband struggled to find their feet. Finding the quality foods they needed for their meals was a hard task, however their determination to succeed outweighed the urge to succumb to poor food choices. They were forced to eat cold oats with powdered egg whites 6-8 times a day. The urge to gag was overwhelming but they were committed to showing the best physique possible on the day of the show.

The dedication paid off. Michelle came second in the Super Bodies division, which is a massive achievement. Michelle entered the show two categories lower, and blew the judges away so much that she was asked twice to be placed in a higher division.

### PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

Like anyone, Michelle loves to win, but her main goal is to be better each time she gets on stage. She has plans to compete in the 2009 end-of-year season, meaning that she will have been doing competition dieting for around nine months straight! She doesn't mind though, Figure competition has become such an integral part of her life.

With Michelle's sporting success and triumph over ill-health, she hopes that others can find inspiration in her story. Whether you draw strength from her ability to focus on her goals or her insatiable quest to be better each time she steps on stage, it is clear that Michelle's journey can provide fuel for the fire in all of us. We wish her success with her future endeavors and look forward to seeing what comes next for this inspirational Aussie champion. ☺



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