

CELEBRATING  
DOUBLE GOLD OLYMPIAN

**NICOLA ADAMS OBE**

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THE MOST DECORATED  
BRITISH FEMALE BOXER OF  
ALL TIME



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**“Tell me I can’t and that’s why I will”**

**- Nicola Adams, 2016**









## **Nicola Adams wins world boxing title to complete full gold-medal set**

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“Nicola Adams secured the last remaining major title to elude her after beating Thailand’s Peamwilai Laopeam to be crowned the world flyweight champion in Kazakhstan. The 33-year-old’s split decision victory means she will head to Rio this summer as the reigning Olympic, world, Commonwealth and European Games champion, having also won European and EU golds previously.”

**- The Guardian**



OLYMPICS SPECIAL

PHOTOGRAPHED EXCLUSIVELY FOR RADIO TIMES BY IAN DERRY

# My Olympic hero

For the first time the BBC's top presenters are women – but who inspires them?

**Gabby Logan chooses Nicola Adams**

I COULD HAVE gone for any one of 30 amazing Olympians, but chose Nicola Adams as my choice. I adore Nicola because she's a pioneer. When it was announced in 2009 that women's boxing would feature for the first time at London's 2012 Olympics, she would have had an eye on Olympic gold. But when the scheduling of the flyweight competition gave her the chance to be the very first woman to win a boxing medal, that must have given her more motivation. Nicola was 29 when the last Chinese legend Ren Cancun. Imagine how many gold medals Nicola might have bagged if women's boxing had been an Olympic sport earlier? She was so patient and I think that speaks volumes about her. She's a proper Olympian because that's her entire focus. Nicola's not someone who earns vast amounts of money, yet she always makes sure she peaks for the big occasions. Nicola's naturally quiet and unassuming – maybe even a little bit shy. She wouldn't tell you this, but she's been an inspiration to a whole new generation of girls. She chose boxing and helped make it acceptable for a woman to box. I don't know how many girls will follow in her footsteps, of course, but I do know that lots of girls will now see that they can have a go at any sport they like.

Nicola helped make it acceptable for women to box

Nicola's achievements have opened girls' eyes to the possibilities that are out there. She's been at the vanguard of a big change in attitudes. Nicola's not only my hero because of her achievements, though – she's so exciting to watch! Every time I see her fight I'm filled with admiration – boxing is so hard. She goes to Rio to defend her Olympic title as world, Commonwealth and European champion, which is incredible. From what I've seen, she's in every bit as good shape as she was in London four years ago. Winning Olympic gold is tough, but if anyone has what it takes to go and do it all again, it's my hero Nicola. Women's flyweight begins Friday 12 August

BOXING Sport 21

# 'Making history drives me on'

**BOXING**  
By Adam Shergold

THERE cannot be many athletes so confident of their place in history as boxer Nicola Adams. Great Britain's double Olympic gold medallist has, after all, been blazing a trail her entire life. So formidable was Adams during her formative years in the ring that nobody in the country wanted to fight her, meaning she had to train and spar with men. In the end, her mentors at Haringey Boxing Club in north London started up their own international tournament, flying in top female competitors so Adams could gauge her ability and form. And boy did she match up well. The flyweight may be only 5ft 5in but she stands head and shoulders above the competition right now as the reigning Olympic, World, Commonwealth and European champion.

In Rio, Adams further endeared herself to the nation, bursting into tears upon hearing the national anthem after retaining the first Olympic women's boxing title she won at London 2012. Asked to take stock of her place in posterity, Adams beams her brilliant smile. 'I spent four years before Rio with goals in mind. There was the 2014 Commonwealth Games and there hadn't been female boxing before, so there was a chance to make history there. "The World Championships as well this year, winning meant I was the first

**GOLDEN LEGACY:** Nicola Adams wants to win more titles

shock. It was the last four years, all the hard work, it was like, "Yes, I've done it". It was all for this moment. Some suggested after Rio that Adams was at a career crossroads. She dominates her weight division but will be 37 when the chance to defend her Adams feels there is more history to be written in the amateur form of the sport. Asked for her motivation in carrying on, she said: "Well, there is the double for the Commonwealths, the double for the Worlds and the triple for the Olympics!" Adams also sees it part of to encourage more girls to step into the ring. "It needs a big name to carry it through. Someone that the public know, so they can follow the journey," she added, in a clear reference to herself. "Definitely give it a go. Go down to your local gym and try it out. We need more







adidas

TEAM GB  
Rio 2016









**GOLDEN SHOT**  
Boxer Nicola Adams (right) lands a right hand to the head of Sarah Ourahmoune of France on her way to winning Olympic gold and becoming the first British boxer to retain an Olympic boxing title for 92 years. Below: Catching her medal



## NICOLA'S GOLDEN GLOVES

On the front foot: Nicola Adams lands a left hand on the head of Sarah Ourahmoune, her French opponent. The British fighter wrote herself into the record books when she became the first woman to retain an Olympic boxing title

# NICOLA'S A HIT!

## Fighter wins gold

**BOXING golden girl**  
Nicola Adams made history as she defended her Olympic crown.

The 33-year-old became the first British fighter to retain a title at the Games for 92 years

by **ROBIN COTTLE**

the 2012 Games, where she became the first female to win an Olympic boxing title after women's bouts were introduced.

The same year she was



# EVER TOP THIS?



**DOUBLE TROUBLE**  
British Nicola Adams has become Olympic gold medalist in her name

**BOXING**  
**NICOLA ADAMS** is the first British boxer to retain an Olympic title since Harry Mallin in 1924. The middleweight righter, with Roger Broseaux four years later, Mallin lost on a decision, only for it to be reversed because the Frenchman had bitten him.



**GIRL POWER:** Team GB's triumphant players show off their medals

## Coach Kerry talked hockey heroes out of retiring to help set up their Rio triumph

THE master tactician behind Britain's historic hockey triumph had to beg the golden couple of his team not to retire two years ago.

Captain Kate Richardson-Walsh and her penalty hero wife, Helen, were considering giving up in 2014, with Kate aged 34 and Helen suffering from multiple sclerosis.

Danny Kerry, the coach behind Friday night's stunning shoot-out win, said Britain came desperately close to losing two of their edges.

But he was able to talk Kate around despite years of falling just short on the big stage and to Helen also speed to the path of rehabilitation, complaining this need with their remarkable win.

**PAD HAGITT:** Hinch and Nico celebrate with the team after their triumph in 2014.

Kerry said: "It's an incredible experience against a team like Holland, the genuine superpower of the sport." Kerry added: "We needed that experience against a team like Holland, the genuine superpower of the sport."

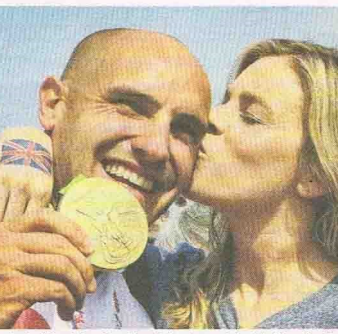
# 15

Another six medals for Britain. Mo Farah raced clear for victory in the 5,000m, ensuring his "double double", having won the 5,000m and 10,000m titles in consecutive games.

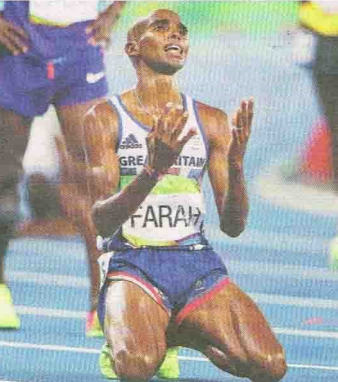
Liam Heath went one better than in the K2 event by winning gold in the 200m kayak sprint, while Nicola Adams defended her title in the ring.

Vicky Holland claimed bronze in the triathlon and Bianca Walkden also finished third, picking up a taekwondo medal, the fourth British woman to do so. Christine Ohuruogu led home a 4x400m bronze.

**GB medals: Gold:** Mo Farah (5,000m); Nicola Adams (women's flyweight); Liam Heath (K1 200m sprint kayak)  
**Bronze:** Vicky Holland (triathlon); Bianca Walkden (taekwondo -67kg); Christine Ohuruogu, Emily Diamond, Eilidh Doyle, Anyika Onuora (women's 4 x 400m relay)



Sealed with a kiss: Heath celebrates gold with his wife, Erin



## Olympic Games Sport

# Decision time for champion Adams

**Ron Lewis**  
Boxing Correspondent Rio de Janeiro

**BOXING**

Nicola Adams was not in the mood to be talked in or out of anything but after retaining her Olympic flyweight crown the dilemma is whether to turn professional, pursue a third Olympic title or try for both.

Mallin, a London policeman, retained the middleweight gold medal that he had won in Antwerp four years previously.

She has won everything she can as an amateur. Her second Olympic gold came in the same year that she finally won a World Championship gold, having won silver three times. She also has a Commonwealth gold, a European Games gold and two golds from the European Championships.

A fresh challenge could come in the professional ranks, with changes to the rules governing Olympic boxing meaning that she could box professionally and still come back to defend her title in Tokyo.

before I decide. There is time. I don't cry. I can't remember the last time I cried. I suppose I'll be tearing on the podium showed how much emotion I had. I'm not a crier, so to even shed a tear showed how much it meant. It just got a little overwhelming."

Title bouts in women's professional boxing take place over ten two-minute rounds, so it is not such a physical stretch for a boxer used to going four two-minute rounds several times in a tournament. Such is the lack of depth in women's

Adams likes making history. Her unanimous points decision victory over France's Sarah Ourahmoune on Saturday made her the first female boxer to win two Olympic golds, as well as the first British boxer to be a double Olympic champion since the *Chariots Of Fire* Olympics of 1924 in Paris, when Harry

professional boxing that she would be likely to box for a world title within a handful of fights.

The problem she could face is finding a role for herself at a time when British boxing is so strong. There are a remarkable 14 world champions from the UK at present, all struggling to get television dates.

Her connection to Anthony Joshua and Luke Campbell, her fellow London 2012 gold medal-winners will help. Joshua already is a world champion, holding the IBF heavyweight title, while lightweight Campbell will hope to move himself close to a world-title shot by the end of the year. It is not difficult to imagine the three of them being on a pay-per-view event together.

wanted it more. The past four years I had a shoulder operation had ankle injuries and became European, world and Olympic champion all in the same year.

Adams will be 37 by the time of the Tokyo Olympics, which would have been over the age limit to compete until that was raised a few years ago. For the time being it is difficult to see anyone who could beat her.

Her biggest challenge could come from inside the Great Britain camp, where Lisa Whiteside has long been pushing for her chance to take over the flyweight spot from Adams. When Adams was injured for the 2014 World Championships, Whiteside took her place and won the silver medal.

**Making history: Adams celebrates retaining her title on Saturday. One option for the 33-year-old Olympic flyweight champion may be to turn professional**



## GREATEST OLYMPICS EVER

**NIC NICKS VICTORY**

**GRANDEE**

**May: Spirit will lift us**

**Chemp again... Nicola after win**

**Chemp... 10,000m with**

**Rio 2016**

**Chemp again... Nicola after win**

**Chemp... 10,000m with**

**Rio 2016**

**Chemp again... Nicola after win**

**Chemp... 10,000m with**

From JAMES BEAL... This is a bigger question... The stakes... performance... the main... and bright... London



'I'm only happy with gold'

Nicola Adams is a double Olympic boxing champion, style icon and LGBT role model. She talks to Jess Cartner-Morley about Team GB's success, her hero Muhammad Ali, and swapping training for calm and clubbing

'S he's a fighter in the ring'... 'I'm only happy with gold'... Nicola Adams is a double Olympic boxing champion, style icon and LGBT role model. She talks to Jess Cartner-Morley about Team GB's success, her hero Muhammad Ali, and swapping training for calm and clubbing.

RIO IS OUR 'GREATEST GAMES'

GB chief hails team effort even better than London



Historic Nicola Adams showed her way to victory's thin gold medal four nights on the Rio Olympics were held on the country's 'greatest ever Games'...

From Bob Mead to Rio It has been a really concerted, concerted effort to a rough sort of the world...

BOSSSES HAIL BEST EVER GAMES FOR TEAM GB



Nicola pleased as punch to claim historic second gold

BY JEREMY ARMSTRONG BOXER Nicola Adams made history with another glorious gold last night. The Yorkshire born world champion produced a stunning display to see off France's Sarah Ourahmane and retain the flyweight title...



RULING THE RING Nicola fighting her French opponent Sarah Ourahmane in yesterday's final



**Saint  
Nic just  
2 good!**

From **BILL LECKIE**  
NICOLA ADAMS became the  
Great British boxer to retake an  
Olympic title for 32 years.  
The Leeds fighter, 33, took  
the women's flyweight world

**NICOLA'S GOLDEN GLOVES**

**Sport**

21.08.2016 SECTION 2



**PLEASED AS PUNCH**  
Adams makes history with back-to-back golds



**Sun** Friday, August 13, 2016

**Rio 2016**

**GOLD**  
Nicola Adams and  
Sally Clark will  
be shown in the  
women's fly.

**GOLD & SILVER**  
Nicola Adams and  
Sally Clark will  
be shown in the  
women's fly.

**GOLD OR SILVER**  
Nicola Adams and  
Sally Clark will  
be shown in the  
women's fly.

**TAKE THAT ME  
OLD CHINA**





Brilliant Adams takes gold, then hints: There ain't nothing like a Damehood!

# QUEEN NIC

**BY MIKE HODGINS**  
 NICOLA ADAMS broke down in tears on the podium after "crushing the dreams" of another rival to retain her Olympic crown.  
 And the spirit of the ring - already an LED - lit her award of Great Britain's first female Olympic gold medal.  
 Adams, who had won a bronze medal at the 2008 Beijing Olympics, was looking to make a name for herself in the sport.  
 She had trained at the London Olympic Centre and was determined to make it back to the top.  
 Adams' victory was a historic moment for British boxing, as she became the first woman to win an Olympic gold medal in the sport.  
 Her triumph was a testament to her hard work and dedication, as she had overcome many setbacks along the way.  
 Adams' gold medal was a well-deserved reward for her years of hard work and sacrifice.  
 She had trained tirelessly, pushing herself to the limit every day.  
 Adams' victory was a source of pride for her country and her fans.  
 She had shown the world that women's boxing is a legitimate and exciting sport.  
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# Our greatest Games ever



SEE PAGES 4, 5, 6 & 7 PLUS SPORT



JOE JOYCE won his gold medal in the men's time trial cycling event.

# RIO IS OUR 'GREATEST GAMES'

GB chief hails team effort even better than London



THE 16th OF AUGUST 2016 AT THE RIO DE JANEIRO STADIUM



# BRIDE OF THE GOLDEN SHOT



NICOLA: I'M THE GREATEST SEE PAGES 4 & 5

# I AM THE GREATEST



Now champ Nicola fancies becoming a Dame

**By Mike Hodgins**  
 Nicola Adams has become the first woman to win an Olympic gold medal in British boxing. Her victory was a historic moment for the sport and for her country.  
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**GOLDEN SHOT**  
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Kayak king Liam grabs gold

# History maker Adams does it again

**BOXING**  
 British flyweight triumphs against feisty Frenchwoman, reports Kevin Mitchell

Nicola Adams, one of boxing's true heroes, brought her Olympic victory to a fitting, golden conclusion with a five-point win over her long-time rival, Sarah Durrahmouze, in the flyweight final here. She would now contend for a place in the history in the subsequent 10 months as long as she did not lose, as she said, "It's a tough process". Adams had only to win one bout here, after taking the start of her career and her opponent - who is starting to go - was having her fourth contest but both were fresh and untested.

Adams, now the European and world champion and double Olympic gold medalist, looked at the opposition and said this might have been an easier opponent than in London, where she won her first gold - and the first by a woman in the sport since the 1900s. "I'm not really nervous like I used to be, because everyone wants to go to the Olympic Games. Every time you have someone, you're craving their success. Today I thought I was winning the match quite comfortably and scoring with the cleaner jab."

She added, with the best of athletes: "I've won the most accomplished female boxer of all time. It's a great title to have. To be honest, I don't really see the extra time that I'm awarded. I've had a second round support from Sarah and the rest of the team. I feel like I know all these things, but I'm not sure, every judge I see throwing..."

Although the decision was unanimous across the spectators of the three judges, they reportedly scored the fight at the four round-by-rounds when it was the same way for first round only. "I just like to win because it's mine," Adams said with a smile. "I didn't follow the points all the way through, so I'm not sure how they gave that to me to be honest."

If it is a matter of choice, and she would not struggle that much more, she is currently on the same team - in the start and winner's draw - did not look happy. "I'm just glad to be back here. I know the judge but not the referee. I've been told by the referee, boxer, coach and fans."

Adams looked understandably relaxed as she stepped into the ring but revealed later that she was very nervous for most of the night. "I know I got over the nerves once I got into the ring. It gives you an adrenaline rush and I know you know that you're talking to somebody who's got you going to work through it." She would have known much earlier, as she had picked her spot with Richard Pannell - until she walked straight into a wild fight near the end of the contest, followed by a tight finish, but she did enough to beat the contest.



World champion Nicola Adams, in red, won victory against rival Sarah Durrahmouze, in blue, in her Olympic final to retain the title.

# British boxer Adams first to retain gold

# MAKE NIC'S A DOUBLE

British boxer Adams first to retain gold. MAKE NIC'S A DOUBLE. Our hockey keeper sticks it to 'em. American hockey keeper sticks it to 'em.



# Now Nicola's our biggest hitter in 92 years

By Jonathan Petre

NICOLA ADAMS made history yesterday by becoming the first British boxer to retain an Olympic title for 92 years when she picked up a gold in the women's flyweight final. The 35-year-old won a unanimous points decision from the judges to beat France's Sarah Durrahmouze. The victory is Team GB's first gold boxing medal at this Olympic games, though super-heavyweight Joe Joyce could add another today.

After the bout, an ebullient Adams - whose nickname is Babyface, a moniker even etched into her gymsheld - said: "The gold rush continues. I'm now officially the most accomplished amateur boxer Great Britain has ever had. I can't believe it. Adams, from Leeds, who was awarded the MBE in 2013 and who added European and Commonwealth golds to her 2012 Olympic title, now becomes the first British boxer to retain an Olympic crown since middleweight London policeman Harry Mallin in 1924.

She started powerfully against the 15th-ranked Durrahmouze, winning the first and second of the four two-minute rounds, on all three judges' scorecards.

But Durrahmouze, who won bronze at this year's World Championships, battled back to take the third and also produced a spirited performance in the final round.

But it was Adams whose arm was raised in victory at the end of the bout after again impressing all three judges.

USA CAN'T BEAT BRITAIN

Team GB boasts a greater breadth of talent than any other country. The USA tops the table and has gold in 11 disciplines, but British athletes have claimed gold in 15 different categories.



**KNOCKOUT SUCCESS:** Nicola Adams celebrates, left, after retaining her title. Above: In action against Durrahmouze. Inset: Her gymsheld, with Babyface nickname

injuries and become a European, world and Olympic champion in the same year and I guess I was just reflecting on that and I got quite emotional. Adams worked as an extra on soap Coronation Street and Emmerdale to make ends meet before her rise to stardom. Recalling that yesterday she said: "I always look back on the hard times. It's what gives me the drive to keep moving forward and keep creating history."

# ADAMS DREAMS WORLD TITLE

## Nicola: Now I'm greatest

**NICOLA ADAMS never had a moment's doubt the gold was hers.** And she is just as certain she is now the greatest British Olympic boxer of all-time. The judges might have kept her smiling after a tense flyweight final with France's Sarah Ourahmoune. Her gritty opponent might have had her eyes closed, trying to hear her name called out. But Nicola knew. She stood there, her finger wagging straight at the TV camera and smiling face. It was her title, her gold. And now double after becoming the first woman to retain an Olympic flyweight title. She has boxed since she was 11 years old from Leeds. "I feel amazing to think I've created history and I'm the most accomplished amateur boxer in Britain of all-time. I feel like I'd done enough to win. I was winning rounds comfortably since the cleaner shots. It's as good as

from **BILL LECKIE** in Rio feeling as it was in London four years ago. "I've had massive support from people back home in Yorkshire and all over the country. It felt like I had that support with me in the ring, with every punch I was throwing, and with France's Sarah Ourahmoune. Adams did an Ali Shuffle before leaping on the ropes, punching the fly near the roaring British fans in the RioCentro Arena. She stood there, her finger wagging straight at the TV camera and smiling face. It was her title, her gold. And now double after becoming the first woman to retain an Olympic flyweight title. She has boxed since she was 11 years old from Leeds. "I feel amazing to think I've created history and I'm the most accomplished amateur boxer in Britain of all-time. I feel like I'd done enough to win. I was winning rounds comfortably since the cleaner shots. It's as good as

cards of all three judges, but Ourahmoune — who took up boxing at a time when it was still illegal for French girls to get into the ring — came out swinging in the third to cut the gap. But as much as Ourahmoune connected with a few in that third round, she left herself open to just as many. If anything, however, she just edged the fourth and there were plenty in here who would not have bet on Britain winning a 26th gold of the Games. Adams, of course, could have strided her horse on it. She laughed: "I just like to keep things interesting, I guess." "I actually didn't know the scores going through, so I wasn't aware until now she'd won the third round. Like I say, I always thought I'd done enough and that's how it turned out. "Now I want to take a holiday, though I'm not saying where because you'll all be there! After that, I'll decide what to do next. "As far as Tokyo in 2020 goes, I need to sit down and relax and see what happens. It's been tough getting here, I don't usually cry, but the emotions overtook me. I was thinking about what I've been through, the operations on my shoulder and ankle, and it all just seems out."



BRIT CRIT... Nicola Adams beat France's Sarah Ourahmoune to win Olympic gold again

GOLD FINGER... Adams after the victory

## Emotional Adams fights off challenge to retain title and create history

Champion becomes first Briton to hold on to crown Strong contingent from Yorkshire cheers her on

By **Jim White** in Rio de Janeiro

Nicola Adams, the smiling Yorkshire assassin, delivered yet another gold medal for Team GB, winning the flyweight boxing division in Rio to add to the title she achieved in London. In the process she became the first British boxer to retain an Olympic championship since the middleweight Harry Mallin in 1924. "It feels absolutely amazing, especially to be able to think to myself that I've created history and I'm now the most accomplished British amateur boxer of all time," she said in the immediate aftermath of victory, the sweat still pouring from her brow. And in terms of European, Commonwealth and World titles, the kind of achievements not available to the fighting policeman Mallin, she is right. As the national anthem played loud over the hall, the normally stoic champion was obliged to wipe away the tears of emotion as the scale of what she had achieved became clear. Not that her straight face lasted long. It never does with Nicola Adams. As soon



Clear winner: Nicola Adams (left) took victory on points to claim another gold for Britain, Colombia and Brazil who gave the first round to the defending champion.

## Boxing and kayak golds keep GB ahead of China as medal table race goes to the last day

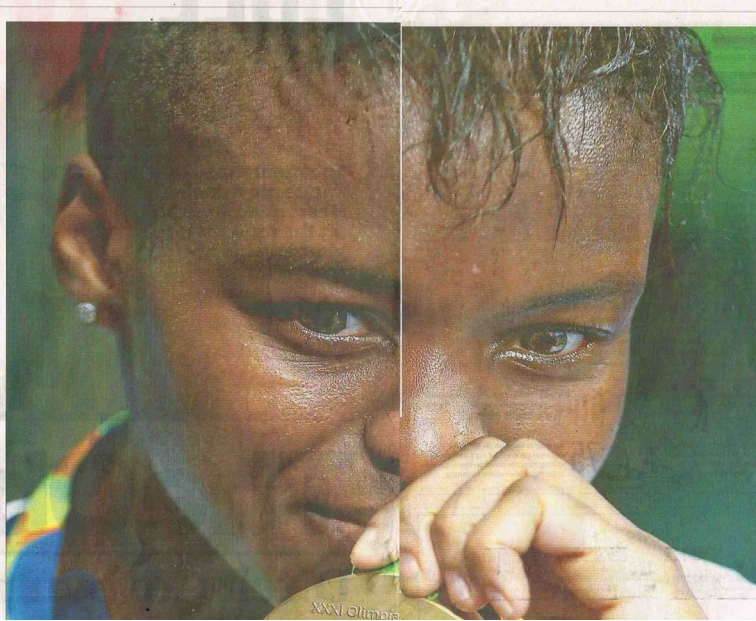
A second place finish for Britain would be the culmination of 20 years of lottery funding after humiliation in 1996 Games

### VIEW FROM RIO

by **Lin Jenkins**

Team GB's Olympic gold rush continued yesterday as Liam Heath powered to victory in the men's kayak single 200m while Nicola Adams defended her flyweight title in the boxing ring. The flyweight's unanimous points win over France's Sarah Ourahmoune, a long-time rival, ensured Adams became the first British boxer to retain an Olympic title for 92 years. Later, she would not confirm whether she would ever fight in a summer Games again, suggesting that, at 25, the four-year stretch to Tokyo 2020 would perhaps be too tough a journey. "I'm now the most accomplished British amateur boxer of all-time... It feels absolutely amazing. I've made history,

thought about being Britain's most successful canoe sprinter. Elsewhere, Non Stanford and Vicky Holland battled it out for bronze in the women's triathlon, with the latter edging ahead to finish three seconds before her best friend and training partner. In the tae kwon do, Bianca Walkden and Mihaela Cho made it through to the semi-finals of the women's +67kg and men's +80kg respectively, but lost and quickly focused on their bronze medal matches in the early hours of this morning. The one sure place to retain an Olympic title for 92 years. Later, she would not confirm whether she would ever fight in a summer Games again, suggesting that, at 25, the four-year stretch to Tokyo 2020 would perhaps be too tough a journey. "I'm now the most accomplished British amateur boxer of all-time... It feels absolutely amazing. I've made history,



# AM THE GREATEST

Now champ Nicola fancies becoming a Dame

**NICOLA ADAMS' brokedown in tears — after crushing the dreams of another rival to retain her Olympic crown.** And now she stands at the foot of the RioCentro Arena, celebrating her 26th gold medal. Adams did an Ali Shuffle before leaping on the ropes, punching the fly near the roaring British fans in the RioCentro Arena. She stood there, her finger wagging straight at the TV camera and smiling face. It was her title, her gold. And now double after becoming the first woman to retain an Olympic flyweight title. She has boxed since she was 11 years old from Leeds. "I feel amazing to think I've created history and I'm the most accomplished amateur boxer in Britain of all-time. I feel like I'd done enough to win. I was winning rounds comfortably since the cleaner shots. It's as good as

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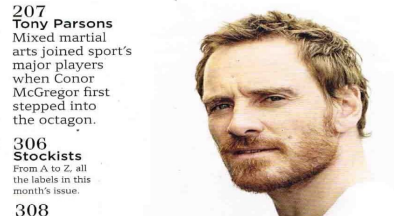
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**Kayak king Liam grabs gold** from **Mike Walters** in Rio. Liam Heath powered to victory in the men's kayak single 200m while Nicola Adams defended her flyweight title in the boxing ring. The flyweight's unanimous points win over France's Sarah Ourahmoune, a long-time rival, ensured Adams became the first British boxer to retain an Olympic title for 92 years. Later, she would not confirm whether she would ever fight in a summer Games again, suggesting that, at 25, the four-year stretch to Tokyo 2020 would perhaps be too tough a journey. "I'm now the most accomplished British amateur boxer of all-time... It feels absolutely amazing. I've made history,

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**Happy Hull: It was great** from **Charles Hull** in Rio. Nicola Adams defended her flyweight title in the boxing ring. The flyweight's unanimous points win over France's Sarah Ourahmoune, a long-time rival, ensured Adams became the first British boxer to retain an Olympic title for 92 years. Later, she would not confirm whether she would ever fight in a summer Games again, suggesting that, at 25, the four-year stretch to Tokyo 2020 would perhaps be too tough a journey. "I'm now the most accomplished British amateur boxer of all-time... It feels absolutely amazing. I've made history,

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## ALASTAIR CAMPBELL

**AC:** OK, talk me through the full-on training regime.  
**NA:** Well, I train in Sheffield with the rest of the GB boxing team, Monday to Thursday, up to 7am, on the track by 7.30am.  
**AC:** Why do boxers run in hoodies?  
**NA:** To sweat more and lose weight. These miles is the longest run we do, or we might do intervals and sprints. Then we go back, have breakfast.  
**AC:** What do you have?  
**NA:** Frosties.  
**AC:** Are you kidding me? You might as well just eat sugar.  
**NA:** I have them. [Laughs] I'm not having anything else, maybe a bit of toast, but Frosties every time.  
**AC:** When do you eat proper food?  
**NA:** In the afternoon. Mornings we do strength and conditioning.  
**AC:** What's the most sit-ups you've done in one go?  
**NA:** About 300.  
**AC:** How many press-ups?  
**NA:** Fifty, maybe.  
**AC:** Is that all?  
**NA:** You'd think I could do more but, yeah, after 50 I need a break. Then we have a meal. It'll be chicken maybe, veg, rice as well. Meals are delivered according to what stage of the build up you're in.  
**AC:** So when do you actually start hitting people?  
**NA:** Evening, I spar with the guys.  
**AC:** If you were to fight the guys, how many could you beat?  
**NA:** One or two, a couple of close ones definitely.

**AC:** What's the most you've ever hurt?  
**NA:** I had a broken bone in my back. That hurt for months. I had morphine patches and stuff, horrible.  
**AC:** What is the worst punch you've ever taken?  
**NA:** From a Ukrainian fighter in the European Champs.  
**AC:** Describe the pain from a real hit.  
**NA:** It's like, "Ow... I really don't want to take one of those again." It seems like a concussive shot, more like a sting.  
**AC:** What do you think when you see footballers rolling around in agony?  
**NA:** Ridiculous.  
**AC:** How do you feel when you hurt someone?  
**NA:** I don't feel anything. I just think about winning.  
**AC:** Women's boxing only became legal in 1996. What if you'd been around in the Eighties?  
**NA:** I can't even imagine it. My life would have been totally different. I was only 12 when I started, but in the Eighties I would never have been taken to a boxing gym.

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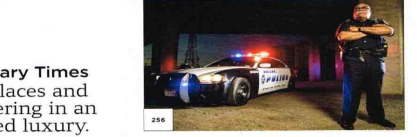
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# ALASTAIR CAMPBELL

Britain's record-busting boxer has beaten the meanest opponents to the canvas and dodged the toughest punches life and sport can throw. Now, the happiest fighter in the ring – and an effortlessly natural role model – tells GO why back-to-back golds in London and Rio are only the beginning

PHOTOGRAPH BY Nick Wilson

From Bear Grylls to Billy Connolly, Mo'Nique to Michael Caine, there was no shortage of famous, high-achieving men picking up glory at the GQ Men Of The Year awards in September. But it was a woman, and one who was presenting rather than receiving an award, who got the loudest cheer of the night as she strode to the stage. She looked – and later told me she was – stunned by the reception. If her first Olympic gold medal, in London, made her famous, it felt like the second, in Rio, had turned Nicola Adams into something of a national treasure.

That is quite a speedy journey: considering women's boxing was outlawed in the UK until 1996 and even Amir Khan has questioned whether women should be allowed in the ring, Adams' theory is that the audience's sense of the struggles she's endured to get to the top made for the visceral roar of support and appreciation. My own view is that it largely does for her personality: an accent that leaves you in no doubt of her working-class Yorkshire upbringing, a swagger, without arrogance, that betrays someone who says she never contemplates losing, and above all a smile that can light up any room.

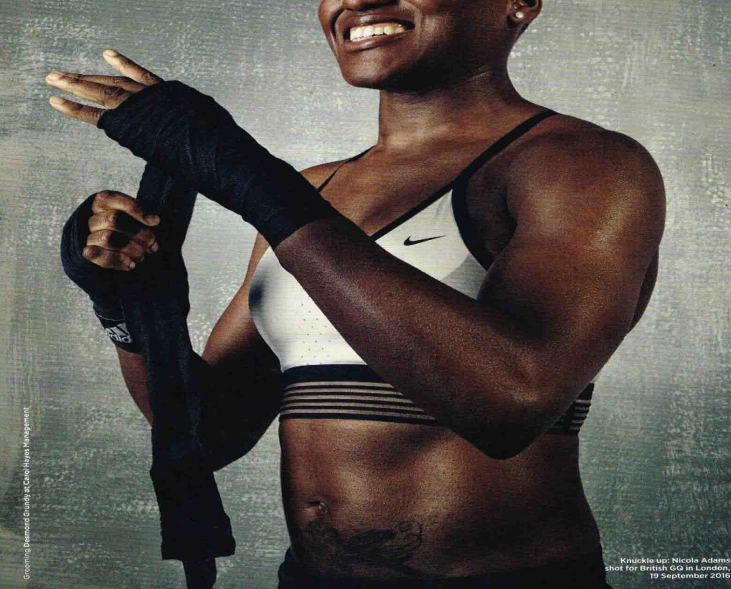
Then there is the role model bit. Black and bisexual, she has become something of an

inspiration for many young black girls and also the LGBT community. Not bad for someone who describes herself as very nonpolitical and "colour blind" when it comes to race.

Now 32, she was about to go on holiday when we met, taking time to mull over the many options coming her way, not least whether to join the growing women's professional boxing circuit. Whether she does or she does not, she is determined to be in Tokyo 2020 for a crack at a third Olympic gold. Making history, she says, is what motivates her to get out there and train. We started with her regime and a breakfast diet I would not recommend to any budding athlete, even if it seems to work for her.

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"I looked across at her when I got in the ring. I could see in her eyes she didn't have my confidence"



Knuckle up: Nicola Adams shot for British GQ in London, 19 September 2016 DECEMBER 2016 GQ.CO.UK 17

## ALASTAIR CAMPBELL

**AC:** Do you feel restricted in your life?  
**NA:** I can't do clubbing as much as I would like to. I've missed weddings and birthdays, but when you stand on top of that podium, and you know you're the best in the world, you realise what all the sacrifice is for.  
**AC:** So of all the possible things in the future, is a third Olympic gold the biggest?  
**NA:** Yeah. I think that would be massive. [Britain] has never had a triple Olympic champion in boxing. That would be making more history.

## AC: Is making history important to you?

**NA:** It's a big motivator. You need big goals to motivate yourself to do the training.  
**AC:** What was it like in 2012 to go from being pretty much unknown to becoming so well known so quickly?  
**NA:** It was strange. After London, I thought maybe things will be back to normal after a couple of weeks and I can stroll through my local supermarket, and I get mobbed. Day to day things became very different. A five minute walk to the corner shop would take 20 because people would want to talk or get a photo.  
**AC:** Have you encountered racism, sexism and homophobia?  
**NA:** Racism, yes. Sexism, yes, in boxing – people saying women shouldn't box. I've never come across homophobia. The racism was more when I was younger, in primary school, and it's about kids not understanding. Actually, I used to struggle with being called "black". I said, "No, I'm brown. Look at me, I'm brown." [Laughs]



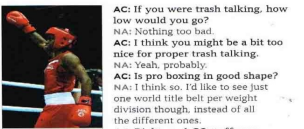
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**AC:** How do you political?  
**NA:** Not really.  
**AC:** Did you vote in the EU referendum?  
**NA:** No, I was away.  
**AC:** You went to Rio with David Cameron. What was that like?  
**AC:** You'd rather never worried about you boxing?  
**NA:** No, she loved that I found something to be passionate about.  
**AC:** If you'd not been a boxer, what might you have done?  
**NA:** I might have made it as a runner. I was good at 100 and 200 metres, and at one point they asked me to think about doing it seriously, but I would have had to stop boxing.  
**AC:** And now you hate running?  
**NA:** The running I do is painful.  
**AC:** At 33, do you get the body glowing out at all?  
**NA:** Not at all. I'm strong, at my peak.  
**AC:** What did you make of the reception you got at the Men Of The Year awards?  
**NA:** Oh my God, it was amazing. I just wasn't expecting that. Someone said it was the loudest cheer of the night. I remember just standing there and thinking, "Wow!" I was blown away.  
**AC:** How do you think it happened?  
**NA:** I think everyone was just happy with my achievements.  
**AC:** Yeah, but Mo'Nique was there, lots of achievers were. Yours was a very special response and you weren't even getting an award.  
**NA:** Yeah, but Mo'Nique was there, lots of achievers were. Yours was a very special response and you weren't even getting an award.

**AC:** You said you've ever hit anyone outside the ring?  
**NA:** I've never needed to. [Laughs]  
**AC:** What about life in the favellas?  
**NA:** I've been there for a while. I've been there for four months, and I looked across at her when I got in the ring and I could see in her eyes she didn't have my confidence. I thought, "This is mine."  
**AC:** Do you think you getting in the ring and smiling has an effect on them?  
**NA:** I think so. I find it hard to imagine how I'd feel if I got into the ring and they were looking at me.  
**AC:** What do you make of all the trash talking in the pro boxing world?  
**NA:** I think it's funny.  
**AC:** Would you do it if you were a pro?  
**NA:** I might do a little bit of it.  
**AC:** Who is the best?  
**NA:** All, every time.  
**AC:** You obviously love when crowds are with you. What about when they're against you?  
**NA:** I've had that a few times, when you are in different countries boxing the home favourite. That works to my advantage too. I hear the boos and I say, "I will silence them."

## ALASTAIR CAMPBELL

**AC:** What was the last film you cried at?  
**NA:** I don't cry at movies. [Laughs]  
**AC:** When was the last time you lost your temper?  
**NA:** A couple of months ago. Someone forgot to use an indicator.  
**AC:** You're a road rager?  
**NA:** That really annoys me.  
**AC:** Did you chase them?  
**NA:** No, I'm not that bad.  
**AC:** Do you never totally lose it?  
**NA:** No. It comes from the boxing. That tends to keep your anger under control. People who don't understand boxing think it is about getting angry and throwing punches, but you have to be in control all the time and that is a part of me, all the time.  
**AC:** So you try to get your opponent to lose control.  
**NA:** Yes, because then they are not thinking straight. They start throwing punches in the wind. You can see in their reactions and their facial expressions that they are losing it, and you can relax. It's like chess.  
**AC:** So is there a moment in a fight when you think, "I've got this."  
**NA:** Definitely.  
**AC:** Have you ever hit anyone outside the ring?  
**NA:** I've never needed to. [Laughs]  
**AC:** What about life in the favellas?  
**NA:** I've been there for a while. I've been there for four months, and I looked across at her when I got in the ring and I could see in her eyes she didn't have my confidence. I thought, "This is mine."  
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**NA:** All, every time.  
**AC:** You obviously love when crowds are with you. What about when they're against you?  
**NA:** I've had that a few times, when you are in different countries boxing the home favourite. That works to my advantage too. I hear the boos and I say, "I will silence them."



Red mist: Adams was her fiercest opponent after beating Sharron Williams at the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow, 30 July 2014

**AC:** If you were trash talking, how low would you go?  
**NA:** Nothing too bad.  
**AC:** I think you might be a bit too nice for proper trash talking.  
**NA:** Yeah, probably.  
**AC:** Is pro boxing in good shape?  
**NA:** I think so. I'd like to see just one world title belt per weight division though, instead of all the different ones.  
**AC:** Right, real GO stuff now. Your hair.  
**NA:** I love my hair. I like the designs on the side that my barber does.  
**AC:** A barber?  
**NA:** Yeah, I go to a barber. Brian at Piranha Studios.  
**AC:** Why a barber?  
**NA:** He is really good at designs, and he knows what kind of thing I'll like. I see him once a week. I look after the top myself, just get it trimmed every now and then.  
**AC:** How many tattoos do you have?  
**NA:** Three: one on my neck and back, a lion with "I am everything I want to be" written underneath; this one on my hand is the Chinese symbol for love, and I've got a lily on my stomach. I might do the Olympic rings, but I'm still thinking which part of the body they should go on.

## AC: Which of these statements sums you up: 'I love winning' or 'I hate losing'?

**NA:** I love winning. I don't ever think about losing. Never. You can't. If you think about losing you're already lost.  
**AC:** How many fights have you had? How many have you lost?  
**NA:** Over 150. I've lost eight.  
**AC:** What did you learn from the defeats?  
**NA:** That I don't lose easily.  
**AC:** What do you do with that?  
**NA:** Every loss I have ever had I have connected with a win. Every fighter who beats me, I've fought against them again and won. I decided I had to do that.  
**AC:** Do you ever think the judging in boxing is suspect?  
**NA:** I've had that a few times, when you are in different countries boxing the home favourite. That works to my advantage too. I hear the boos and I say, "I will silence them."



ITV REPORT 4 November 2016 at 10:41pm

## Boxer Nicola Adams' inspirational Mobo message: 'Tell me I can't and that's why I will'



Boxer Nicola Adams turned on the girl power as she accepted the inspirational 'Paving The Way' award at this year's Mobos.

The award is given to individuals in any field who are "punching above their weight" or creating a path for others to follow.

Adams became the first woman to win an Olympic boxing title, the first double Olympic champion, as well as being the first boxer to win European, Commonwealth and World titles.

But despite knowing that was what she wanted to do when she was 12 she revealed she could have easily not succeeded.

She said: "(I was told) If you're dreams don't come true, you can be a ringcard girl.

"Women should be in the kitchen. Women shouldn't be allowed to box.

"And my favourite one is - why don't you just go play tennis?"

She said it sounded funny now but that was what life was like for her growing up.

"But I evolved, I knew I wanted to create a path so girls could follow.

"And I'm standing here now receiving this award, and this is what I say: Tell me I can't, and that's why I will."









# NICOLA ADAMS: NATIONAL TREASURE

PHOTOS L+R  
HAIR + MAKE-UP PATRICIA  
@CAROLHAYES  
STYLING + PHOTOGRAPHY  
ASSISTANT AUTHOR

THE OUT BI  
BOXER WHO  
SCOOPED  
HER SECOND  
OLYMPIC GOLD  
IN RIO THIS  
YEAR TALKS  
TO DIVA

INTERVIEW JANE  
CZYZSELSKA

When Nicola Adams walks into the room, it's hard not to take notice. Despite her size – she cuts a slight physique at just 5' 5" and 51kg – the flyweight world boxing champion has an intensity and a megawatt smile that demands attention. Refreshingly for a celebrity, she's driven herself to the north London studio where we meet for our photo shoot – fresh from the catwalk at London Fashion Week, where she sashayed like a pro in a Vin & Omi suit emblazoned with the image of her hero, Muhammad Ali. Half an hour before our cover star arrived, I went looking for a parking space near the Stoke Newington location and found the only one as far as the eye could see. If I'd placed a sign there that read:

# DIVA

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EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

## Nicola Adams

"I feel proud to be an LGBT role model"

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on her bisexual storyline in *Holby City*

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Trans punk singer on love, sex and heartbreak

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"Getting pregnant our way"

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BY RAILS

“Just be who you are. I didn't do a whole announcement. Gold medals speak for themselves”



“Mum was always positive,  
she told me I could box as  
good as Muhammad Ali!”

Nicola Adams just keeps on  
breaking records—and now  
she’s set to win her second  
Olympic gold.

**- Vogue**









FRANK WARREN PRESENTS

# A NEW ERA FOR BOXING

FRANK WARREN

BT Sport









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Nicola Adams OBE



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**N**obody knows how to work on a dream like Nicola Adams. As a young girl, she told her mother she was going to win a gold medal boxing at the Olympics. It wasn't so much an ambition as a crazy fantasy: women's boxing wasn't even an Olympic sport at the time. But sure enough, Adams went on to become the first woman to win gold, at the London Olympics. Four years later, in Rio, she wept when she won gold again, becoming the first British boxer to retain an Olympic title since in 1924. She is a hero of mine - as a boxer (technically gifted and balletic, she dances like a pint-sized Muhammad Ali), as an accidental role model (the lack of fuss with which she revealed she was bisexual), as a life force (that luminous smile).

We meet in a south London photographer's studio, just a few days after her first professional fight. Adams won the bout; she has also just got engaged to her girlfriend, Mexican-American boxer Marlen Esparza, and is living a sun-blushed life in San Francisco. Things could not be better. Perhaps this is what has made her ready to confront some of the unhappiest periods in her life.

Esparza is with her today, advising her on the photoshoot, telling her how hot she looks. The pair seem deliriously in love; and theirs must be one of the most romantic stories in the history of boxing. In her new autobiography, *Believe*, Adams says that when she was first introduced to Esparza, she was so taken by her she could not speak - nor the second time they met. The third time, she couldn't stop talking. While Adams is having her photograph taken, Esparza tells me this is all true; that when they met she thought Adams was plain weird. But not for long.

Esparza is 27, seven years younger than Adams, and tells me, "I'm a lot meaner than Nicky. People take to her a lot quicker, because she looks more approachable. But when it comes to people she doesn't know, she gets really nervous. She can be socially awkward." Does she realise that? "Not really. I'll say, 'You're self-conscious', and she's 'No, I just feel weird.' If you point out a flaw, she doesn't recognise it. She likes to describe things in an optimistic way, and I like to describe things in a realistic way."

When Adams sits down with me, I see what Esparza means. Adams looks into the distance, and answers in terse monosyllables - not aggressively, just self-consciously. But then she suddenly relaxes, and the contrast could not be more extreme: direct eye-contact, full answers, engaged, surprising. In fact, she turns out to be one of the most open people I have met.

The young Nicola was a frail little thing, waylaid by asthma, allergies, eczema. When she was five, the doctor told her mother she had better not let her run around, lest it trigger her asthma. Adams wasn't having any of it: "Try and tell a five-year-old kid they can't run up and down. It's pretty much impossible," she says in her hard, flat Yorkshire accent.

**'Aged four, I jumped in front of my mum and tried to protect her with a plastic sword. I thought I could keep my dad away. I tried to fight him, but I was a bit small'**



Adams celebrates winning the flyweight gold medal at the Rio Olympics last year

Adams has always said she fluked her way into boxing. When she was 12, her mother, Dee, went to an aerobics class and, not wanting to leave her two children home alone (her babysitter had cancelled), took them with her to the gym. It just so happened that there was a children's boxing class on that day, which Nicola fancied - and that was that.

She told anybody who would listen that she would become an Olympic boxer. Few took her seriously. Although women's boxing goes back to the 18th century, and appeared at the 1904 Olympics in a demonstration bout, it was not introduced as an Olympic sport until 2012. In England it was banned for more than a century, on the grounds that premenstrual syndrome made women too unstable to box. It wasn't until November 1996 that the Amateur Boxing Association of England controversially voted in favour of lifting the ban, allowing girls as young as 10 to compete and to spar in gyms.

Adams had her first fight a year before the ban was lifted, aged 13, at a working men's club in Leeds. She won, and then didn't fight for four years: there simply weren't any girls to fight. Surely she must have been tempted to give up? "Naaah." She grins. "I still enjoyed the training. I'd go with the guys to support them when they were competing. It used to get me frustrated sometimes, because all I wanted to do was get in the ring." Did she fight boys? "No. I used to spar boys, but I wasn't allowed to box them."

As we talk, it emerges that, beyond her chance start in boxing, Adams might have had a more profound motivation. In a chapter of her memoir tellingly entitled *Round 1*, she writes that her parents separated when she was 11, and that her

mother "had put up with a lot". She describes an incident that happened when she was around four and her parents were arguing. "I just wanted to get between them, so I jumped in front of my mum and tried to protect her with a plastic sword. I thought I could keep my dad away. My mum reckons that, even then, I was brave." From the age of eight, she says, she begged her mother to leave her father; three years later, she did.

Why was she so desperate for her mother to leave? "I knew she wasn't happy and that made me unhappy as well. She's such a bubbly, joyful person. I didn't like the way I was seeing her being treated." In her book, she says she hoped her father, Innocent, would change and learn, but he never did. What did he need to learn? "I guess just to be a better person, and to be nicer to my mum." Adams is looking into the middle distance. Was her father violent to her mother? "Yes. My dad was hitting my mum when I was trying to hit him with my plastic sword to protect her." And did he ever hit Nicola? "Yes. Just the odd slap here and there. But I was more concerned about my mum. I tried to fight back, but I was a bit small." She looks at me, and even now that smile is luminous.

There is no doubt who the hero of her book, and life, is: Dee. In her early years, Adams' family were comfortably off. Both parents were working (her father as a plasterer, her mother as a restaurant manager), and every summer they left Leeds to spend six weeks in New York with relatives. Adams talks about how they moved to a new estate after her mother left her father; how her mother took on two jobs, working day and night to make ends meet; how her mother's black uniform went grey with rewashing. She worked, »





'Who'd win in a fight? We don't know': with her fiancée, boxer Marlen Esparza

boxing and hand over her top and shorts, dripping in sweat, to the next girl to fight in. "That was only 2008," she says today, the same year she won her silver at the World Championships. "It was shocking. You'd think it was the 1950s or something."

Adams is also a keen actor, and subsidised herself by appearing as an extra in TV shows, including *Waterloo Road* and *Coronation Street*. She had hoped that women's boxing would be introduced as an Olympic sport in 2008, but it wasn't to be. In fact, 2008 proved a disastrous year. She slipped on a boxing bandage, fell downstairs and cracked a vertebra in her back. For five months, she had to wear a body cast moulded to the top half of her body, in agony, bored silly. She didn't box for more than a year. But in August 2009, she was given the best incentive to get fit again when it was announced that women's boxing was going to be included in the next Olympics.

And in 2012, she danced, jabbed and clubbed her way to gold in the flyweight final, in front of a crowd of 10,000, outclassing her great rival, China's Ren Cancan (Cancan had beaten her in the finals of the 2010 and 2012 World Championships, as well as beating Esparza in the Olympic semi-final). It was one of the great moments of London 2012: the crowd roaring so loudly you couldn't hear the commentary, Adams punching the air triumphantly at the end, history being made.

Adams made it clear who the gold medal was for, as she does today. "It was all for my mum. I always promised her I was going to be the best." So she was shocked when her father turned up in the family area afterwards. "I was a bit angry,

because how many other tournaments have I been to? But this is the only one you're going to be there for, because it's the Olympics."

Did she tell him to leave? "No, because I didn't want to spoil the mood." Had he supported her in any way since he left? "I got the occasional birthday or Christmas present. I stopped accepting them from him not long after 2012. I don't have anything to do with him at all now."

The turning point came, she says, when they had a phone conversation soon after her victory. "I said, 'Just apologise for the way you were with my mum and with me.' And he didn't even admit anything that happened in the past, so I was like, 'OK, that's it, I'm done.' I was angry. Really angry." That was their last contact? "Yes. Then he messaged me to say good luck for Rio. And it's like, well what about the Commonwealth Games, the Europeans, the World Championships and all the other tournaments I've had for the past four years? What about good luck for the qualifiers?"

When I asked him to comment, Innocent Adams confirmed he had refused to apologise to his daughter and ex-wife, because he didn't feel he had anything to apologise for. "The allegations made are completely false," he said. "I have never been violent towards my ex-wife or Nicola. This is just a defamation of my good character." Dee Adams stands by her daughter's version of events.

Now Adams plans to become Britain's first female professional world champion, boxing as "the Lioness". She is managed by Frank Warren, who only three years ago said, "I don't like women's boxing. Never have, and never will." Why has she agreed to be represented by such a dinosaur? Simple, she says. "He's seen the light. »

**'My first match was in a smoke-filled room, my lungs on fire': an exclusive extract from Nicola Adams' new book**

My new life started when I was 12, not long after my parents split up, because that's when I discovered boxing. My mum went to her aerobics class, and Kurtis and I waited in the gym outside, which happened to be a boxing gym. I remember looking around and being so taken aback. The super-heavyweights were pounding away on bags, and people were sparring each other. It was a proper, old-school, Rocky-style gym, with steamed-up windows and peeling paint. I instantly fell in love with the place. I stood there and thought, "This must have been what it was like for Muhammad Ali when he was starting out."

Ali had always been a big idol of mine, because I used to watch all of his fights on TV with my dad. But I hadn't imagined for a minute it was something I might do one day.

That day, I had a choice of either sitting around or getting involved in the boxing. The coach, Steve Franks, asked if I fancied giving it a go, and I thought, "Why not?" The first thing he got me to do was punching pads, and it just felt right and I wanted to do more. When I got home that night I couldn't stop talking about it and begged my mum to take me back.

The gym ran a junior boxing club and an after-school club. The more I went, the more hooked I got. I felt like the people there understood me. Over the next couple of weeks I learned to shadow-box; I soon perfected my stance and started learning to jab. I didn't think about the fact that it was such a male environment and I was this young girl. Steve said, really early on, that the gym wasn't male or female - it was just a boxing gym. He had one rule and that was that we all listened to him. One day he took my mum aside and told her he thought I had real potential.

When I turned 13, Mum started letting me go to the gym on my own. I had to spar with guys a lot and quite often I gave them a good run for their money. My brother started boxing a bit as well and I used to spar with him sometimes, which I loved. He thought he could beat me: there was no way.

None of my female friends boxed, but I soon made friends at the gym. I didn't see it as a big deal, and none of my mates, male or female, did, »

at different times, as a manager for a jewellery company, for a restaurant, and as a hairdresser.

However tough it was, Adams says her family life was transformed. The three of them (Dee, Adams, and her younger brother Kurtis) became an even closer unit. "We started laughing, and joking." Had it been hard to laugh before? "Yeah, it was tough because you didn't want to do anything where you could get into trouble... everybody would be tiptoeing around." Would her father go off without warning? "Yes." Did he drink? "No, not a lot - he was just really controlling. My mum wouldn't be allowed to go out with her friends."

While there were times she missed her father, Adams says she was relieved her mother had finally gathered the courage to make a fresh start. She understands why she found it hard to leave, describing a situation where "the other person is so controlling that they feel they can't, or they feel they're not mentally strong enough to do things on their own."

Did her father scare her when she was a little girl? "Yes. He was huge. He's not big no more, though." She laughs. I bet you weren't laughing back then, I say. "No, it was scary." I ask her if she would ever campaign against domestic violence. "Yeah, I'd love to work with that."

A year after her parents separated, Adams started boxing. Does she think the two things had anything to do with each other? "I don't know," she says. "I've never really thought about it that way. I've always been quite strong-minded. Maybe somewhere it did. At the time, I enjoyed boxing because it was a place I could go to escape. All the kids in the gym had problems, and it was a place you didn't have to think about them."

Before her father left, Adams had enjoyed watching classic matches with him on television. Does he deserve any credit for her success? She thinks long and hard. "I don't know, because if my mum hadn't taken me by mistake I wouldn't have thought for one second I was going to be a boxer. She's the reason I ended up boxing."

At the age of 14, there was another family crisis. Dee contracted meningitis and almost died. Adams called the ambulance when she found her mother could barely walk, her speech slurred. And it was Adams who demanded that something urgent be done when she was left for three hours at the hospital. By then, Dee could not remember her date of birth or how many children she had. When the hospital eventually carried out tests, Adams says, they discovered her mother's brain had begun to shut down; she had had only a couple of hours to live.

Dee's recovery was slow and laborious. Twenty years on, she still suffers the after-effects, and while she recovered, Adams had to look after both herself and her brother. This is when she grew up; the word she uses repeatedly to describe herself through this period is "strong". The one time she wept was in private. "I was by myself in the

**After her parents separated, Adams, her mother and brother became a close unit. 'We started laughing again. Before, everybody would be tiptoeing around'**



In Florida on her 21st birthday with her younger brother, Kurtis, and her mother, Dee

hospital cafeteria and I just broke down. I didn't ever let my brother see me cry, because I didn't want him to think things were really bad. I stayed strong for him. And I had to stay strong for Mum."

To complicate matters, at the age of 15, Adams was diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. As always, she tries to see this as a positive. "I think it's helped my training. I never get tired. I've always got energy. It helps with my shots. I'm always trying new things."

Sitting nearby, Esparza looks up from her phone and laughs. "I know I'll never be bored, because I never know what she's going to do. It's hard to keep up with her."

Is Adams calmer these days? "Well, I'm on Adderall, so I'm more focused. I stopped for a bit, but went on it again. When you have ADHD you can start a million things, but it's very hard to focus and just finish one thing. The Adderall helps."

I ask if she worked hard at school. "Only at classes I liked, like science and maths." She once said her favourite book is *Freakonomics*, Steven Levitt and Stephen J Dubner's study of economics based on the principle of incentives. Adams lights up like a pinball machine when I mention it. She smiles with her eyes, cheeks and nose. Even her ears seem to smile. "I really like that book because it explains economics in a fun way. Let me think of an example. Like, how drug dealers basically make the same amount of money as people working in McDonald's." She stops and corrects herself. "That might be in *SuperFreakonomics*, the second one."

Is she a big reader? "I've read Bill Bryson's *History Of Nearly Everything*. I liked that. What else? *The God Delusion*, the Richard Dawkins

book." Blimey, I say - but you're a Christian, aren't you? She grins. "Yeah. I was intrigued. I like trying to understand different views and perceptions. There are bits where it makes you question things. You think: 'That's a good point.'" So did Dawkins convert her? "Nah. I'm hanging on my own side!"

At school, she was a talented sprinter, running 100m and 200m for Leeds as a teenager. She might have made a career of running, if she wasn't so taken with boxing. At 17, she got the chance to box for the second time, as "Babyface Adams", winning with a knockout in the second round. There were still few fights to be had in Britain, so she travelled Europe to spar and compete. In 2001, she became the first woman boxer to represent England. In 2003, aged 20, she became English amateur champion.

Adams was still studying - first business studies, physical education and software development at college, then a BTEC in sports science at Hopwood Hall in Rochdale. The main reason she went to Hopwood Hall was because the boxing coach Alwyn Belcher worked there: she was desperate for him to turn her into a champ. Like most of the men she came across, he was reluctant to train a woman, but in 2007 he coached her to a silver medal at the European Championships. A year later, she won another silver at the World Championships in China.

The attitude to women boxers was still primitive. There was little funding, hopeless facilities, no respect. Adams says that female boxers were treated like the kind of "novelty act you get on Britain's Got Talent". In her book, she describes how sometimes one girl would finish >>



VALERIE PHILLIPS FOR THE GUARDIAN; STYLING: MELANIE WILKINSON; HAIR: SOPHIA FOX AT STELLA CREATIVE ARTISTS; MAKEUP: LOU DARTFORD AT STELLA CREATIVE ARTISTS; ADAMS WEARS TOP: EVA THORSBERG; LEGS: BOTH CHARLY COHEN.COM; TRAINERS: ADAMS' OWN

He's totally come round to us. I had the meeting with him, and he didn't shy away from what he'd said in the past. He said, 'Seeing you compete over the years has changed my mind.' He thinks I could do really big things in the pros. He believes in what I want to do for women's boxing - get it to the same level as the men's. I'd love to be able to headline a show in Vegas at the MGM.' In other words, he's a businessman who has finally realised you are marketable? She grins. "Exactly."

Does she enjoy boxing as much as she used to? "Yes!" she says, and once she starts talking about the joy of boxing, it's hard to stop her. "It's one of those sports where you're never the finished article. There's always something more to learn; a new move - you could always be faster, stronger, more technical. That's what I enjoy about it most. In boxing, it doesn't matter if your speed goes a little bit. Take Canelo [Alvarez] and Floyd Mayweather when they fought. You had someone really young and strong, and you have someone who is older and a lot more skilful, and he just had the smarts to outmanoeuvre the younger guy."

Does anything else give her a buzz like boxing? She looks at Esparza. "The only thing that gives me the same adrenaline is driving on the race tracks." She's not going to swap boxing for Formula One?

Esparza shakes her head furiously. "She's not going to be a racing driver," she says. Because it's dangerous, or unrealistic? "Cos it's dangerous. She'd do it and she'd probably be good at it, but she's not going to do it. You can't control a car like you think you can." She looks at Adams. "We've talked about this."

Adams is hooting with laughter. Esparza hasn't

finished. "She's the kind of person who, when she has fun with something and she wants to do it, she does it. That's what I like about her. But not that. I said to her, if you do that I can climb Mount Everest. One danger for another. And she said no to that."

But surely boxing is dangerous? "There's always a danger when you do sport," Adams says, "and it's whether you're happy with the risks involved, and I'm happy. The first thing you learn is not to get hit."

Now that she is boxing professionally, she is fighting for the first time without a headguard. Does she fear a punch in the head? "Nah, that's boxing. You get in the shower, you're going to get wet. And it's a lot easier. The helmet blocks your peripheral vision. Now, I can see everything. Plus my head's a much smaller target now."

Adams and Esparza have been together for just over a year, and alternate between Adams' home in Leeds and Esparza's in San Francisco. Where does she prefer? "I like the weather." In Leeds? "San Francisco! We train over there." She thinks they might move there permanently.

I ask Adams if Esparza has changed her. "Yes, I'm happier - if that was possible." She laughs. "I never thought you could be that happy being with someone. I just thought it was something you saw in movies. I thought, 'Really? Nobody actually loves somebody like that - it's just too far!' But now I know the movies are true."

Is it true that Esparza had only been out with men before? "Yes," she says. "But Nicky just put them to shame."

Would they ever fight each other? No way, they say simultaneously. They expected to in the past, when they fought in the same weight division - but now Esparza is a weight lower.

They talk about how different they are as boxers. "I'm very aggressive," Esparza says. "There's a lot going on all the time in my fights. She's more of a counter-puncher, lets people come to her. I'm more: 'I'm going to come to you.'"

Who would win in a fight?

"Don't know," they chorus.

I ask Adams what her ultimate ambition as a boxer is. "I want to be remembered as the greatest, just like my hero, Muhammad Ali."

Has Esparza got anything to say about that? "About her being the best ever? I'm pretty sure I will be. I have to be. I don't do this for no reason." They look at each other and laugh.

"We do have a rivalry about who is going to be the best," Adams says.

"It's the elephant in the relationship," Esparza says.

At 34, Adams thinks she is at her peak. There is so much going on in her life: a wedding to plan, the new book, an acting career to get off the ground. She knows she has got her work cut out if she is going to be remembered as the greatest female boxer ever. But then Adams has a knack of realising her dreams ●

either. Maybe if I'd started later it would have seemed strange, but at 12 you don't analyse these things. You follow your heart.

My first competitive match took place in a working men's club in Leeds when I was 13. My family came to watch me and I was so excited I kept peeping through the curtains to look at the audience. Steve wanted me to conserve my energy for the match, but I just wanted to get out into the ring and show people what I could do. I chose Ini Kamoze's Here Comes the Hotstepper to walk out to.

I'd been watching a lot of Prince Naseem's fights, so when I stepped into the ring I started doing his moves, like the shuffle, and engaging with the audience. Putting on a show has been really important to me since day one, because boxing should be about entertainment as much as everything else. I wasn't scared about getting hit because I'd been boxing for a year and I knew that, if it did happen, I'd take it all in my stride.

I think that was the first time most of the people in the club had seen a girl box, and I imagined they would all carry on drinking their pints and chatting but, amazingly, they all paid attention. I was pleasantly surprised. The match took place before the smoking ban came in and the entire room was thick with smoke. I remember going back to the corner at the end of the first and second rounds. My lungs were on fire. Steve told me stories about how, when he boxed as a youngster, even the coach was allowed to smoke. He'd be trying to get his breath back in the middle of a match and his coach would be blowing smoke in his face. Can you imagine? The smoking ban is one of the best things that has ever happened, in my opinion.

I won the match and, that was the moment I decided that, one day, I was going to be an Olympic champion. When I used to tell people I was going to win gold, they'd laugh at me, but I didn't care. One day, I was going to prove them all wrong ●

This is an edited extract from *Believe* by Nicola Adams, published by Viking on 18 May at £14.99. To order a copy for £12.74, go to [bookshop.theguardian.com](http://bookshop.theguardian.com) or call 0330 333 6846.

**'I'd love to headline a show in Las Vegas. There's always something to learn: you could always be faster, stronger, more technical'**

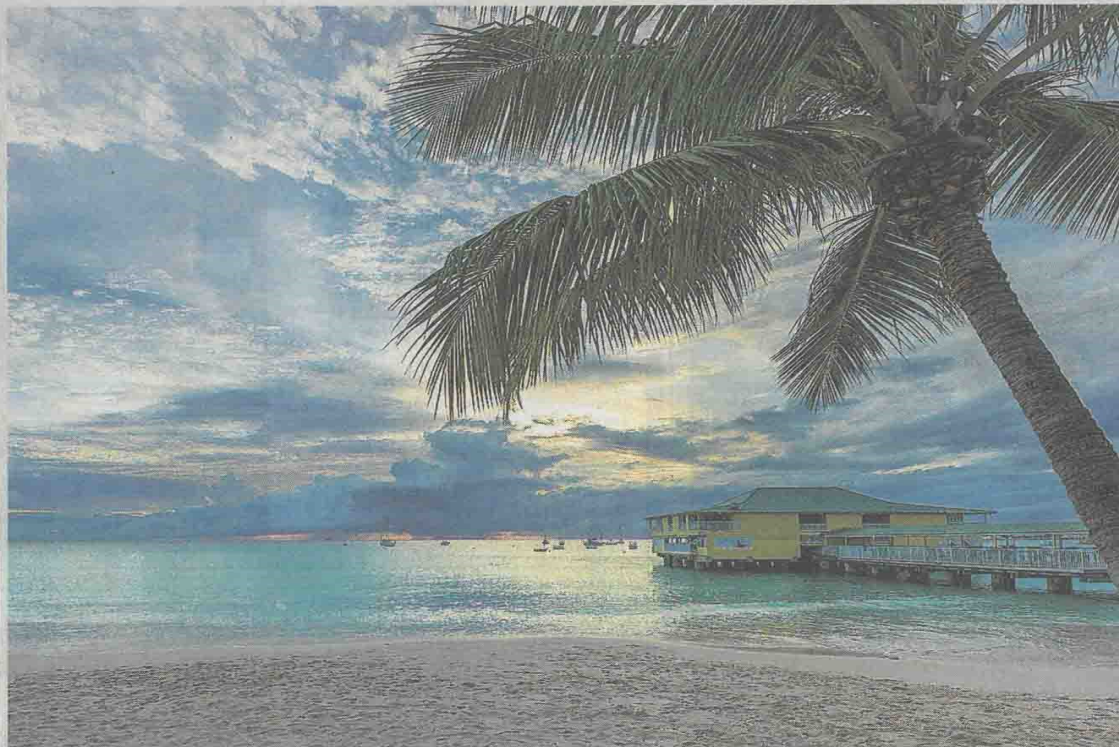
INTERVIEW

# Travelling life



Nicola Adams  
Boxer and Olympian

**'I like to be on a beach having a piña colada'**



Pebbles Beach, in Carlisle Bay, Barbados, at sunset, above; and Lombard Street, San Francisco, right

**How often do you travel?**

I'm constantly shuttling between my home in Leeds, where I grew up, and San Francisco. I'm based there for boxing training with the American coach Virgil Hunter at his gym in Oakland, California. He's training champions including Amir Khan. I'm looking to buy an apartment in San Francisco soon. Whenever I'm not competing, I go back to Leeds for a couple of weeks. I'm just starting to get used to the 11-hour flights, an eight-hour time difference and the jet lag.

**Any advice on overcoming jet lag?**

I adjust my behaviour to the time of my destination, so

when I'm flying back to the US, I try to sleep on the plane when everybody in San Francisco would be sleeping and then wake up accordingly.

**What do you need for the perfect holiday?**

In the summer, I like to be on a nice beach having a piña colada cocktail and do water sports, such as jet skiing or banana boating. In the winter, I absolutely love snowboarding. Wherever I go, I need something with lots of activities to keep me busy, otherwise I get bored easily.

**Your earliest memory of travelling abroad?**

Some of my happiest memories growing up are of

going to New York on holiday for six weeks every summer. We had family there and I really used to look forward to it. I saw all the major sights such as the Statue of Liberty and the Empire State Building. My cousins and I would hang out at the local pizza parlour and I'd beg my dad to take me to the theme parks. Back home, we'd go on regular day trips to theme parks such as Alton Towers and Thorpe Park. Every year I'd hope that I'd grown enough to go on some of the rides for older kids. I still love theme parks.

**Most unusual places you've competed?**

The first was Ningbo, China, in 2008 for the World Amateur Championships. That's where I won my first

world medal – a silver. It's an industrial coastal town with one of the busiest ports in the world. I definitely had culture shock. It was teeming with people – I couldn't get over how crowded it was.

Back in July 2013, for the European Union Amateur Championships, I fought in Keszthely, Hungary. It's a small but beautiful lakeside resort town, steeped in history and surrounded by an area known for its wine and spas. It was really, really hot, but oddly rather than the fight being held in a typical sports hall or arena, it was in a giant wedding marquee. Very random.

**Favourite holiday destination?**

Miami. I first went there in 2010 for a training camp in

preparation for the World Championships with the United States team, and I've been back several times since. I loved the people and the weather. From there I travelled to Barbados, where the competition was held. The beaches were incredibly beautiful and after the day's training, it was such a relief to be able to dive straight into the sea. It was so warm, but refreshing nevertheless.

**Favourite city?**

I've fallen in love with San Francisco in the past year, since I moved there. It's great for tourists because there's so much to see, such as Alcatraz, the trams, the Golden Gate Bridge and Lombard Street, said to be the steepest and most crooked street in the world. And the weather is so sunny.

**Favourite hotels?**

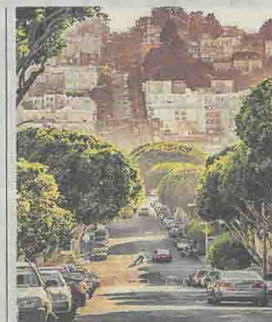
The Shangri-La at the Shard and the Park Lane Hilton, both in London. At the Shangri-La, I love the 360-degree views over the capital which are especially magical and beautiful by night. At the Park Lane, I really love the staff and the bar on the top floor – they do the best cocktails.

**Favourite restaurant?**

There are too many to name, because I do so much eating out. But I especially love Mexican food, so I'm lucky that San Francisco has some fantastic examples such as La Taqueria, Colibri and Gracias Madre. I love Brazilian steakhouses, too. Fogo de Chão is an excellent choice.

**Worst travel experience?**

When I was 24, I was on a girls' holiday in Portugal and got bitten by a spider, which made my leg balloon after it got infected. I still have a scar from it. These days I seem to be cursed by airport and flight delays, but I use the time to go over work, read through scripts



and watch a backlog of television series. I've just finished *The Walking Dead* and I'm a huge fan of *Game of Thrones*.

**Favourite city for nightlife?**

You can't beat London. I'm not a big drinker, but after months of preparing for a competition, I love going out to let my hair down and celebrate afterwards.

**Favourite airline?**

I love Virgin Atlantic and British Airways. They offer great direct flights from the UK to San Francisco.

**Your one travel essential?**

My tablet, which is loaded with books, movies and television shows.

**What do you hate about travelling?**

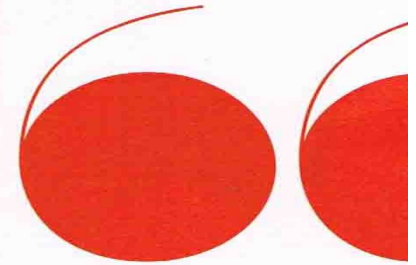
I'm quite impatient from the time I get to the airport to the flight, always looking at the clock.

**Where next?**

Australia appeals. I'm going to arrange a rumble in a jungle out there so I can visit.

Interview by Sarah Ewing

Believe (Viking, £14.99) by Nicola Adams is out now.



**NICOLA  
ADAMS MBE**  
*Olympic boxer*

## 'I work better under pressure'

**I learned three things in 2016. One, how determined I am and two, how mentally strong I am. Three, I'll come back to.** At the start of 2016, I suffered an ankle injury during training. I was preparing for the qualifiers for Rio 2016. It came not long after a shoulder injury that had left me needing an operation. I don't think I've ever felt pain like it, but I had to continue training.

Boxing is 50% physical, 50% mental. When you're injured, both elements are tested. I train three times a day, Monday to Friday. I started boxing when I was 12. I love it because whatever you put into it, you get out of it. The harder you train, the more you win.

I work better when I'm under pressure. Having an injury gave me an extra kick. Fortunately, by May I was back to peak fitness and qualified for Rio. The expectation to achieve another gold following London 2012 was huge. Before I'd even got my place for Rio, people were saying I was going to get another gold. Everyone had such high hopes for me, but that gave me a boost. I'd rather people were saying,

'She can do it.' London was such a special Olympics. It was my first Games, my first gold and the amount of support from the home crowd was just unbelievable. But the encouragement from everyone was up there in Rio. I was getting messages on social media and daily calls from friends and family.

Younger boxers tell me I'm their role model and that I'm their hero – it's so nice to hear. Sometimes, I can't believe what I've achieved. It's mad. All I'm thinking when I compete is that I want to win. Who's my hero? Muhammad Ali. He was more than just a boxer – he was a character.

When I'm walking towards the ring I'm trying to enjoy the moment, then once I step inside I'm thinking about the tactics. Winning my second gold was just amazing. But that moment in the ring wasn't my highlight. My highlight was standing on the podium. I just burst into tears. I never cry. I think it was just the emotion of training for the last four years, the injuries I'd suffered... everything really.

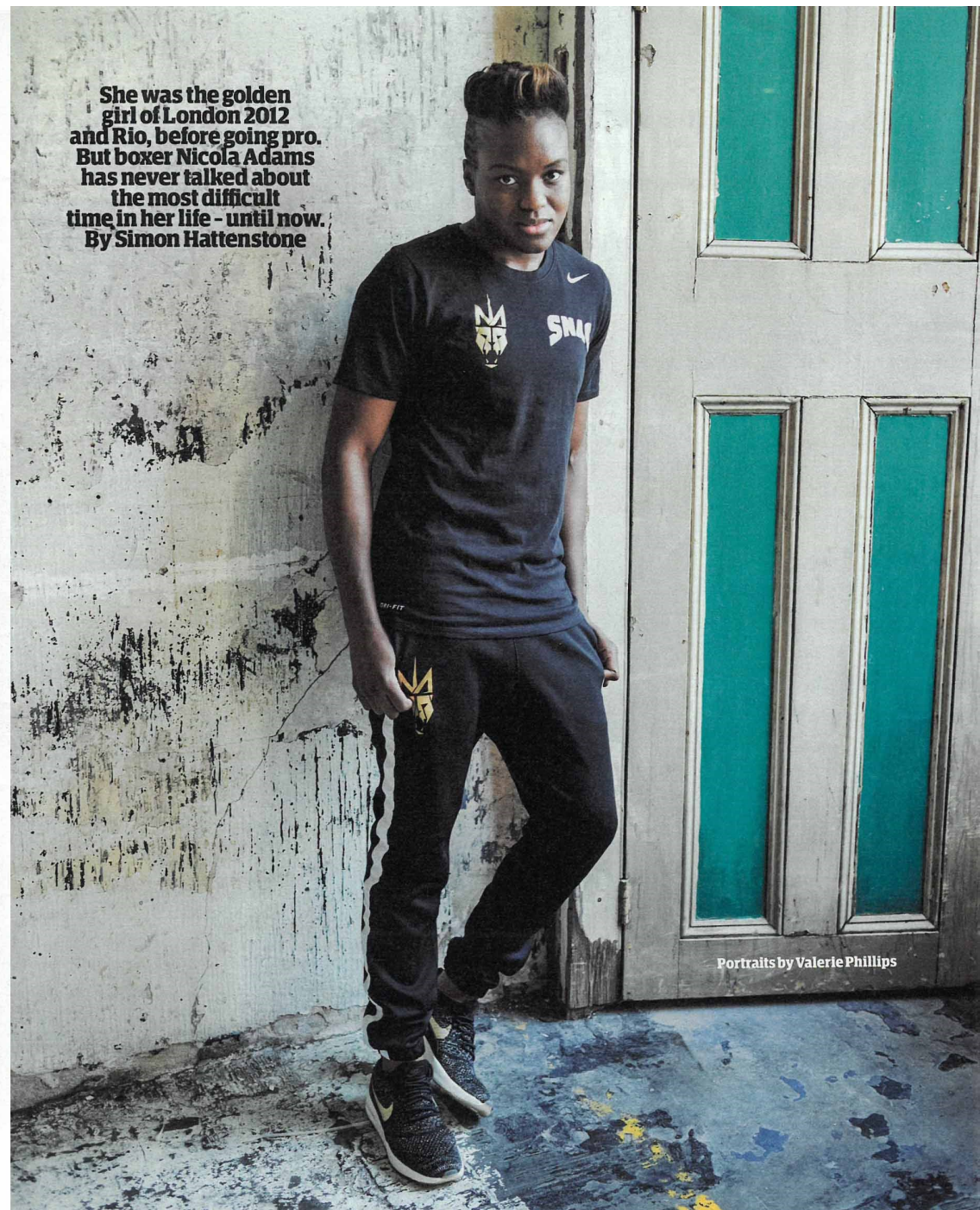
The third thing I've learned this year? That I can cry in public! ▶

Jacket, £65, trousers, £35, and loafers, £29, all Topshop (topshop.com); camisole, £59.95, Samsøe and Samsøe (johnlewis.com)

# STARS

tough

She was the golden girl of London 2012 and Rio, before going pro. But boxer Nicola Adams has never talked about the most difficult time in her life - until now. By Simon Hattenstone



Portraits by Valerie Phillips

# BALANCE

LIVE WELL

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REBRANDING  
MENTAL HEALTH

QUIZ: DO YOU  
LISTEN TO  
YOUR BODY?

CANNABIS  
GOES  
MAINSTREAM

ALOHA!  
HAWAIIAN  
POKÉ BOWL  
RECIPES

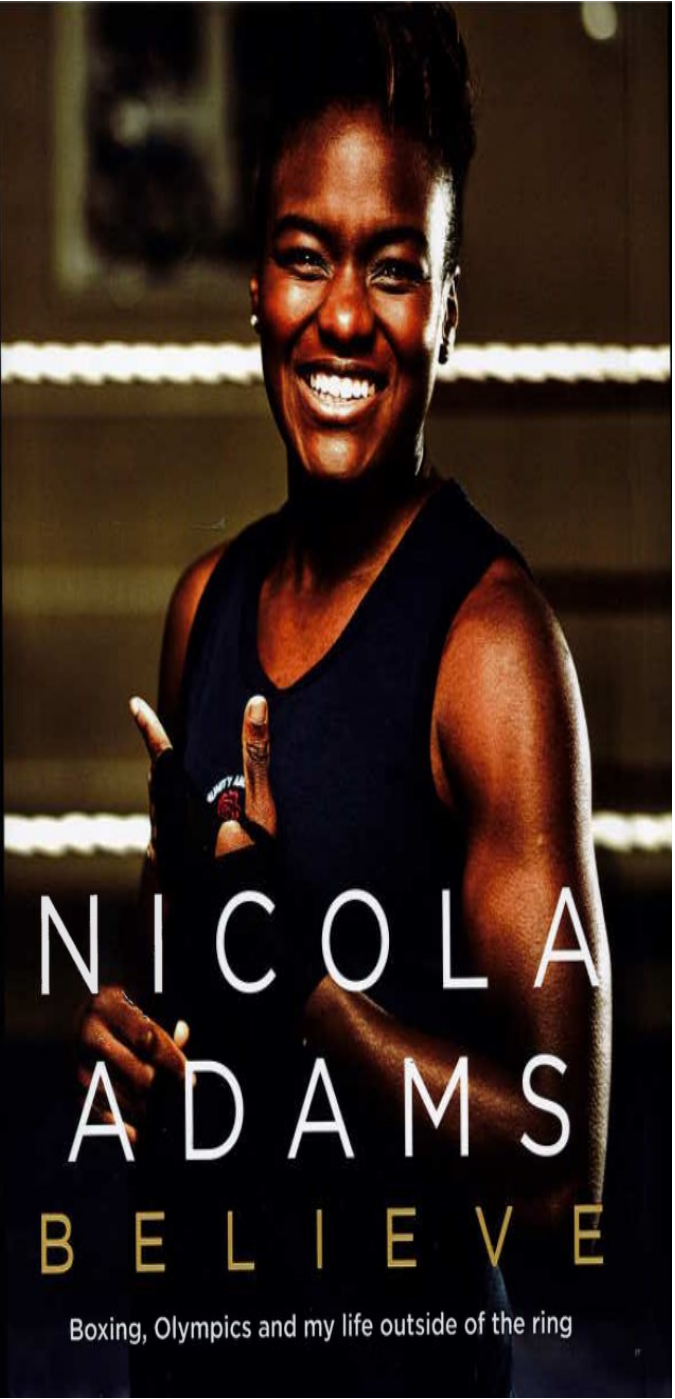


# Nicola

*Fighting spirit*

JUNE 2017  
ISSUE 14  
BALANCE.MEDIA

NICOLA ADAMS BELIEVE



# NICOLA ADAMS BELIEVE

PENGUIN  
VIKING

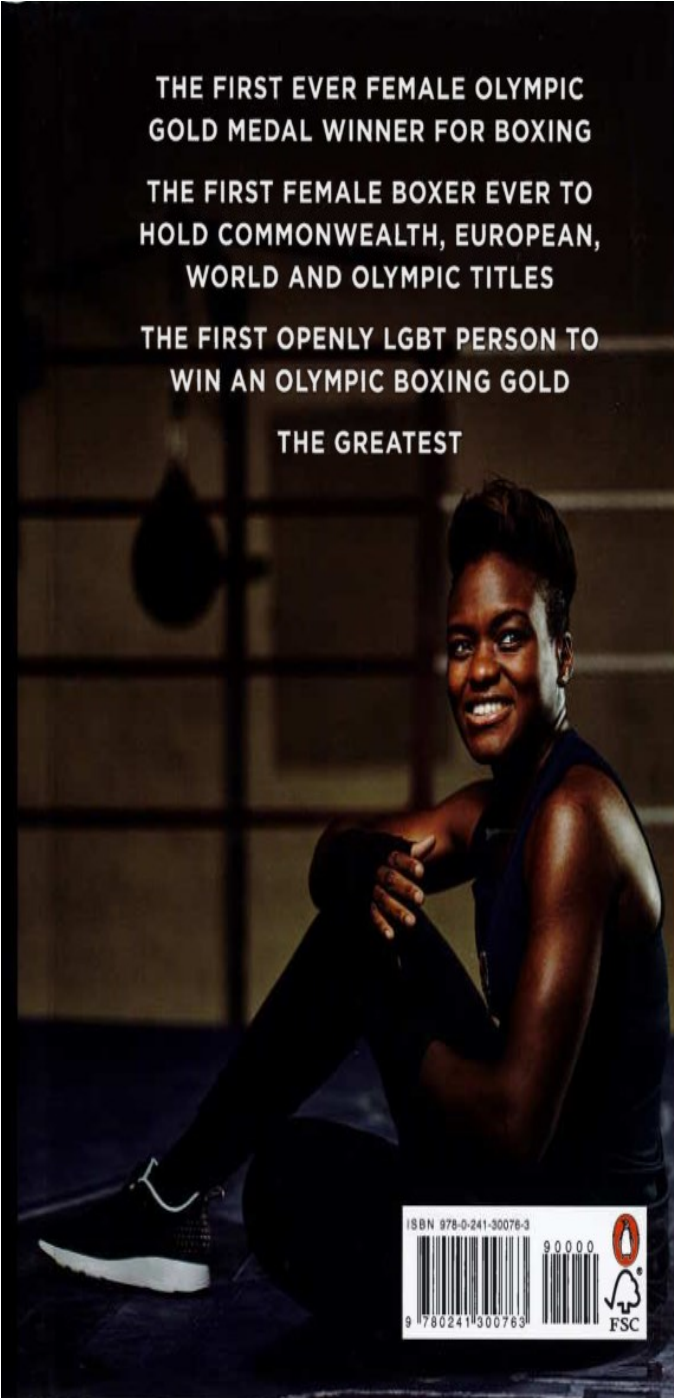
Boxing, Olympics and my life outside of the ring

THE FIRST EVER FEMALE OLYMPIC  
GOLD MEDAL WINNER FOR BOXING

THE FIRST FEMALE BOXER EVER TO  
HOLD COMMONWEALTH, EUROPEAN,  
WORLD AND OLYMPIC TITLES

THE FIRST OPENLY LGBT PERSON TO  
WIN AN OLYMPIC BOXING GOLD

THE GREATEST



At London 2012 Nicola Adams made history. The flyweight boxer became the first woman ever to win an Olympic Gold medal for boxing. In Rio 2016, with the nation cheering her on, she did it all over again.

Years of relentless training, fundraising and determination have seen Nicola battle through injury, prejudice and defeat to become one of Britain's best-loved athletes and an inspiration to all those who are chasing after a seemingly impossible dream.

From a leisure centre in Leeds to the Olympic Stadium in Rio, Nicola with her infamous smile has become the poster girl for women in sport. She's a trailblazer, record-breaker, and has led the way for women's boxing. This is Nicola's story of grit, talent and the real person behind the smile.

**Nicola Adams** is the reigning Olympic, World, Commonwealth Games and European Games flyweight boxing champion. She became the first woman in the UK to win an Olympic Gold medal for boxing during London 2012 and won her second Olympic Gold in Rio 2016. In 2017 she made headline news by turning professional. She topped the list of the *Independent's* 101 most influential LGBT people in Britain for 2012 and was voted *Glamour's* Sportswoman of the Year in 2013.



weekend  
06.05.17

punch

# Sucker

Nicola Adams reveals the dark days that drive her

Zigzag-ah:  
confessions  
of a Spice Girls  
superfan

Experience:  
my dog  
rescues cats

theguardian



Taking the plunge Nicola Adams has high ambitions for the next stage of her career, which will start in earnest with her professional debut on 8 April in Manchester  
Yuri Cortez/AFP/Getty Images

# Adams turns pro after sounding out Joshua

**Olympic gold medallist aims for world title after signing deal with Frank Warren and BT Sport**

Sean Ingle

Nicola Adams took advice from the IBF world heavyweight champion, Anthony Joshua, after having sleepless nights about turning professional - but, having made her decision, she intends to emulate him and her hero Muhammad Ali by following up Olympic gold with a world title.

"I speak to Anthony quite a lot and he said I'd love it: the lights, the cameras, being able to control your own destiny," she said after signing a promotional deal with Frank Warren and BT Sport yesterday. "I love the big shows. That is just me. Even when I walk to the ring, I'm smiling and waving to the crowds.

"I had a few sleepless nights. I was like 'I could go to Tokyo and become a triple Olympic champion, solely focus on acting, or turn pro and become a world champion', so it was a tough decision. But I decided that I wanted to do something new, and I wanted to do what my hero

Muhammad Ali did by going to the pro ranks and becoming a world champion."

Adams, who will make her debut on 8 April in Manchester, before fighting in her home town of Leeds a month later, has set her sights on winning the world title within a year. She also insists that even at 34 her best days lie ahead of her.

"I feel like these are my peak years," she said. "And as a pro I will be able to plant my feet a lot more, and get a lot more power in my punches and just take my time picking my shots. So hopefully next year I'll be going for a world title and lighting up the scene."

Few would be surprised if Adams succeeded in becoming the first woman to be an Olympic gold medallist for Britain and a professional world title holder - a feat that would make her only the third Briton to do so after Joshua and James DeGale. After all, she is used to making history. In 2001 she became the first female boxer to represent England; in 2007 the first to win a European boxing medal; in 2008 the first to a world championship medal; in 2012 the first woman to win an Olympic gold medal.

She also won gold at the 2014 Commonwealth Games and the 2016 world championships, before retaining her Olympic title

by beating France's Sarah Ourahmoune in Rio. No wonder Warren called her one of his "most exciting" signings in his 35 years as a promoter. "I am eating humble pie because I said I would never promote women's boxing," he said.

"But after London 2012, cabbies were always mentioning Nicola and I was thinking 'Am I a dinosaur?' In fact, more people were talking about Nicola than Joshua. She has totally changed my mind about it. Over the last eight years there has been a tremendous influx of women into the sport and I want to be part of that. We are going to have some big nights ahead. We intend to lead her to become a multiple world champion."

Warren also indicated that if Adams progressed quickly in the professional ranks she could even emulate the Ukrainian Vasyl Lomachenko, who followed up winning double Olympic gold in 2008 and 2012 by winning a professional world title in his third fight. "She'll need a couple of fights to settle down and we'll see where we go. But maybe she'll do a Lomachenko, go out there and do it quick. Why not? Her pedigree is as good as his."

Adams laughed when she was asked whether she was aware of Warren's previously held views about women's box-

ing. "I'm very aware!" she replied. "But if I've been able to change Frank's mind, I believe I can change anyone's mind about women's boxing. Signing with Frank was probably unexpected for a lot of people but they believed in my dream, and they have the right set-up to help me become a

## Roll of honour

**Oct 2011** Crowned European champion with victory against Frenchwoman Sarah Ourahmoune in Rotterdam

**Aug 2012** Wins first women's Olympic gold medal by outclassing Ren Cancan of China at the London Games

**Aug 2014** Becomes Commonwealth champion by beating Northern Ireland's Michaela Walsh in Glasgow

**May 2016** Completes gold medal set by beating Thailand's Peamwilai Laopeam at Kazakhstan world championships

**Aug 2016** Becomes first British boxer in 92 years to retain Olympic title with another win over Ourahmoune in Rio

world champion and take women's boxing to the next level."

Adams, who is yet to decide on her new trainer after leaving GB Boxing, knows that women's professional boxing has little of the prestige or money of the men's ranks - the best professional flyweights in the world, who include the Mexican Jessica "Kika" Chavez and the German Susi "Killer Queen" Kentikian, are barely known by hardened aficionados. But, as in the amateur ranks, Adams intends to be a trailblazer, paving the way for others to follow in her stead.

She was asked whether there were any professional women's fighters she particularly admired, but replied: "No, just Ali. Because of his character inside and outside the ring. His poems, his rhymes, his foot speed and his hand speed."

In the amateurs she fought wearing a head guard over four two-minute rounds, while in the pros there will be no similar protection and championship bouts stretch to 10 two-minute rounds.

Some sensations, however, will be all too familiar. "I'll definitely have nerves in my first fight," she said smiling. "And I'd be worried if I didn't, because I'd be a bit too overconfident. But the pro ranks are made for me."

# The Champ

*She won everything in the amateurs, bagged two Olympic golds and now looks set to dominate the pros. It's safe to say Nicola Adams packs serious punch*

PHOTOGRAPHS by LUKE & NIK

Nicola Adams is the first boxer ever - male or female - to win the World, Commonwealth and European Games titles, and boast being a double gold-medal-winning Olympian. That's every accolade open to amateurs. But when you're only 34, and replete with the eye of the tiger, the last thing you do then is retire. This year, Nicola turned professional and started a new career. "The main difference is that there's no headguard, so I can see a lot more when punches are coming towards me." What hasn't changed? How she feels on fight day: "I'm excited, I'm confident, I'm nervous and I want to put on a good show. But most importantly, I want to win."

PREVIOUS WINNERS INCLUDE *Johanna Konta (2016); Laura Trott (2015); Dame Jessica Ennis-Hill (2011)*



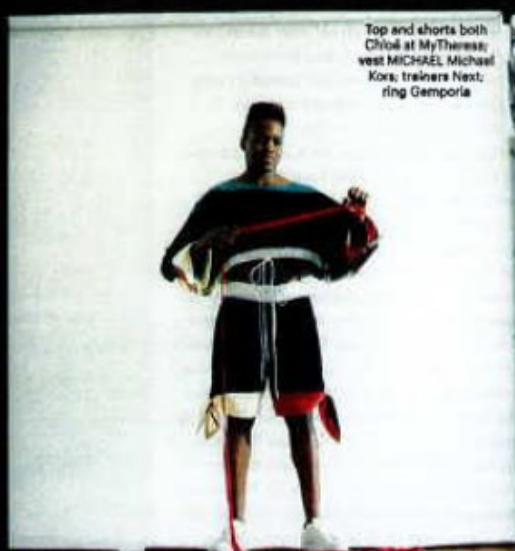
RA 400

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KODAK PORTRA 400



Top and shorts both Chloé at MyTherapist; vest MICHAEL Michael Kors; trainers Next; ring Gemporia



"I want to inspire the next generation"



Styling: Lucy Walker; Hair: Chloé McEwan at Trenz Agency; Makeup: Sarah Sanderson at Trenz Agency; Photographs: Luke & Nik









Britain's most successful female boxer and winner of two Olympic golds, Nicola Adams is responsible for enticing a whole new legion of women – and men – to join boxing clubs, including our own *Polly Vernon*. Here's what happened when Nicola accepted Polly's invitation to train at her local gym...

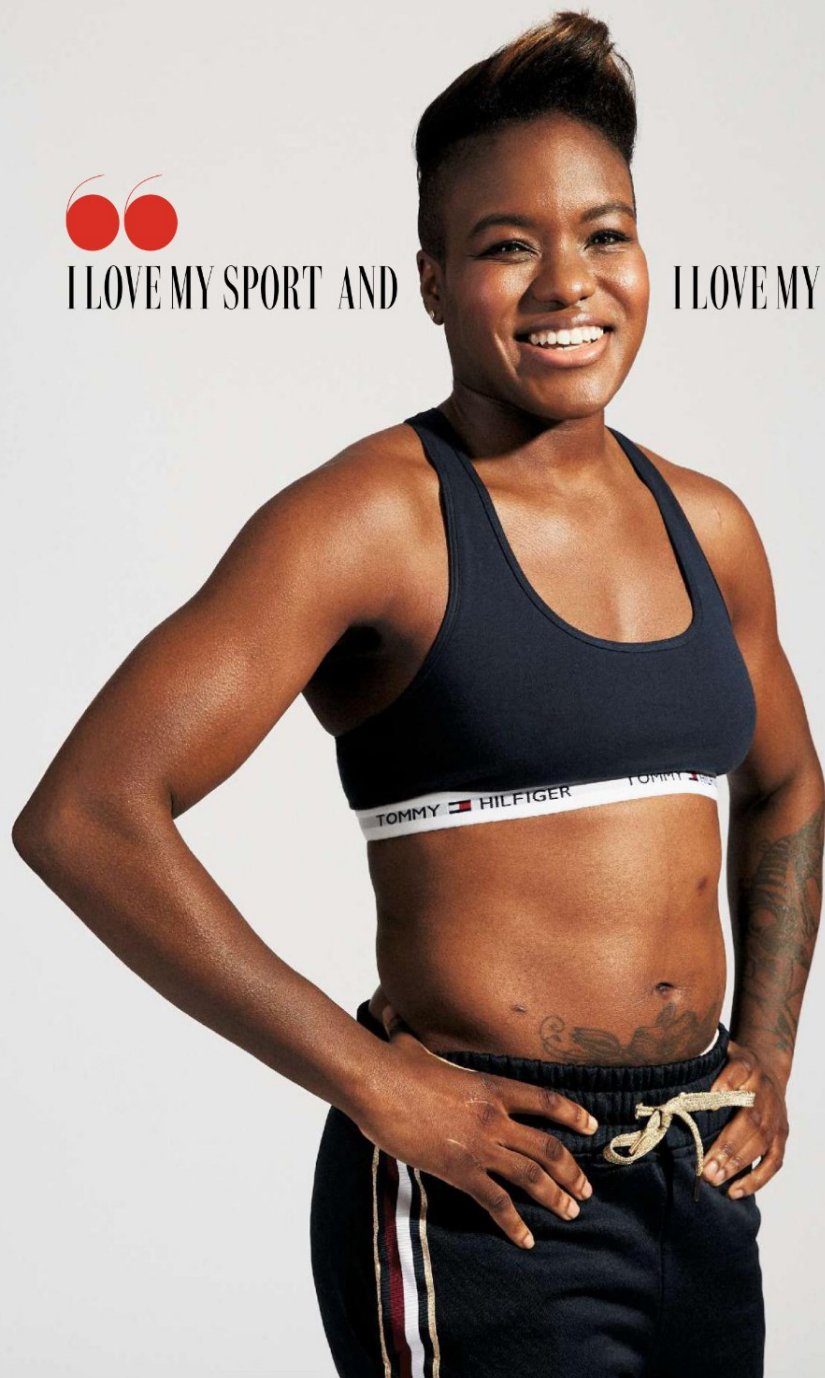
## WHAT HAPPENED WHEN POLLY WENT HEAD-TO-HEAD WITH NICOLA ADAMS





I LOVE MY SPORT AND

I LOVE MY BODY



## INTERVIEW

**I** MEET NICOLA ADAMS – OBE, MBE, two-time Olympic gold medal winner – at Islington Boxing Club in North London, the two-storey, leaky-roofed sweatbox of a community gym where local champions train alongside Hollywood superstars, and – on Saturday mornings, between 10 and 11, at the weekly women's only recreational class that I've come to love beyond all else – *me*.

Adams bowls in, fresh out of a cab from Leeds, like this gym is her second home. She hasn't been here before, but she knows these places so well. A community boxing gym just like this one – raw, authentic, cool – was where she first put on a pair of gloves, swung her first punch, and sealed her fate as one of the greatest British athletes of our time.

'I was 12. I was the only girl and it was actually by accident,' she tells me once the *Grazia* shoot has finished (a process she nails. Adams is beautiful but, more importantly, knows her angles. She's 36 years old and already an old pro).

We're sitting by the side of the boxing ring; she's eating the healthiest thing on the Nando's menu (grilled chicken wrap), transported by Deliveroo.

'My mum used to do aerobics, and she couldn't get a babysitter, and they had a boxing class at the same place, so one night, she took me and my brother down.'

Childcare set you on a path to the Olympics? 'Literally.'

What was it about boxing?

'I just loved it. The atmosphere; seeing everybody working out, training, having fun, all the kids running around, playing games. I'd seen re-runs of Muhammad Ali and Mike Tyson fighting, and I was like: Oh man. This is so cool!'

How did it feel, the first time you threw a punch? 'Unreal. Unreal!' And the first time you realised you were good?

'I was 13, and my coach, after a year of training, he said: "You look pretty good, I think you're quite talented. Have you ever thought about getting into competition?" Oh! I was buzzing!'

That was 23 years ago. Nicola Adams has spent two and a half decades boxing her way up the ranks, starting at a time before women's boxing was even legal (the British Boxing Board of Control denied women a licence to fight until 1998 – when Adams was 17 – on the grounds

that PMT makes us unstable). She won Gold at the London Olympics in 2012, only three years after women's boxing was recognised as an Olympic sport at all.

It was in 2012 that the nation fell in love with Adams, this small, insanely powerful Yorkshire woman, whose expression is one of barely suppressed fury when she's in the ring, but whose room-mesmerising smile breaks through like a goddamn *miracle* the moment she's won, which she usually does. I remember watching her in 2012 – as a woman who'd never given a damn about boxing until that point – and thinking: bloody *hell*. She's so cool!

Six months after Adams won her second Gold, in Rio in 2016, I walked through the doors of Islington Boxing Club for my first class. It would prove one of the best choices I've ever made. There is no question that Nicola Adams made me to do it.

It's a hideous old cliché, but Adams is a trailblazer. She is Northern: Leeds born and raised. Working class and black; a small, sickly kid: 'The doctor said my asthma was that bad I shouldn't even play in the playground. I was like: I'm not doing that.' A girl who boxed long before grown women were supposed to. A girl who felt powerless watching her father hit her mother Dee, when Adams was terribly young. She's openly bisexual – she came out to her mum Dee when she was just 14; Dee responded: 'That's fine, love.'

So Nicola Adams represents triumph over hardship, strength through adversity, and the beautiful possibilities of inclusiveness. Because of this, she resonates with everyone. Me. Frank Warren – the boxing promoter who once said, 'I don't like women's boxing. Never have, never will,' but who now promotes Adams. The legions of amateur and pro female boxers coming up behind her. The newbies who signed up for boxing fitness classes in the UK last year, 50% of whom were women and girls.



Adams wears it lightly. I ask her what it's like to have changed the world; she's chill, casual. 'It's good to see other girls in the gym, getting fit, staying in shape. It's nice to think I've played a part.'

I ask her if her intentions are feminist.

'In some respects. I feel like we should be able to do whatever job we please. And get the same pay. I mean, [my pay] is OK, because I've come into professional boxing as a double Olympic champion, but for the other girls, who haven't got that profile, it's harder to get started, get good money.'

You could call Adams an unintentional feminist icon. Her main interest is winning, as a side-consequence of which, she's become a one-woman revolution. I think about the power she represents, both physical and cultural. I think about how empowered I feel, every time I raise a gloved fist and punch a bag; when I watch the other women in my group unleash oceans of contained, tactical, respectful violence on each other. We all box at least partly, if not completely, because of Nicola Adams' example; *because we box*, we feel more powerful and empowered than we have ever felt.

I ask Adams about promoter Frank Warren's change of heart over women's boxing; her other, great, inadvertent feminist act.

'It was a funny one, because *he* approached *me*. I was like: "Oh. OK."

What was his opening gambit? 'He said whenever he'd got into a taxi lately, they never mentioned any of the lads. They only mentioned me.'

As I interview Adams, I remember the thing I always remember when interviewing athletes: they're not like us. They are, by definition, uniquely focused, less open to entertaining the haphazard mess of existence into which the rest of us throw ourselves headlong. They don't really *do* vulnerability, or existential crises, or the bigger picture. They can't.

When, for example, I ask Adams if she thinks there was any connection between her seeing her father hit her mother and being unable to intervene, and her ultimately excelling in the sport of hitting (which, by the way, she took up just after her mother finally left her father), she says only: 'Not really, because it was only by chance I ended up in the boxing gym.'

And when I ask her when she last cried, she says: 'I don't cry. Well, I cried when I won my second Olympic medal. I don't know what happened. I was like: "What



# **Nicola Adams OBE**

Represented by

**INTERTALENT RIGHTS GROUP**

**Lee Gray**

lee@intertalentgroup.com

07825 599152

**Professor Jonathan Shalit OBE**

jonathan@intertalentgroup.com

