

The 2010 Arnold Sports Festival

In its 22nd year, The Arnold takes it up a notch with fierce competition and new faces.

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NICOLE WILKINS-LEE ACCEPTS HER PRIZE ALONG-SIDE ARNOLD AND SYLVESTER STALLONE.

The Arnold Sports Festival

(a.k.a. "The Arnold") needs no real introduction amongst sports fans.

Nearly all fitness enthusiasts of all ages know something about this spectacular weekend that's been held in Columbus, Ohio, every March for the last 22 years. And if you aren't familiar with the sports side of things, who doesn't know Arnold Schwarzenegger – current Governor of California, star of *Pumping Iron* and *The Terminator*, multiple Mr. Olympia winner and the inspiration behind this highly anticipated, fun-filled, competitive weekend. The Arnold has something for all ages and has taken on a

life of its own since its inaugural show in 1989.

With the first-ever IFBB Bikini International show scheduled for the 2011 Arnold, other categories, particularly figure, could be in for some major shake-ups, mainly because competitors don't have to be as "shredded" as the term goes, therefore having much more commercial appeal. For many competitors, the approval of this new "softer" look could even spark a crossover of figure competitors into the bikini category across the industry, where the playing field is more open to a physique that still features healthy, toned



NICOLE WILKINS-LEE

1st

muscle but places overall feminine curves and grace at the top of the scoring card. And word has it that with magazines like *Oxygen* making pro-like workouts more easily accessible, competition stages could see a slew of new faces and fitness-model hopefuls as a result – not a bad thing at all.

Visit oxygenmag.com/bikini for coverage of the Arnold's bikini category.

Figure International

This year marked the eighth year of presenting another lineup of beautiful, invitation-only IFBB Pro Figure competitors. As usual, all competitors are judged as one single class, regardless of height and weight. All physiques were amazing and well polished, and the top-six spots were decided after the judges confirmed which competitors had managed to hone their physiques. This meant meeting criteria that the IFBB Pro League had been drilling into the competitors for the last couple of seasons.

The women's physiques were softer this year, a look that hasn't been rewarded in the past but is beginning to find a place on the competitive stage. In the world of figure it means feminine curves, round glutes, athletic (not shredded) abs and, in general, a nice portrayal of fit and feminine muscle. These are the competitors who took the top spots.

1ST PLACE Nicole Wilkins-Lee

As the figure story unfolded, the newest "it" girl and reigning IFBB Ms. Figure Olympia – Nicole Wilkins-Lee – was crowned 2010 Figure International champion.

Wilkins-Lee is certainly used to experiencing some wonderful firsts. In 2007, she made NPC/IFBB history by gaining two wins and earning two pro cards for figure and fitness at the same National Team Universe show. Wilkins-Lee can now add becoming the first IFBB

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Pro Figure competitor to consecutively win the Olympia and Arnold.

Her symmetry and proportions were exceptional – Wilkins-Lee is just well put together and beautiful. There's a glow about her that is second to none, as well as a relaxed and unpretentious style.

The following evening, Sylvester Stallone was presented with the 2010 Arnold Achievement Award. Even when bantering onstage with these two larger-than-life personalities, Wilkins-Lee's ease and self-confidence didn't desert her. She was posed and charming as always.

2ND PLACE Erin Stern

From the physique standpoint, Erin Stern hits all the criteria that the IFBB wants to promote in their figure competitor. Like Wilkins-Lee, Stern comes across as a naturally healthy and well-balanced competitor. She has a girl-next-door look about her. From the full-on front poses, it is clear why Stern placed so highly: She is tall, slender and athletic-looking with broad shoulders and a feminine waist. The only part of Stern's stage presentation that could have affected her score was the lack of a strong walk before she hit her poses. The effort she infuses into her stances could be put into her transitions.

3RD PLACE Heather Mae French

Of the top six, Heather Mae French was the only competitor who was noticeably different in "type." She was clearly the "sexy siren" of the bunch, as her look could be described as having been taken from the sultry genre – cast in a Humphrey Bogart romantic mystery. Her smoldering blue eyes were a hit and from the many comments of admiring onlookers, everything else about her was a hit as well. When she came out all guns blazing with puckered lips, giving way to an eventual smile, she melted the crowd.

4TH PLACE Mindi Smith

Mindi Smith, a striking athlete, is a relative newcomer to the IFBB Pro Figure and has been enjoying wins in the few shows she has competed in along the way.

In 2009, her first dabble with an NPC show, Smith won the NPC Sacramento, then the NPC Nationals where she earned her IFBB

pro card. Earlier this year – just before the Arnold – she won her first pro show in Phoenix. And despite not receiving another first at the Arnold, fourth place at her first Arnold is a strong end to a fantastic run of firsts.

Smith obviously takes her training, preparation and successes seriously. Interestingly, she didn't fall for the typical safe swimsuit choices by choosing an easy block of pastel. Instead, she only had hints of pinks, yellows and blues, artfully mixed with grays on a black base. The effect was a nice collection of Swarovski crystals.



STERN, FRENCH AND SMITH ARE BECOMING STAPLES IN THE WINNER'S CIRCLE OF PRO FIGURE.

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5TH PLACE Felicia Romero

Felicia Romero took a chance with her beautiful, matching themed suits for both the one- and two-piece rounds.

For the prelims two-piece round, Romero's abs did not look the most defined – almost as if she was breathing in – and left her looking a tad blocky. But when she hit her stances, her lack of definition corrected itself. Overall, Romero's beautiful look, conditioning and healthy appeal were on track with the criteria, and she fully earned her placing.

6TH PLACE Larissa Reis

Larissa Reis appeared to have lost some size and her customary "edge" at this show. Ordinarily, she has standout appeal, so she needs to be sure she doesn't lose herself when trying to conform her physique to gain the ultimate top spot. That said, however, for the prelims two-piece physique round, Reis made a good show by playing up some of her positive features: She had smaller tops compared to the others and maintained her laissez-faire approach to the stage. Clearly, it still worked for her.

The Rest of the Figure Best

7th Place: Monica Brant

8th Place: Kristi Tauti

9th Place: Andrea Watson

10th Place: Rosa-Maria Romero

Fitness International

This year, the competitors were charged with navigating a newly implemented judging format: The competition had been pared down to just two rounds (the two-piece swimwear round and the routine final), instead of the usual four rounds that included a one-piece round and a 45-second routine round. This new format left the competitors to battle it out during a two-piece swimwear round during prelims and then during the finals.

With no compulsory routine for prelims, the evening routines became a real do-or-die affair. Any fumbles could really affect placings and the backup plan of having done well in prelims was gone. The chips could have fallen very differently had the judging criteria remained the same and the pressure



THE EXOTIC FELICIA ROMERO AND EVER-POISED LARISSA REIS BROUGHT FORWARD STUNNING PHYSIQUES AND PRESENCE.

ONE MORE WIN FOR ADELA GARCIA AND SHE'LL TIE WITH SUSIE CURRY FOR THE IFBB RECORD FOR MOST WINS.

seemed to have an effect. Nearly all competitors – except for Oksana Grishina – made mistakes. Those that coped best came out on top.

Best Physique

1ST PLACE Adela Garcia

Powerhouse Adela Garcia's return to Fitness at the Arnold was certainly a success. In fact, she probably needs to build herself a new trophy case, because surely her current one must be buckling from the weight of all her wins. Adding in this year's win from the 2010 Fitness International, Garcia can now boast being a three-time Fitness International champ as well as the reigning and four-time IFBB Fitness Olympia champ. Just one more Fitness International win and she'll match the record currently held by Susie Curry.

During the prelims round on the Expo stage, an extremely fresh-faced Garcia strutted her stuff in a striking emerald-green swimsuit. Later that evening, she performed a J-Lo-themed routine, decked in a Sylvia Tremblay outfit – a lime green knock-off of J-Lo's coming-out dress she made famous at the 2000 Grammy Awards. With perfect scores in the physique round and a close second to Tanji Johnson (one point) in the routine round, Garcia came to the stage to dominate, and dominate she did indeed.



Adela's routine was J-Lo-inspired

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