



She was destined to become Ms. Figure OLYMPIA

From a young age Cydney Gillon knew exactly who she was. Her biggest influences are her momma, daddy, grandmother and track coach and together they helped instill the foundational beliefs that she lives by and that have shaped who Cyd Gillon is. These beliefs have enabled her to be unwavering in what she stands for, setting boundaries and guidelines and creating the type of life she wanted for herself. That life includes winning five Ms Figure Olympia titles, having multiple businesses, being a strong advocate for education, marrying the man that has supported her through it all and is opening doors for a future that goes beyond that sport. I had the pleasure of interviewing Cyd shortly after her Olympia win and as you read what she has to say, you will learn what a true athlete is and what it takes to reach the level of success you're striving for in this sport or in life.

by Rachel Payne

Photography by Dan Moore Photography | @drmfoto

Who Cyd Gillon is.

What adjectives best describe you?

Daughter, wife, individual, fun, fierce, determined, relentless and perfectionist sums me up in all aspects of life. I am relentless in pursuit of perfection. When I was in high school, my track coach said to me, "Cyd, when you're done crying, get back on the line." It made me the woman I am today. I didn't realize it at the time, but his extreme tough love molded me into the person who is able to make it through anything. When life gets tough, I may feel like trash at the time, but I am going to keep pushing regardless, tears and all. Once you've done that for so many times, for so many years, it becomes a habit and it becomes you. That's why the quote is so important; because I live by that. To this day, I know I can make it through because those track workouts were some of the roughest times where I questioned a lot of things, but I still showed up everyday and I kept putting one foot in

front of the other. For me it's a microcosm for how you should be in life and a testament to why I am relentless, persistent and determined.

Tell us something that we don't know about Cyd Gillon.

Most people don't know that I had high cholesterol at the age of 12, my mamma used to call me - a food junkie! I was so bad that I never drank water. I only drank coke and sweet tea. I was at McDonald's every other day eating a Big & Tasty with extra mayo and supersize fries! Years ago, Mom and Dad used to be obese, but when they decided to change their eating habits, they got all of the junk food out of the house. Being the serial entrepreneur that I am, I started selling candy. I had my own money, so I had access to purchasing my own food, clothes and shoes. Obviously, my diet changed just a few years later when I began my competition journey.



Training & Competition

What is it like to be Cyd Gillon in training?

My training is pretty intense. I keep the intensity up for where I'm at. A lot of people train for where they are consistently trying to go, but for me, my goal is to keep my physique exactly where I am. My training style is for maintenance, keeping the intensity up while still maintaining the physique and the amount of muscle I currently carry, in order to refine the physique. I incorporate various training techniques that keep the intensity high for me. Like I've said many times, this is a journey about training for what each individual needs and not what anyone else needs, not what Instagram needs, not what people want to see; it's just for me and that's what I stick with. I consistently train with intensity year-round however, a few weeks before a show, I move to Arizona and my cardio increases to a noticeable difference, only then I would say I'm in prep. Most importantly, I listen to my coach, Damian Segovia with Pro Physiques. When he says it's time to drop the hammer, it's go time; that's what I do.

What sets you apart that has enabled you to achieve 5 Olympia titles?

I believe it's my level of drive, consistency and humility that sets me apart. It's easy to be hungry when you're trying to get the title. There's another level of drive and hunger when you've got the title to where I am. In my mind, my hunger can't be matched because I've been able to wholeheartedly be hungry every single year. My drive is unrelenting, it just goes and goes and goes. I attribute that work ethic to my family and track coach that laid the foundation and beliefs that I live by. The ability to be that hungry and that humble at the same time allows me to be objective and my drive to really flourish. For example, I really wanted to break Nicole Wilkins' record of 4X Ms. Figure Olympia title wins. I set my goal, focused on it and accomplished it. Now I have new goals. I'll just keep adding on and adding on until I'm tired and so far, I'm not tired! After almost 20 years, I don't see myself being tired anytime soon.

Pro Tips

From the true novice competitor to your fellow IFBB Pro athletes, what key tip would you share to those who dream about making it to the Olympia stage?

You need to know yourself and focus on yourself. This sport is subjective and you can sometimes lose sight of yourself. If you know yourself going in, you're not going to be bothered if you place 5th or if someone tells you you're fat or if someone tells you're too muscular. There may be a lot of different judgments coming your way, but none of that matters, if you know who you are. If you don't know who you are and you have insecurities, that's when you're going to struggle. You need to get secure, know who you are and own who you are. A lot of people get into this sport and focus on how others look, what others weigh, or what others are eating. None of that has anything to do with what you're going to be able to do to make your physique it's absolute best. Using people as a source of motivation is one thing, but the second it becomes envy, you're going down a slippery slope. President Theodore Roosevelt said it best,

“There may be a lot of different judgments coming your way, but none of that matters, if you know who you are. If you don't know who you are and you have insecurities, that's when you're going to struggle.”

“Comparisons are the thief of joy.” The secret to being your best is focusing on yourself. That in and of itself, will allow you to step one foot in front of the other and stay consistent in your goals to make you your best. You need to get secure, focus on yourself, know who you are and own who you are. That is the most important advice I can give to anyone in this sport and in life.

Playing the Game

In 2017, you chose to do Survivor, why? And would you do it again?

I would definitely do Survivor again! I originally did Survivor because I was broke as a joke. I had just graduated from school and it was time to make some decisions. I pushed pause, took a step back and asked myself, “What do I want to do that will afford me the opportunity to train, compete and still make money?” While doing cardio, I began watching Survivor while I was preparing for my first Olympia and first Arnold Classic. One night, a casting call rolled across my screen — Survivor Auditions, Woodstock, Georgia. Thinking to myself, that's not that far, maybe I should do it. I told my

mom and she said, “What! You don't know how to swim, you don't go outside and you don't camp. How is that going to work for you?” My response was, “I don't know, but I'm going to do it.” The audition went well and I was flown to LA for the final casting for the show. I would be leaving for Survivor right after the Arnold Classic. Post show and already depleted, bodybuilding definitely prepared me for the game; I knew the struggle. Living on the island wasn't any different actually. It was less food, but it was fun. Ultimately, it was life changing and the idea that I could win a million dollars, change my life and my family's life just by living on TV, is why I did the show. Today it might be different, because I eat so many more carbs. Back then, it was all keto and coconut was plentiful on the island, so it was perfect for me. After the first week, which was an adjustment, I was flourishing. Most bodybuilders or athletic type people go down fast, so they didn't think I was going to make it. But I did because I was able to adapt and I was relentless. I won a number of challenges and I played the game in a way that even made Jeff Probst comment. I kept things low key, did what I needed to do and almost went to the very end. I would definitely do it again!



Cyd and her husband
Maurice Benton



Cyd with Coach Damian
Segovia, Pro physiques



What do you do for self care?
 I won't say life has been challenging, but I have had to navigate multiple aspects of my life from scoliosis, being a student athlete, moving across the country for my graduate degree and having a long distance relationship, all while keeping my identity. I have discovered that it's a matter of finding my balance and sticking to that, no matter what that may be at the time. To overcome the daily challenges that life can present, self care is really important to me and I do make time for it. I get massages every other week, I get pedicures, I meditate, I foam roll and watch TV. Television is my #1 go to. I sit, watch my show and mellow out. I save spending time with my family and friends for the weekends after I've gotten done with the work week. We watch movies, I spend time connecting with people I haven't seen in a couple weeks or even plan different trips for post Olympia because that's when I get most of my down time. Year-round I'm focused on being where I need to be, but for those few days after the "O", I have fun and my focus switches to adding in that last little bit of balance. I feel like my life is extremely balanced for me. I love my life every single day, so adding that little bitty part where I don't have to bring my scale if I chose not to, is the pinnacle of my self care.

“While I do try to plan my life, most importantly I live by my beliefs and make sure I'm a good person and I believe the universe will reward me. Whatever the future has in store for me, you can bet I'll be ready for it.”

What doors have been opened to you through bodybuilding?
 Since I started so young, bodybuilding has opened almost every door I've had. Even when I was preparing for undergraduate school, my story was different from everybody else because bodybuilding made me stand out. Beyond that, it's the relationships I've been able to seed as a part of this sport that will allow me to reap future opportunities beyond the stage. Bodybuilding is technically my job. It's paid for my education and living expenses and allowed me to be who I am. This sport has given me the freedom to start other businesses such as being a Posing Coach, which I love and live my life. It's also saved my life. Beyond financially, weightlifting has saved my quality of life by making my back as strong as possible and stopping the curve in my back from shifting. As a result, I live with less pain from scoliosis and lordosis, even as I age. I am very, very grateful for this sport.

Giving Back
Tell us about your scholarship?
 The Cydney Gillon Scholar-Athlete Scholarship started four years ago; first, because education is important to me and second, because I wanted to reward students who didn't necessarily have the money, but had the drive, the smarts and the desire to be their best and continue pushing past high school into college in their athletic endeavors. Realizing that at a certain point your body's going to be done, you need to have the brains to back it up. My objective is to help student athletes with their education, so they will be more prepared, especially if they pursue their sport professionally, to maximize their endeavors, while doing what they love and learn how to support themselves while not being taken advantage of. When we review the scholarship applications, we look for student athletes that have been dedicated and excelled in high school and demonstrated what sports have done for them physically, socially, psychologically and mentally. Recognizing that their hard work and achievements have not gone unnoticed is also important because oftentimes student athletes are overlooked. Right now, the scholarship is from my own funds and so far I've awarded six scholarships totalling nearly \$15,000. Eventually, I'd like to grow the scholarship through corporate sponsorships and grants so we can really change a person's life and even pay for all four years of college for someone who's deserving of it. My end goal is to have a positive impact on the scholarship recipients. If I can contribute to their success even in the smallest way, then I will have accomplished my goal. Additionally, I would like to create a program to help guide at-risk students down a path that gives them a better chance at a positive outcome in life, possibly through SAT prep programs in elementary and middle school. My hope is that using my success as a bodybuilding athlete, I can help these at-risk kids understand that it is possible to achieve success by giving your all and that they can overcome any obstacle they encounter.

Future
You are a serial entrepreneur and so far you are a Posing Coach, Trainer, you have a clothing line, you put on Workshops and Retreats and now we can add Promoter to your job titles. What do you see for yourself in the future?
 I am so excited to finally be able to promote my own show and I see myself doing a lot more shows down the road. I may eventually add a pro component, maybe even going as far as having a large scale show with multiple events and an expo, as long as it makes sense for me. I could see myself lending my name to shows (franchise) as I expand my brand while providing amazing shows for the athletes in the NPC and IFBB. I am extremely multi-faceted and one of my goals is to help bring new athletes to the organization. I definitely see myself judging in the future. When the time is right, I'll be ready. Once I retire from competition, I have a lot of TV opportunities, but for now all I can say is the future could include anything from being on TV internationally to promoting a large scale show. While I do try to plan my life, most importantly I live by my beliefs and make sure I'm a good person and I believe the universe will reward me. Whatever the future has in store for me, you can bet I'll be



Cyd and her dad Skip Gillon at her 2014 University of Pennsylvania graduation



Cyd and Maurice with her in-laws, parents and grandparents



Cyd's parents Skip and Tangelea Gillon

ready for it. So far, I've been blessed to be successful in everything I do. I hope that when I no longer have to be as focused on myself, I will be able to do more and give more back because I'll have more to give.

The Sport of Bodybuilding

What are your thoughts on the future of the sport?

I believe the future of bodybuilding is bright as long as we continue to demonstrate attainable, healthy looks for every body are possible through the sport. In my opinion, I believe the IFBB Professional League has done a really, really good job of allowing every body type to come in and be a part of this sport, especially with the recent addition of Women's Wellness. I feel that if we continue to maximize the looks that we already have, there won't be a need to add any other divisions in the realm of bodybuilding.



What impact do you see yourself making in the sport?

I think the biggest impact I can have on the sport of bodybuilding is to continue to be who I am, in particular, when talking to my followers and supporters. Being a good ambassador for the sport of bodybuilding and the organization is what I've been doing so far and it's been working really well. Letting others see that a regular person can be successful in this industry and there are nice people out there that are willing to help and willing to lend an ear is important to me. I talk to most people, strangers really and being able to help them find a path to guide them in our sport is really fun for me.

For all that Cydney Gillon has accomplished, it's hard to remember that she is only 29 years old. Her success and her winning attitude are based on a foundation of: Always giving 150%, Always striving for excellence in everything you do, Education is the foundation for everything, To be successful, you must be self-driven. Cyd will tell you, she bases everything around these beliefs; they are so ingrained in her that she doesn't even realize they are her beliefs, they are just who she is. These are the tools she has used to achieve her success both on and off the stage making her destined to be a standout for years to come. To contact Cydney Gillon, register for her show, The NPC Peach Classic, attend one of her seminars or retreats, or purchase her apparel, go to cakefactoryfitness.com.

Did you know?

15 The age Cyd was when she competed in her first show and won Overall Figure.

100 Meters Hurdles & Sprints are the track events that Cyd competed in high school & college.

2011 NPC Battle at the River
Cyd's 1st NPC show.

Strategic Public Relations
(Sports and Entertainment) The master's degree Cyd received from University of Southern California.

2012 NPC National Championships
The show Cyd earned her professional status.

2nd Year as an IFBB Pro to make it to the Olympia stage (after only 4 shows).

5 Number of years as an IFBB Pro it took Cyd to take the title of Ms. Figure Olympia.