

BY JOHN TAN

Beauty meets brawn

► Kimberley Leggett on venturing into fitness, bodybuilding after Miss Universe

IT has been over a decade since Kimberley Ann Estrop-Leggett was crowned Miss Universe Malaysia, defeating 19 other contestants.

The Penang native then went on to represent Malaysia at Miss Universe 2012, which she describes as a surreal experience.

"Just like anyone, I was inspired by the women in the pageants. They were all beautiful and intelligent. They all had intellectual jobs as some of them were lawyers and engineers.

"I thought of them as triple threats. I always wanted to be like them, wanted to emulate that for myself in some regard. So, in a way, it was a dream," recalled Leggett in an exclusive interview with *theSun*.

But since her pageant win, her life has been far from glamorous. While other beauty queens pursued careers in entertainment, Leggett, now 31, decided to pursue her passion for fitness after getting a degree in nutrition.

"When I was younger, I was a chubby kid. I struggled with body image issues. Miss Universe was more of a challenge for me in that sense.

"For me, to achieve that physique that I had always admired of other people, to achieve that for myself was such a groundbreaking moment for me. I then fell in love with the process, which inspired me to help other people achieve that too," said the now fitness coach and bodybuilder.

Debunking stereotypes

This pursuit, however, took some adjustments. Given her tenure as Miss Universe Malaysia, beauty pageant fans were surprised as they were expecting her to maintain a particular look.

"Fans of beauty pageants are more about the skinny model look. So, for them, it was a shock factor as there is a mentality that muscular is not feminine. So, that is a myth I need to dispel because it is not the case."

Her family and friends, on the other hand, were not surprised. Instead, they were astonished by her decision to participate in Miss Universe Malaysia back in 2012.

"I was always sporty when I was growing up. My friends, in fact, found it surprising when I joined Miss Universe Malaysia as I was a tomboy.



Leggett competing at Miss Universe in 2012 at Las Vegas.

relationship with food and her body. Not only was she previously uncomfortable in her own skin, but she also struggled with food.

"I was always the person that was sitting on the side and not being in the pool during parties. I did not want to be in swimwear. I also did not have a good relationship with food. I used to binge at home and was a closet eater behind the scenes," she confessed.

Even during her pageant days, she succumbed to various unhealthy methods to reach her desired look, which took a toll on her health.

"Miss Universe helped me to achieve a goal I wanted. But I

My mother actually had to push me to dress up and be more presentable.

"So, for me to join the pageant was contrary to how I presented myself on a daily basis. In that sense, it made more sense for me to be a fitness trainer and bodybuilder than to be a beauty pageant queen."

Healthier outcomes

Now that she has ventured into fitness, Leggett has never felt more fulfilled and healthier. For one, she has a better



Leggett and partner Nic McWilliams own a gym. — PIC COURTESY OF KIMBERLEY LEGGETT



Leggett trains three to four times a week in the gym. — CHASE MCMILLAN PIC



Leggett made her debut as a competitive bodybuilder recently. — PIC COURTESY OF DALLAS OLSEN

would say it was not necessarily done in a way that is healthy, nor one that I would recommend. I did it the wrong way. I under-ate and overdid the exercises, leading me to a place that was unhealthy.

"I lost my menses and my cycle for three to four years after that. I had all the symptoms that came with under-eating and almost essentially having an eating disorder. Yet, I was praised for how I looked."

Fortunately, she no longer practises those habits as she has equipped herself with a holistic and healthier outlook on her physique.

"I now know what is right and what is wrong for my body. I eat more than I probably ever ate. I also look very healthy and different to how I looked at Miss Universe. So, I have definitely come a long way."

Current endeavours

Leggett has been committed to educating her clients on healthier

approaches to reaching their fitness goals. Instead of depriving themselves of food, she advocates for her clients to adopt a combination of healthy habits.

From eating a well-proportioned diet to sleeping and exercising regularly, Leggett is passionate about curating a robust and sustainable plan for her clients.

Aside from coaching, she has kept herself busy with her bodybuilding aspirations, making her professional debut recently at a competition in Australia.

"I was placed in the top five. I was hoping for a top three or a win. I hope to achieve that at some point."

"Either next year or the year after, I am looking at doing the world championship. The end goal is to be a world champion at some stage. That is definitely my goal in the near future."

Life outside fitness

Her resolutions this year include activities besides fitness as well. Considering the amount of time she spends in the gym, she aims to explore her identity outside fitness.

"I hope to enjoy some parts of life outside competing and bodybuilding. The thing with bodybuilding, it takes away months of your life when you are dedicated to the sole goal."

"You do not think and do anything else. So, I hope to live in the moment a little bit, go on holidays and enjoy other parts of life," said the former beauty queen.