

# 'I STILL HAVE SO MUCH MORE TO GIVE'

CrossFit legend **Tia-Clair Toomey-Orr** talks about her postpartum fitness journey and tells us why she thinks 2024 could be her best year yet

Words: Joanna Ebsworth







**'I always thought the day I fell pregnant would be the day I turned the page and started a new chapter,'** reveals

Australian weightlifter, CrossFit Games athlete and mum-of-one Tia-Clair Toomey-Orr, 30. But, in a surprise turn of events that has stunned the CrossFit world – and her, too – the six-time Fittest Woman On Earth is currently in training to compete in the final of the 2024 CrossFit Games this August, following the birth of her first child – daughter Willow – in May 2023.

**'As it turns out,** I didn't even realise I was pregnant during the early part of my first trimester,' says Toomey-Orr. 'I was traditionally taking some time off after the CrossFit Games in 2022 to let my mind and body relax, and I figured I might have adrenal fatigue because something didn't feel quite right, but everything fell into place once I found out I was pregnant. From that moment on, my only focus was to enjoy my pregnancy and listen to what my body needed.'

**Toomey-Orr says** she and her husband and coach, Shane Orr, tried to heed as much advice as

possible during her pregnancy – which included being told that she 'shouldn't move so much' – but admits any ideas of resting up were soon overpowered by her natural inclination to move. Towards the end of my first trimester, I decided to try moving more because I am very active, and being outside makes me really happy. We had just returned to Australia at the beginning of summer, and the weather was so beautiful – I just found my body felt better the more I moved.

**'It actually felt** amazing to move my body just for me,' she confesses. 'I would go to the



Having 'me-time' in the gym was important for Toomey-Orr

pregnancy, I couldn't help but think that moving my body would help me to not be in such a physical deficit on the off-chance I did want to come back.'

**Toomey-Orr's longest-standing** partner, pliability (pliability.com), came to her to see if she was interested in collaborating on a project while she was pregnant. Pliability saw her pregnancy as an opportunity to continue telling her story to thousands of women who could benefit from this chapter.

**'I decided** to take up the offer because I felt it would set me up for success in the future, whether I wanted to have more kids or compete again,' she explains. 'Shane has always been a big believer in the importance of the inner core but, as you can imagine, training absolutely every muscle all the time for CrossFit is just not possible. We would do accessories on top of daily training to keep my joints moving nicely and to strengthen the smaller muscles of my core and pelvic floor, but in working with pliability, alongside The MINT Prjct (themintprjct.com),

gym and do whatever I wanted to. And for the first time in so many years, it was refreshing to walk into the gym and have some "me time" - to work out because it made me feel really good, rather than walking into the gym with a purpose of standing on top of the podium at the end of the season. Not having that focus of winning was so refreshing, and while I didn't know what to expect in terms of my competitive future, I knew I wanted to have a really nice pregnancy and, hopefully, a good birth.'

**While Toomey-Orr** admits to having felt overjoyed about the prospect of becoming a first-time mum, she also recognises she was, perhaps, harbouring some niggling doubts about her retirement from CrossFit, even though she would potentially be bowing out on the highest high after winning the 2022 Games: a feat that cemented her place in the history books as the most dominant CrossFit athlete of all time after competing at eight Games and winning six consecutive titles.

**'At the time,** I felt that if that was the end of my competitive career, I would be so proud and happy with what I'd achieved.' she continues, 'But for some reason, when I looked back at my 2022 season, I just didn't feel I executed the CrossFit Games to the best of my true abilities. I felt that finishing my career there wouldn't sit well with me later in life and, while I was enjoying every minute of

Teaming up with recovery app pliability was a no-brainer



which specialises in supporting and guiding pregnant and postpartum women with programs that make exercise safe and effective, I was able to understand the pelvic floor.

**'Prior to being** pregnant, I just didn't comprehend it all,' Toomey-Orr explains. 'But by talking to people who have really studied the pelvic floor, I learnt how all these tiny muscles are in overdrive all the time. I realised we really don't give that much appreciation to them, and I now understand much more about how to brace properly compared to what I was doing before. I mean, you have to give it to Shane, because he always thinks outside the box with my training, but learning how important the pelvic floor is for performance has been a real eyeopener.'

**Physical fitness aside,** Toomey-Orr says working with The MINT Prjct and pliability teams also gave her the confidence to continue exercising in the face of mounting criticism – a period



Toomey-Orr's love for daughter Willow is a source of strength

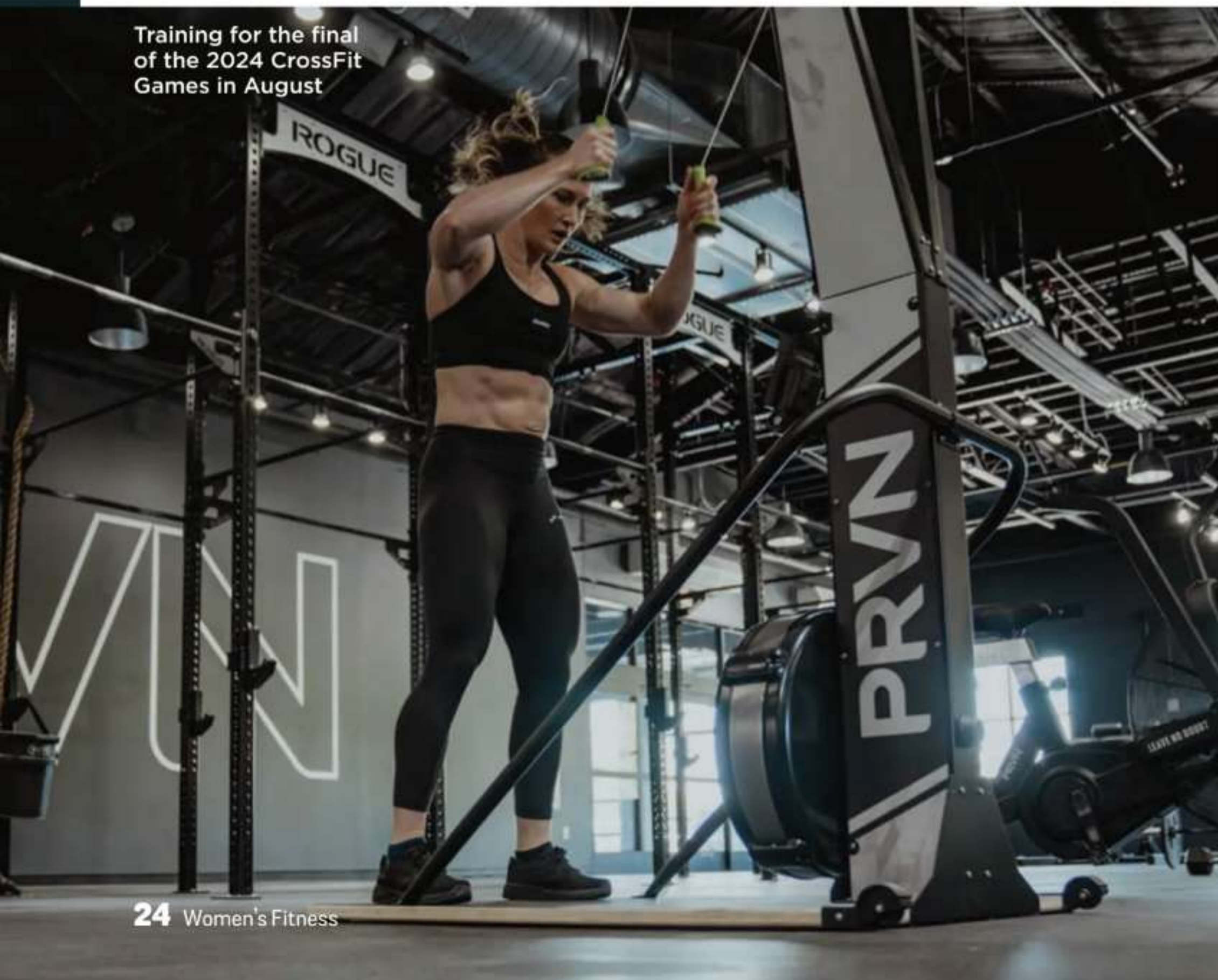
she refers to as 'almost scary, because you're always worrying that you might not be doing the right thing. I don't know if you read any of the comments on my social media, but for every post where I was exercising, there was a lot of good, but also a lot of negative attention. People said horrible things. Which was hard because I felt

**'With each competition I do, I'm building more confidence. I'm right where I need to be'**

so good, and those people didn't even know me.

**'I couldn't help** but second-guess my actions because I'd never gone through it before, so having guidance from The MINT Prjct ladies on how to move my body as I got bigger was invaluable,' she continues. 'None of the exercises were super groundbreaking, and it was all really manageable stuff, but that was a valuable lesson for me. Sometimes, especially as an athlete, you think an exercise has to hurt in order to make you better, but it's the complete opposite in pregnancy. Slowing things down and staying calm and letting my body open up naturally was so important. And then I had Willow, and it was all about, "How do I recover faster?"'

**With a 'rather ambitious'** goal in mind of returning to the competition floor five months postpartum for the 2023 Rogue Invitational event, Toomey-Orr says she kept her focus on progressing through her recovery slowly, as opposed to rushing it, especially after her plans for a natural birth were swapped for an emergency c-section. 'For two weeks after having Willow, I was sore, tender and very, very swollen, so there was no getting back to the



Training for the final of the 2024 CrossFit Games in August

gym straight away because I was struggling to roll out of bed and get off the couch!' she says. 'But the thing about pliability's Postpartum Program that distinguishes it from other offerings is it starts from day one with breathing exercises, stretches and mindfulness activities, while providing two different pathways for mums to follow depending on whether you've had a natural birth or a caesarean.'

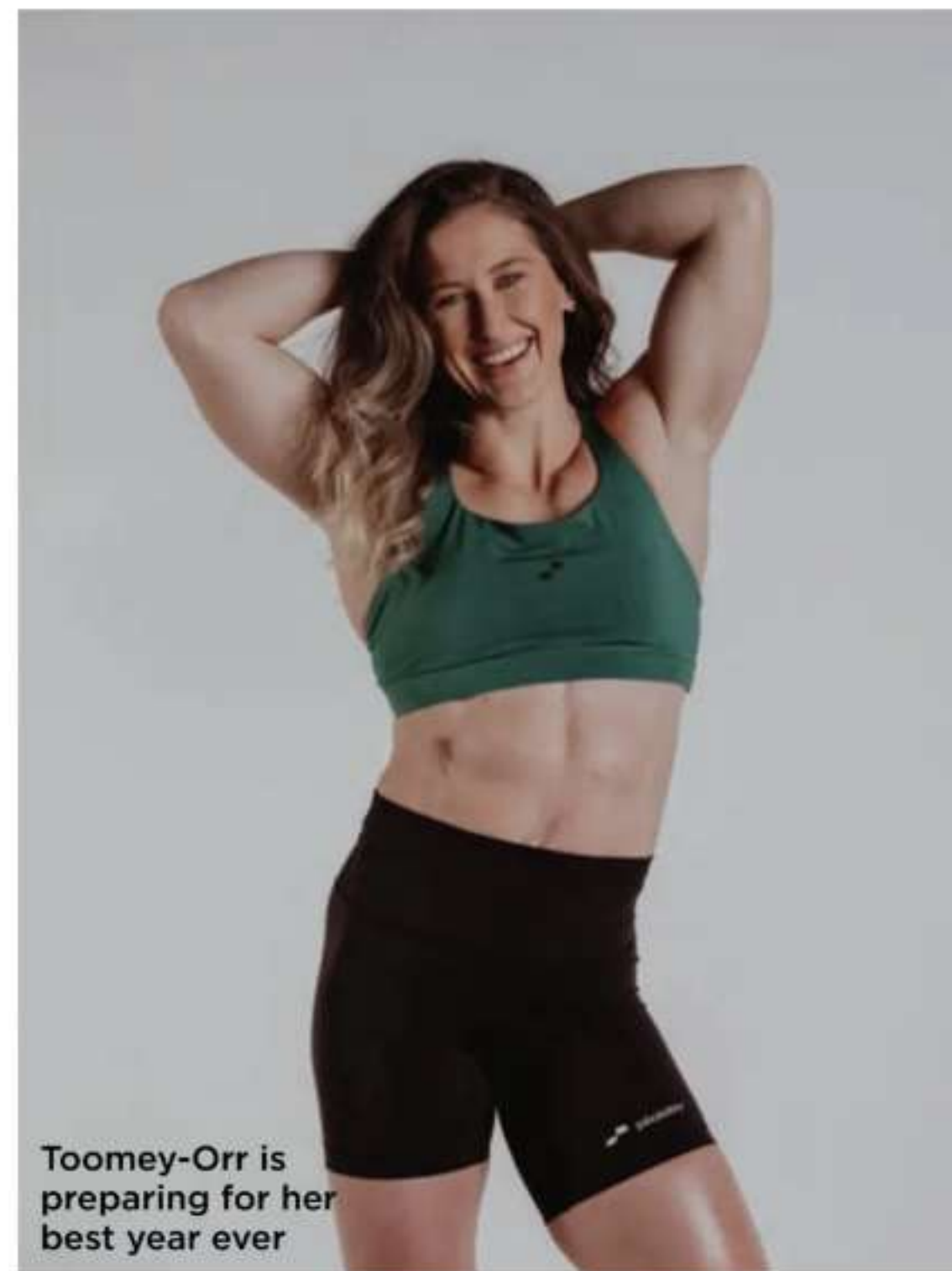
**'Of course,** everyone's individual experience is different,' she continues. 'But I found starting out with something as simple as breathing was really beneficial for me, because your body has had to change so much over nine months and your organs are all over the shop inside. That's how basic my recovery was in the beginning, but the program allowed me to slowly progress at my own speed with gentle movements and stretching, and I was able to build a really solid foundation so I could move on to the guided walks which feature positive affirmations to help keep things light - because things can feel quite dark at times, and the adjustment for some people can be quite overwhelming.'

**'That's why** I keep emphasising the happiness of mums and doing what feels right for them,' she elaborates. 'I was so grateful that I did exercise through my pregnancy because I was strong in my upper body and that meant I could hold Willow and not be in pain. It's so important to have people like pliability and The MINT Prjct out there saying "it's okay for you to move", because the reality is it's hard on your body and mind to just stay at home for six weeks and do absolutely nothing.'

**'Since we launched** the Postpartum Program, I've had so many women who are past their 12-week mark tell me they wish they'd known it existed, or that it was around when they were day-one postpartum. But I think we have to remind ourselves that it is never too late to heal your pelvic floor, or focus specifically on your mobility as a mum, or even connect to the affirmation and mindfulness components. I still get so much value from it, and I like to think I've reminded women that it's okay to start now... you'll still get the benefit out of it.'

**Toomey-Orr is** keen to stress she really did take her time with her recovery, and only started to train harder one month out from the Rogue Invitational. 'That was significantly very short compared to what I would normally do, but I had four months of doing my homework and working on my mobility and pelvic floor,' she notes. 'And I certainly didn't do any big CrossFit moves such as Toes-to-Bar or anything that would put a big strain on the midline. Even Shane was a little more conservative than what I wanted, but it was probably a good thing because I can be a bit eager,' she laughs.

**'It's been an** interesting battle because your body is telling you one thing and your mind another, but I don't mind - having Willow reminded me that I first embarked on my CrossFit journey to create memories and stories I could tell my future children. And then I realised how cool it would be to actually live that reality: having her come to the gym with me every single day while I was trying to be the best in the world. I still feel there



Toomey-Orr is preparing for her best year ever

is so much more to give,' she affirms. 'And with each competition I do, I'm building more confidence. I'm right where I need to be, and while there are things I still need to work on, I really believe that this is going to be my best year yet.'

**'Willow has come** at the most important time, whether I knew that or not. I look back and believe there is a reason why I fell pregnant at that time, and she has definitely extended my career, for sure,' concludes Toomey-Orr. 'Sometimes, you get to a point in your career where you start to wonder why you're doing it. You can always find a reason, but in order to have that passion, there's got to be something deep down that you can really believe in - and Willow is that for me. My love for her makes me feel invincible.' 🐾

The pliability app is available to download now on iOS, Android and any web browser. Videos can be watched on-demand, streamed to any screen or downloaded for offline use. All users get a seven-day free trial before a flat rate of £16.95 per month or £169.95 annually.