

# SINA GHAMI, OWNER OF EVOLVE GYM, LONDON

## THE BIG INTERVIEW



### How did you get into the fitness industry & why?

My initial dream was to become a professional footballer but unfortunately I sustained an injury which prevented this. Sometimes you just have to be realistic with yourself and look for another opportunity in life if you're not able enough to get to the level you want to. I always wanted to be in the sport industry, so I went to university and undertook a degree in Sports & Exercise Rehabilitation.

It's been a dream of mine to work with elite athletes and have been doing so since 2012. My degree even opened up the opportunity for me to work with the NFL, NBA and College Football at Michigan State University in the States.

I've always wanted to be well established in my hometown, London, too. Then if I decided to return to America I wouldn't just be another Mickey Mouse trying to make it - people would recognise my name, my brand. The rest is history.

### Tell us about Evolve Gym.

'It was important to me that Evolve was different to other gyms through our style. We provide 3D astro turf in our classes and sprint tracks, and I always wanted Hammer Strength equipment because that's the only equipment they'll use in the States and there's a reason for that - it's the best in the world. It's for people who really want to lift proper weights whilst hitting the correct muscles.

I believe it's not really about the gym but the people in it that make it what it is. A lot of people have the misconception that we're a bodybuilding gym, but we have a wide variety of members, including mums who do classes at 9.30am after the school run. Many people that can't afford to go to high-end, expensive gyms with Hammer Strength equipment so we give them that facility but at a quarter of the price - that's what makes us who we are.

People like something different and that's why they like Evolve, because we're different; because we bring a style of training that no other gym really provides.

Every two or three months we add a new piece of equipment to the gym, which our members really appreciate. We recently installed a CardioWall, designed by Rugged Interactive. It's really interesting as it causes a distraction - in a good way.

People use it to warm up now before a session, whereas they used to come in and head straight for the weights. It's amazing because it switches their brain on. Even I came in yesterday and spent a good eight minutes on it before



training because I wanted my brain to wake up. I believe that if you have equipment that attracts people, that's the key. The CardioWall is the most attractive piece of equipment I have in the gym right now - even bodybuilders, the guys that just want to do weights and no cardio, are using it every day. It gets your brain working too; I'd say it's the best piece of equipment I have in the gym right now.

### What are your biggest achievements?

People always think that I must be really proud of myself and what I've achieved with Evolve, but to be honest I don't think I've achieved anything in life yet. My mentality is that achieving something is to be able to give something back to the people and to become an idol - someone for people to look up to.

If I could match up to an idol it would be my mum; there's no one else I could really look up to. I emigrated to the UK in '98 with my family and built something through hard work. My mindset is that your family and your upbringing mean everything. Mum is the one that provides food, put clothes on you, cares for you - that's your idol right there.

### What sets Evolve Gym apart from its competitors?

The gym is like a second home to a lot of people, so I believe that as long as you make them feel at home, that's where they'll want to train. That's key to Evolve, keeping members feeling like part of the family. It's a community, and you can have the best facilities in the world but if your gym doesn't have any personality, nobody is going to want to train there.

Our equipment does also play a role in this. A few ex-members from a rival gym have signed up with us now, saying they prefer Evolve, saying we have better equipment. The most important thing with training is that if it's boring, nobody wants to do it. That's why investing in equipment like the CardioWall is key for attracting members.

Gym design is important too and we have special areas of the gym for different types of ability too, so people feel comfortable. We have accessible but hidden rooms so that a bodybuilder could be screaming and lifting 50kgs in one area, but 'Mum' who's in a class in a different room can't hear a thing!

Also, the way we train our clients is completely different - form, technique and forget your ego, because it isn't going to build you muscle. We treat people with respect and we deliver an experience.

### What is your vision for Evolve Gym?

I can't give away any specific details but we'd love to open Evolve 2 and start expanding. Our plan is to go global. We don't want to stay small; we want to make sure that there is an Evolve in every single area of London and then start branching out to other UK cities like Manchester with the same concept.

The journey with Evolve has been a blessing so far and I'm still young and learning, but I know that we don't want to be an overcrowded gym because it would ruin the intimacy and the image of what I've built. I'd also love to help those who

have been with me since day one. If Evolve grows, they grow with me.

### What are the biggest challenges facing your business over the next few years?

Trying to keep everyone happy in the gym is probably the biggest challenge.

People have different music tastes for example, so it's also about finding that balance.

There will be other gyms opening in the area, so it's about staying up-to-date with the latest technology and equipment. Don't just take, take, take and give nothing back to your members. People asked for a bicycle to be installed in the gym, we installed two; people said they wanted more equipment in the spinning studio so we got more spin bikes. We are always trying to make sure we give back our members what they want.

We're always looking to evolve. I always approach new equipment in that way because people love variety and that's evident with the new CardioWall. Our members love it because it's just fun; the colours, the lights, the numbers - it's like something you'd see in an arcade rather than in a gym so you kind of forget that you're exercising.

Another challenge is social media and how it's changed the fitness industry. We get brainwashed by so much nonsense online now; you need to eat this, or you need to train hard to look a certain way. Training is very simple, like  $2+2=4$ . Eat simple and clean, and train normally, like three or four sessions a week.



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Unfortunately another massive failure in the fitness industry is education. PTs that go on expensive courses and expect to jump straight into teaching - I've been in this industry for over seven years and I'm still learning every day.

### **You're an integral member of Team Anthony Joshua - how did this come about, and what insights can you give us into his training routine and how he stays on top of his game?**

I've been good friends with Anthony since we were about 12 years old! We used to play football together (he was always a better player - he was just too big, you couldn't get the ball off him!), and when I started doing my Rehab degree he started to get into boxing. We've been working together for about seven years now but we call each other family.

He used to wake up at 7am and go for a run, then at 12pm he'd do strength conditioning and then boxing at 6pm but we quickly realised that this was overdoing his training - a big mistake that nearly cost him the Klitschko fight. He was doing too much, including a lot of strength conditioning which meant he wasn't as quick or mobile, but training AJ is all about experience. I said to him that Klitschko should have won that fight based on experience. AJ was only a novice and in his 18th fight he was up against a guy who'd knocked out 54 people from his last 63 fights. Realistically, he should have lost. I said for him to overcome that fight shows how much he has in his tank. He got out of jail in that fight but that showed his heart - that night made him who he is today. He went from an elite athlete to a superstar. He went worldwide on that fight.

The truth is that before his Klitschko fight I saw him on the Friday. He came into the gym and he was wounded; his range of motion was completely gone and his flexibility was destroyed because he trained like a beast for five days. I'll never forget this but three weeks before going up against Klitschko he came up to me and said, "Sina, I think I'm going to have to call this fight off. My back is completely messed up because I can't even walk up the stairs." I put him straight on a rehab bed and spent an hour and a half on his lower back, releasing his tension. After an hour, he couldn't believe the difference. What I'm saying is that it all comes down to learning and now his training programme is completely different.

He trains twice a day; he gets up naturally around 9.30-10am. At 11am we're in the gym, warming up, stretching, boxing, then showering and doing Pilates, so by the time we leave it's around 4pm. He gets home and we do rehab for about 45 minutes. He's lucky if he gets a half an hour

nap and then we're back in the gym again for strength conditioning. It's his dedication. He always wants to go big and that's what's gotten him where he is today.

I have worked with a lot of professional athletes but I've never seen someone as dedicated as Anthony. When I return home back from working with him in Sheffield, I always come back more motivated than when I went. He's the only person I've ever worked with that never questions you. Trust is one thing but it's also his mentality.

He respects that I'm the coach and I know what I'm doing, and he never, ever complains - that's something that you can't teach someone and it's this part of his mindset. That's the reason he is where he is now.

### **What are your own personal fitness goals and how do you achieve these?**

Before I opened Evolve, I never missed a training session - it was like an addiction.

Then when I opened Evolve, I needed to focus on the business so I didn't train for about five and a half months. When I started training again, I struggled with 60kg!

But I'm getting back into it slowly and try to get in five sessions a week, Mon-Fri.

My ultimate piece of equipment is the squat rack because you can do so many things with it and my favourite part of the body to work out is my shoulders.

As I've gotten older, I'm much wiser about my training. I was overdoing it myself like AJ was; I would train hard and eat two hours after but now I've learnt how important nutrition is and I actually let it do the majority of my training. I know that I don't need to kill myself in the gym. I used to have separate days for each section of my body but you need variety, and now I teach my classes in the same way. It's about creating a functional fitness routine and knowing your specialities.

### **What's the best lesson you've learnt from the fitness industry?**

I've definitely learnt that training is the best medicine for your body. When people come and see me with pains, woes and worries and they're on medication that the doctors give them, I tell them instead that lifestyle and exercise is medicine.

Doctors are specialised in giving medication but my medication is in the gym. You have to train to keep your body strong otherwise your condition will deteriorate, but it's a mindset.

