



# ALWAYS A LOSER

By Louise Elliott

**'Losing' is a word normally teamed with negative connotations. That is, until, one puts a healthy perspective on it!**

Upon first impressions, the title of one of Australia's most watched reality TV shows, 'The Biggest Loser', seems quite derogatory. However, a name that adequately intrigued the nation to watch overweight contestants slog their way through gruelling physical challenges, confronting weigh-ins and expositions of personal vulnerabilities, could now see the 2009 series the most absorbing yet.

*Couples* of any calibre – husband and wife, brother and sister, best friends, or divorcees – set the theme for this series format. By teaming contestants with common, personal backgrounds, the show is transformed from one of individual rivalry to that of closely bonded groups, where viewers will witness intimate backgrounds either supporting the competitive ante or working against the competitors' roads to Loser success.

The Australian version of The Biggest Loser started in 2006 as a lifestyle competition offering a life changing experience for contestants, and inspiration to a watching nation. The show helped encourage all viewers, not only those struggling with dieting, but even those without a weight issue to aim for a healthier lifestyle.

However, not without blemish, the show received criticism by health professionals branding its methods as 'ratings sensationalism'. They argued that the "too much, too fast" approach to weight loss ultimately leads to the 'Yoyo effect', where contestants can have rebounding weight gain as metabolically their bodies attempt to restore a previous size. Also, if any psychological or emotional causes that underscored their weight problems were not resolved during the show, professionals warn these determinants will

almost certainly be triggered afterwards, re-establishing comfort eating and weight gain.

Contrary to critics concerns, nonetheless, one contestant whose spunk and sheer determination has not allowed the former, larger self to resurrect is Wal Milberg, fondly dubbed 'Big Wal'. Previously interviewed by Options during the 2006 series, Wal became famous for the greatest, initial weigh-in loss recorded in a show worldwide – 15.5kg, plus the greatest overall weight loss in the Australian series – 66kg in 15 weeks. However, he claims his greatest personal achievement comes everyday whilst upholding good nutritional habits, portion sizes, adequate exercise and a firm level of determination.

"Actually portion sizes are the key to success," says Wal emphatically. Spurred on by education received from new sponsor and weight loss mentoring service, Jenny Craig, Wal travels interstate lecturing trim-wannabes that there is no magic bullet to weight loss success. "Exercise is the edge to your weight loss results. Yet it all comes down to having smaller portion sizes. Some people know how to eat healthy, but they just eat too much".

As Wal often comes across in his seminars, people want their results pronto! Unfortunately they look for a quick fix in dieting supplements or fad programs. "At the end of the day, as soon as people come off the powders and bars, the weight just comes back on," states Wal, clearly not an advocate of weight loss products.

"It's the same as fad exercise machines that you see on television. They have demonstrators with finely cut bodies promising similar results

after showing a few sit-ups! It's outrageous!" Quoting an American study, this feisty Fire Officer explains that, on average, people have three big fitness kicks in their lifetime. And as long as a piece of equipment is sold, marketers know that the product craze will have a relatively short usage period, and soon will be replaced with the next wiz-bang, sure-thing, soon-to-be-neglected product.

Instead, Wal believes that lifestyle management is the only solution. "Half the battle is fought in the supermarket. If you don't buy it [junk food], you don't bring it home, and you don't eat it. Easy!" In fact, nutritional experts warn weight loss contenders not to go shopping on an empty stomach so as to avoid junk food temptations and 'shopping cart catastrophes'.

In the auditioning process for The Biggest Loser, producers have engaged Wal to stress to competitors the rigors facing them throughout the show if successful. "It is very demanding and not at all the glitz and glamour it's made out to be. If you're trying out for the show to make a name for yourself, forget it!"

However, ask the European market who Big Wal is and if they watch the Lifestyle channel, they'll know! Recently at the World Fire Fighters Games, an armoured guard under the Eiffel Tower, Paris, recognized Wal and approached him for a photo. "Of course we're not allowed to ask them for one," he was quick to note.

With Wal's unremitting role as a public figurehead for health success, one argues whether this tough man ever falls off the weight loss wagon? "Of course I do; even now I'm trying to regain some ground lost whilst overseas at the Games. But everything has to be

in moderation. I want to be able to go on holidays and eat pizza and enjoy myself. On the show you work out 6 – 7 hours per day, but that's unrealistic in everyday life. As I keep saying, eating at least six small portioned, nutritious meals per day is the key to keeping it off. I exercise for an hour per day too, and that helps."

These days Wal is a proud fundraiser for charities. Alongside other attractive 'Fire-ies', our 'Big Wal' turned 'Buff Wal' Wal poses his fit physique for photos in the infamous 'Fire Fighter's Calendar'. Proceeds from sales support the Westmead Hospital, Sydney and the Royal Children's Hospital, Brisbane. (If you would also like to assist in this worthy cause by purchasing a calendar, visit [www.firefighterscalendar.com.au](http://www.firefighterscalendar.com.au))

As the next Biggest Loser approaches, the proposed 'Couples' format is already a tried testimony in the Milberg household. Wife, Suzy, became a success story in her own right, losing 55kg alongside Wal in the triumph over the bulge. Options asked Big Wal if he could divulge any secrets about the new Loser season: "Well, it's a rumour - but I've heard this time The Biggest Loser will be shot in Queensland on an Island off Cairns (Queensland), in 'Survivor' style!"

And if ever there was a survivor, the man who proudly proclaims he's a 'Loser and loving it', Big Wal's balanced, determined attitude to weight loss and life will, in optimistic terms, ensure this man will always be a Loser. ■

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