

Roya Shafai's Story

A story of resilience, bravery and symbol for women's rights. Roya was beaten by the Taliban, but that didn't stop her, she went to a secret gym, kept her six packs, won a full-ride scholarship to study Health & Fitness at the Loyalist College in Ontario, and now, she has successfully arrived in Canada.

As soon as the Taliban returned back to power in August 2021, they have banned all forms of sports for women and girls in Afghanistan. In addition to the ban, they have imposed strict punishment based on Sharia law.

The Taliban see sports for women as a sinful act because it is a psychological activity, and the Taliban forbid such activities for women and girls.

Roya was a decorated athlete in Afghanistan. She played mixed martial arts, and Judo. She has competed a couple of times outside of Afghanistan, and she has won several cups, and trophies in the championships. After couple of wins in MMA (Mixed Martial Arts), she started playing Judo, and soon after she joined Afghanistan's women national team. She was doing very well, until the Afghan central republican government collapsed, and the Taliban took over again.

In her own words, she is describing her life as *'My life has become to eat and asleep at home'*, Roya writes *" I didn't do anything wrong. The only crime I have committed is to play sports."*

Before the Taliban took power in August 2021, Roya was one of the best judo and mixed martial arts fighters in the country. She couldn't take the Taliban's oppression on female athletes, and she began to a secret gym in the neighbourhood. Then the Taliban raided her gym and beat her with the AK-47 magazine on her left arm, and left a serious bruise. They wanted to hit her for going to the gym. If she couldn't manage to escape on time, she would have been tried in a Sharia court. That would have meant a penalty of 100 lashes or even public execution, just for the 'crime' of excelling in sports.

Fortunately, later, WLOT was able to organize for her evacuation to Pakistan, and secure a full-ride scholarship for her later to Canada.