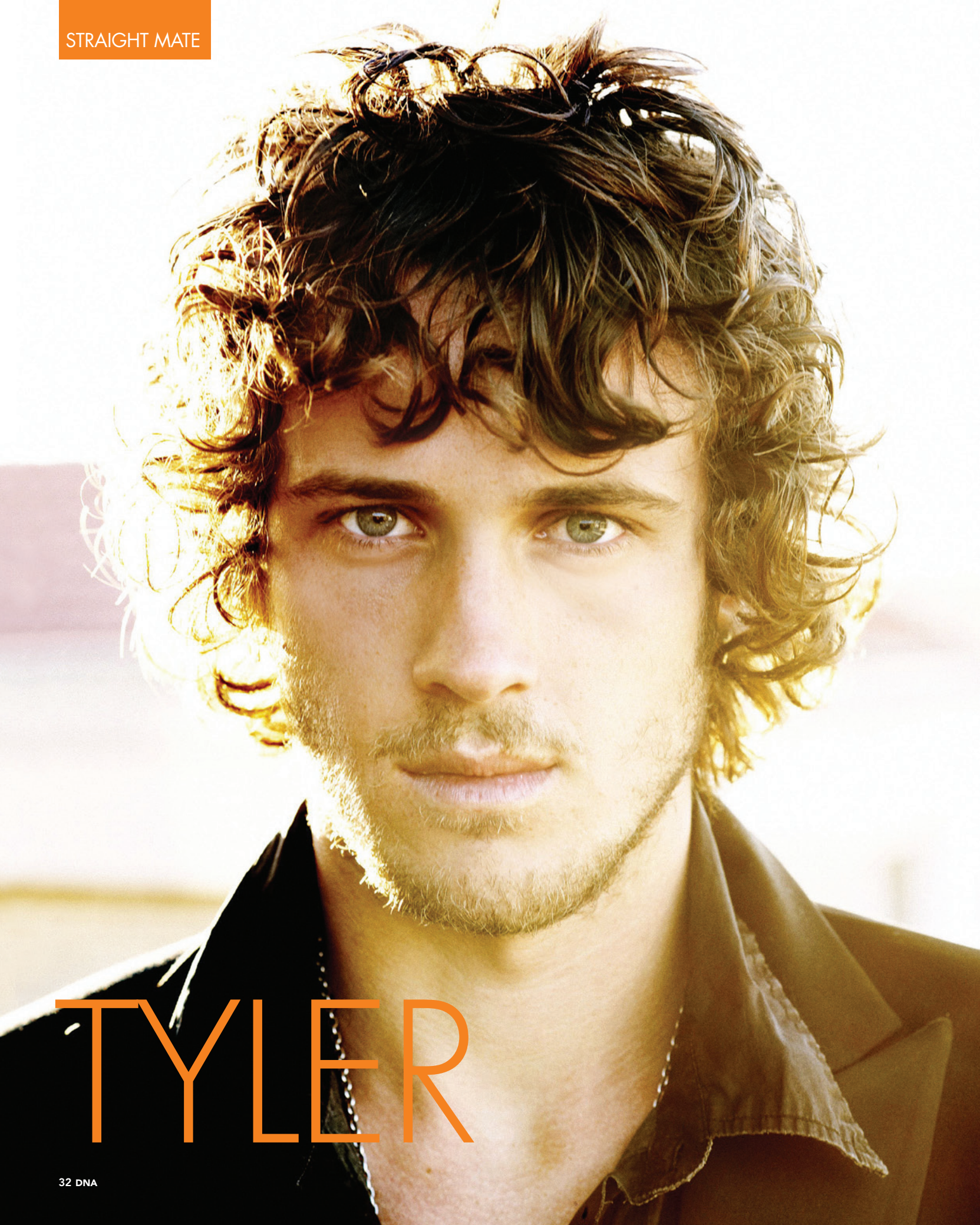


STRAIGHT MATE



TYLER

HE WON THE AMAZING RACE AUSTRALIA, BATTLED A LIFE-THREATENING ILLNESS – HE EVEN SURVIVED AN ENCOUNTER WITH PARIS HILTON. TYLER ATKINS TAKES TIME OUT FROM SURFING AND ACTING LESSONS TO TALK TO MATTHEW MYERS.

DNA: How did it feel to be the first winner of *The Amazing Race Australia*?

Tyler Atkins: It was really weird because we had been going for so long and throughout filming, we experienced every single emotion that you could imagine. When we got to the winner's mat, there was no emotion. I didn't know how I felt. I couldn't believe it and I wasn't excited, because I had already been excited so much. It was just very surreal.

Do you still keep in touch with your counterpart Nathan Jolliffe (who went on to *Celebrity Apprentice*)?

We keep in touch but we're doing different things at the moment. He went

down the reality TV path and I'm trying to break into acting.

What was the most difficult challenge you had to face on *The Race*?

I think it was the sawing challenge. We were in Poland and had to saw through two chunks of wood. At that stage we were so tired and had no energy. I can't even explain how hard that was. It took everything out of us. Nathan and I had also been robbed on the train, so we didn't have any money that whole leg. It was just a nightmare.

Did you form any friendships from the show?

Yeah, throughout *The Race* we got to bond with others, and afterwards we realised that no one else could really imagine what we went through. So, it's a special bond. I'll always have the others close to my heart. I'm still pretty close with the Perth girls, Sam and Renae. I also got to like Richard and Joey. We had a reunion about a year after the race, which was pretty fun because everyone got drunk. On *The Race* you can't drink!

You were once a regular on the Sydney nightclub scene, but a kidney problem led to a long stint in hospital.

Yeah, I had a surfing accident and they found out that I had this kidney disease, which took about five operations to fix. I'm really lucky because it was only in one kidney. That was a massive life-changing thing. I spent months in hospital and quit drinking for about a year or so. I got my life together, so it was a really big blessing in disguise. I still have the occasional glass of wine. I'm still young, and you've got to live!

And now you're an ambassador for Kidney Health Australia?

Yes, I get to help out little kids that are going through a lot worse than I did. It made my time a lot easier, because I could relate to these kids that had gone through the same as me.

You've also studied at NIDA?

It was a short course and now I'm continuing to study with Aaron Jeffery (*McLeod's Daughters*) who is my private coach. I have lessons with him once or twice a week. I've always wanted to act, and after my kidney disease the time seemed right.

And now you're in the new series *Puberty Blues*. What's your character like?

I play Darren Peters, and he's one of the older boys in the gang. He makes sure everything goes to plan. It's based on a true story. It's set in the '70s, with lots of drug taking, smoking weed, drinking and hooking up with girls. It's going to be a pretty intense show. It's really cool. We get to drive around in old panel vans and we have single fin surfboards. It's a great cast and it's really good fun.

It must be a change to now be in the acting world, rather than reality TV?

I really enjoy it and work with great people on *Puberty Blues*. They've made me feel really welcome and it makes it a hell of a lot easier. It is different when you get to do the real thing, but I feel blessed to have the opportunity to get my foot in the door. Southern Star does really great dramas, so I couldn't ask for more.

Is it true that you once dated Paris Hilton?

Nah, I just kind of hung out with her on the beach for a little while. That was about six years ago now. I just met her on the beach. In LA there's a tight group of people who all know one another and you just all end up hanging out together. There's a few pictures out there somewhere.

Not many people would realise that you were on the cover of *Australian Vogue*, because it's just your back!

[Laughs] Yeah, I know. But that was a really fun shoot. I've also been in *American Glamour* magazine. I got to work with Abbey Lee and Max Doyle, who is one of my favourite photographers. I don't think a lot of guys could say their back's been on the front of *Vogue*!

If you were gay for a day, who would you go for?

I have a man-crush on Johnny Depp and Ryan Gosling. Ryan Gosling is pretty cool.

Where do you stand on gay marriage?

I'm all for it. To be honest, I think it's a joke that it's even banned. There's nothing wrong with it. It's just like back in the days when they didn't want a female prime minister. There are so many people like that, and it's just plain discrimination.

Who is your diva?

Lady Gaga! I love everything about her. She's so good. I think she's really smart in the way she's marketed herself. Her songs are great and I went to a private concert of hers which was pretty special.

What's your porn name (your first pet and the street you grew up in)?

[Laughs] Well, believe it or not, the first street I grew up in was Nobby Parade, and my first pet was Cludo. Cludo Nobby!

What's your favourite exercise?

Surfing. In the gym I like doing chin-ups. I normally do about 20 reps.

You've promoted Red Undies Week (Kidney Australia) and Bonds Quick Dry Undies, so what do you wear under your board shorts?

I don't wear anything under my board shorts. I freeball! I only wear undies when I'm wearing jeans. It's a little bit weird surfing with undies. They get all tangled everywhere and it's not a good feeling in the water. [Laughs] You need to be as free as possible.

Go to tyleratkins.com. For more on Kidney Health Australia go to kidney.org.au



(Above) Tyler's back on the cover of *Vogue*; (below) with Paris Hilton in 2006.

