



Vegan Strong Plantbuilt Team Heads Back to the Mr. America Competition with New Member Briana Jones

By Michelle McCarthy
2023-09-19 10:32:48



Photo by Charlotte Foerschler

She's a mother, nurse, marathon runner, and Navy veteran...and now Briana Jones is hoping to add another title to her impressive résumé: vegan champion. After being introduced to CrossFit through a Groupon deal, she quickly fell in love with the sport and joined the Vegan Strong Plantbuilt team, a diverse group of bodybuilders and other strength athletes on a mission to demonstrate the power of a cruelty-free diet. At 2022's Mr. America competition, Vegan Strong Plantbuilt scored a total of [18 medals](#). This year, they plan to top that stellar performance as they take the stage October 6–8 in Atlantic City, New Jersey. We chatted with Jones—who will be competing in the A.C. Fitness Throwdown event at Mr. America—about why she chose a plant-based diet, what she eats before and after workouts, and why she thinks her team will outshine the rest in this year's competition.

Why did you adopt a whole-food, plant-based diet?

Briana Jones: In high school, I eliminated a lot of meat from my diet. As I learned about inflammation, I started to eliminate dairy because I have asthma. I fully adopted the diet after watching the *Forks Over Knives* documentary, and I noticed my asthma improved almost immediately.

What do you like to eat before and after

workouts?

BJ: I usually eat an apple and oatmeal with flax and hemp seeds before I work out. Sweet potatoes are my go-to. I'll snack on them throughout the day when I'm competing. After I work out, I'll have a big grain bowl with beans for protein (chickpeas are my favorite) and cucumbers and tomatoes for hydration. I'll eat that and an acai bowl with bananas, strawberries, and blueberries.

Photo by @alexhayesphoto

What sets the Vegan Strong Plantbuilt team apart from other Mr. America competitors?

BJ: What separates us is the recovery aspect. Now that I'm plant-based, I recover a lot better, and the food I'm eating is actually nourishing my body. When I'm recovering between events, I'm eating sweet potatoes and I'm watching other people eat gummy bears. I know I'm getting instant energy and nutrients to get me through the next event. I'm not going to have a high and then crash. That makes a huge difference.

What would you say to someone who's interested in a plant-based diet?

BJ: Do a little research and go for it. In a week, you'll notice a significant difference in your body that will motivate you to continue on—more energy, better sleep. Take it a day at a time, adding one plant-based meal to your day for a week, then two the next week, and three the next. Before you know it, you've adopted a lifestyle that is going to give you a lot of energy and feel rewarding.

Photo by @theiconicimagery

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What are you most looking forward to at this year's Mr. America competition?

BJ: We're excited to go out and show our strengths. Our goal is to represent what it looks like to eat a plant-based diet and be healthy and strong. When you're plant-based, people think you can't build muscle, you can't be strong, that you're going to be skinny. We want everyone to see that, "Hey, these plant-based athletes are competing and they're doing well." It's all about leading by example, and it's nice to be able to demonstrate that to the world in a positive way.

To learn more about a whole-food, plant-based diet, visit our [Plant-Based Primer](#). For meal-planning support, check out [Forks Meal Planner](#), FOK's easy weekly meal-planning tool to keep you on a healthy plant-based path.