

BIKINI BODY

BRITISH IFBB BIKINI PRO
MICHELLE BRANNAN
IS PREPARING TO FLY TO
LAS VEGAS FOR THE
BIKINI OLYMPIA
PHOTOS BY ISAAC HINDS



MATT MARSH

don't really like and forcing their bodies to do things that are not right for them.

I am lucky that competing suits my body and personality reasonably well. Saying that, I don't choose the easy way out: I train six days a week and eat the same way pretty much all year round, working my life around that.

I train with weights five or six days a week, usually doing three upper body sessions and two or three lower body sessions. I also do cardio for 30-60 minutes five or six days a week.

I also have to remember to eat plenty of the right things—it's easy to remember to eat enough of the wrong things! I eat between 1500-2500 calories a day, with a macronutrient breakdown of 20-30 % fats, 30-40 % carbs and 40 % protein.

I like to incorporate as many different foods as possible and I don't really stick to one set cheat meal as long as I'm training and hitting my macros. After all, this isn't a crash diet I'm doing—it's my life.

This is my third year competing so it would be pretty monotonous if my diet were boring. When I am close to a show, my diet tightens up and I am stricter with my carbs and fats.

DON'T COPY OTHERS

Another question I am frequently asked is: what do you need to improve to win? This is a very difficult question in such a subjective sport. I run a coaching team called ShowGirl Fitness, training girls for competitions or just to be in the best shape they can, and every single girl is different, including me.

We all have strengths and weaknesses. You can waste a lot of time and send yourself on a wild goose chase trying to be like somebody else or by looking at a previous show and trying to look like the winner.

The key is to bring the best of yourself. Having said that it is, however, a fitness contest. The judges want to see a balanced, trained physique and they want to see someone who is confident and attractive on stage. You have to be aware of this but competing is ultimately about being the best you can be, bringing the

With the biggest show in the world of fitness and bodybuilding fast approaching, I am still kicking myself trying to come to terms with the fact I will be on stage at the Olympia weekend in Las Vegas from September 26 to 29.

I won't just be competing. I will also become the first UK bikini athlete to make it on to the Olympia stage. For any fitness competitor this is the height of success and beyond most people's dreams.

I feel very lucky to be in such a position. When I started competing in 2010 I set my sights on an IFBB pro card. I entered every show I could and won the first ever UKBFF regional qualifier in 2010 and then took first place in the bikini category at the Amateur Olympia in 2011.

I then represented the UK at the IFBB European Championships and the first Arnold Classic Europe. I got my pro card after placing third out of 28 girls at the IFBB World Championships in 2011, becoming the first UK bikini athlete to do so.

For me, this was a dream come true. But being a very competitive, driven person I then set another goal: to compete at the Olympia.

In 2012 I started competing in the

IFBB pro league, placing fourth on my pro debut in St Louis before winning my first pro show at the British Grand Prix in 2012, which qualified me for the Olympia.

When I stand on the Olympia stage, almost a year will have passed since my last competition. I decided to have some time off competing to improve my physique to bring a more balanced package.

I wanted to improve my upper body and strengthen my rear view. I have always had good legs but my upper body was less developed and my glutes lagged.

WHAT MOTIVATES ME?

This is a question I am asked over and over again. My answer is always the same: you have to ask yourself how badly you want it.

When I set a goal, I want to make that goal happen. For me, satisfaction comes from achieving the things I set out to do and ultimate success is achieving those goals while enjoying the process.

It is really important to enjoy what you do. Finding ways to fit training and nutrition into your life so you still enjoy the process is vital.

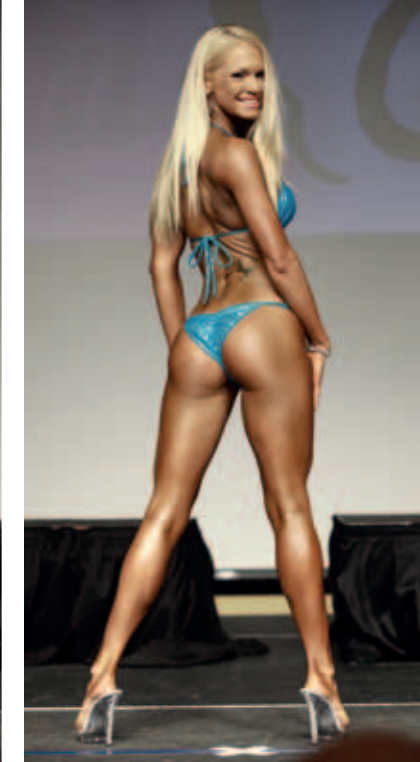
So many competitors make themselves miserable by doing things they



"I AM STILL COMING TO TERMS WITH THE FACT I WILL BE ON STAGE AT THE OLYMPIA WEEKEND IN LAS VEGAS"



On stage in St Louis



best version of yourself and no one else.

What's next for me? Well, I am honoured to be competing at the Olympia and to be the first bikini athlete in the UK to earn my pro card and win a pro show. I believe I have helped to put UK bikini on the map and hope I can inspire other girls to follow in my footsteps.

Part of competing is making a commitment to yourself and that journey requires you to overcome both physical and mental obstacles; no one said it would be easy.

In terms of contests, I would like to compete in the Bikini International at the Arnold Sports Festival in Columbus, Ohio next year. The pro shows at the Arnold are invitation-only. You can't qualify and only 15 girls are chosen so it would be a great honour to get on that stage.

I am also enjoying coaching other girls who are just starting on their journey in fitness and bikini competitions and sharing my experiences openly and honestly.

My husband, Nicolas Paul, started competing this year and will be competing in the men's physique category at the UKBFF British Championships in October so competing is and will continue to be a very big part of my life. **M&F**

Michelle Brannan is Britain's first IFBB pro bikini competitor. She won last year's British Grand Prix and is due to compete at the Bikini Olympia in Las Vegas this month