An Interview with **Rob Bigwood** - the World's most successful

Vegan Arm-Wrestler

Pete Ryan ISSA CFT SPN Dip

Pete: Hi Rob, thanks for taking the time to answer a few questions for all the interested readers out there. I thought we'd start with some basic questions. What made you go vegan in the first place?

Rob: I first considered a vegetarian diet after an arm-wrestling tournament back in 2002. After competing, some friends and I walked around the Pennsylvania State Fair and a group of piglets caught my attention. It was cute watching them play around and feed from their mom, it reminded me of little puppies. I got sick to my stomach knowing that I had a bacon and egg sandwich for breakfast that same morning. I never thought of meat in the same way again.

Pete: Being a strength athlete, was there any concerns that you might lose strength when you first changed your diet, and what did you find when you did make the change?

Rob: I was concerned at first but didn't care. I made a conscious and ethical decision to give up meat, and was willing to face the consequences. It is more important to practise what I believe in than to worry about being a strength athlete.

My body did not feel right at the beginning, and it took a couple of weeks to adjust without the meat. Eventually, I began to gain energy and consistently lost weight. I have never felt better in my entire life and it was one of the smartest decisions I ever made.

Pete: Most people will have tried arm-wrestling at some point, but most of us think of it as something to do in a bar after a few pints, not really an athletic pursuit. How did you get involved in the sport of arm-wrestling?

Rob: I was always strong at arm-wrestling, getting the genetics from my mom. She could beat most men, including my dad, and even competed in a tournament before I was born. In High School, I met a guy that competed professionally and he talked me into giving it a shot. My first tournament was in North Carolina back in 2000. I ended up taking fifth place and have been addicted ever since.

Pete: What sort of training do you need to do to enter your sport?

Rob: The best way to train for this sport is to get on a table and arm wrestle. It's hard to simulate and hit the right angles at the gym, almost impossible. Try to find some pullers in your area and see if you can practise with them. Some useful websites are *armwrestlingtv.com* and *armwrestlersnearyou.com*.

Pete: You recently came second (both left- and right-handed) at the 2009 "Big Apple Grapple". This probably makes you the top vegan arm-wrestler in the world at this time. How did you prepare for the contest, and is there anything special about being a vegan athlete that a meat-eater wouldn't need to concern themselves with when prepping for a competition?

Rob: I am probably the only vegan arm-wrestler in the world!

Prior to the Big Apple Grapple, I had been inactive for over two years and needed some motivation to start pulling again. Even though placing second in both arms, I was pretty rusty considering I trained for only three months. As far as preparation, I made sure to eat right, train hard, and get enough rest. I don't think that is any different than what the meat-eaters do.

Pete: How were you received as a vegan at an arm-wrestling contest: were the other athletes interested, dismissive, curious? Also, the fans: how did they react to a vegan whipping so many of the meat-eating competitors; did it make an impression?

Rob: Most of the arm-wrestlers were shocked to see how strong I was after being out of the scene for two years. Most have known me prior to going vegan and respect my decision. I had one spectator tell me that her son was my new biggest fan. She had unsuccessfully tried to get him to go vegetarian and after watching me compete he now wants to try.

Pete: What are your goals in terms of arm-wrestling?

Rob: My ultimate goal is to be the U.S. National Champion and then World Champion. But more importantly I want to prove to people that strength athletes do not need meat or animal products to be powerful – all you need are veggies!

Pete: As well as being an athlete and highlighting veganism through your strength, you are also active with several animal rights groups. Do you think that strong guys like yourself appearing on the vegan scene are starting to smash the stereotypical image of the pasty, wimp of a (male) vegan, and do you think that this might be a good way to get more guys involved in the vegan movement (by highlighting more male vegans with strength and power)?

Rob: I am pasty but definitely not wimpy! Most people are shocked when they find out I am vegan and don't understand how I am strong without meat, milk, eggs, etc. I have been doing the best I can with educating, inspiring, and breaking the typical stereotypes.

Pete: You look like you've got massive arms; just how big are your guns?

Rob: Ha ha. I actually haven't measured my arms in years, I'm not that kind of guy. I hardly train for size, rather for strength. It's a huge misconception that the bigger the biceps the stronger the arm-wrestler. This sport is a precise combination of technique, speed and entire body strength. Also, if you don't have a strong hand and wrist then you won't be successful.

Pete: Would you suggest that other vegans get involved in the sport of arm-wrestling, and if so how should they begin to get involved?

Rob: I think other vegans and vegetarians should give it a try – who doesn't like to arm wrestle? It's the biggest underground sport that is about to explode on the scenes. There is a great new documentary called *Pulling John* that will bring our sport to the next level, like *Pumping Iron* did for bodybuilding.

Pete: If you had a sentence or two to convince someone to try out a vegan diet, what would you say to them?

Rob: If not for the awesome health benefits, then at least make an effort for the animals. If being a vegan seems impossible then cut back on meat a few days a week; every effort counts. People don't realise the harsh cruelty and suffering these animals go through before eventually ending up as the meat in your sandwich. Being vegan also means being green, it is the absolute best thing for our environment!

Pete: If people want to get hold of you online have you got a website or blog where people can follow you as you continue on your quest for arm-wrestling dominance?

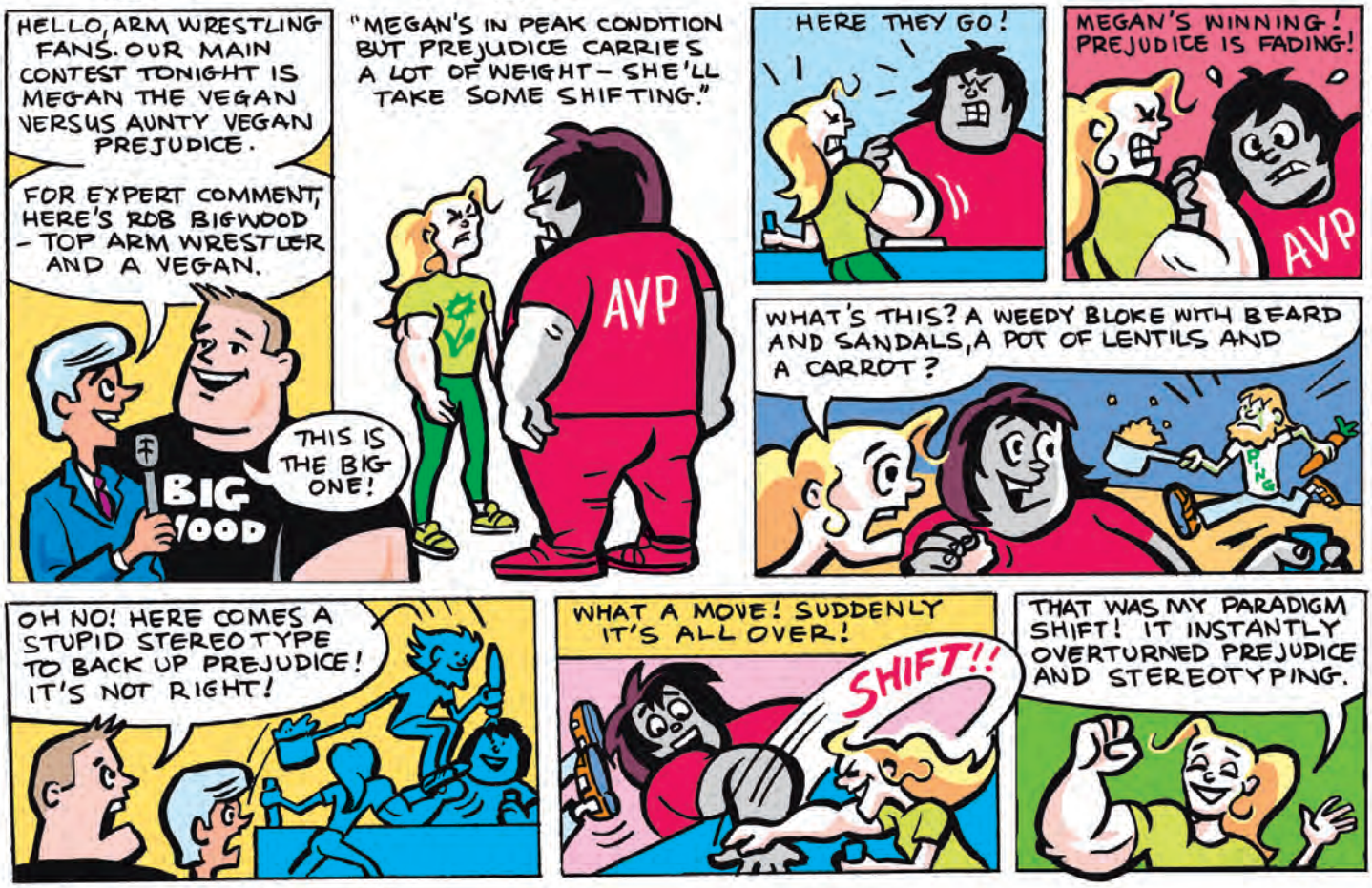
blog.rbigwood.com

facebook.com/rob.bigwood

twitter.com/rbigwood

For more information about training on a vegan diet go to http://www.veganbodybuilding.org or http://veganbodybuilding.userboard.net

Since this interview Rob Bigwood just won the 2009 South Jersey Fitness Expo in Atlantic City, NJ with the left arm & came 3rd using the right (he wasn't pinned with the right, his elbow slipped off the pad, so it's an automatic loose).

Megan the Vegan

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