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# OUR SPORTING GREATS

MURRI AND AILAN ATHLETES IN THE SPOTLIGHT

## RHONDA PURCELL

BODYBUILDER AND DEADLY CHOICES AMBASSADOR

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# RHONDA PURCELL

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Currently in off-season, prepping for her next entry onto the professional international stage, Rhonda Purcell is an unstoppable force. Her personal journey to becoming a professional natural bodybuilder in her forties, and passionate community health ambassador continues to inspire others.

Rhonda's family are the Nguigi and Noonucal people from the Quandamooka region of Moreton and North Stradbroke Islands on her grandfather's side, and on her nanna's side are the Koa people from Winton. Rhonda's grandparents raised their family in Cherbourg, on the land of the Wakka Wakka people, and her aunt was a Cherbourg Marching Girl. Her mother was a strong black woman who overcame many hardships, a lifelong inspiration for Rhonda. Rhonda's mother passed away at an early age, in her fifties.

Witnessing firsthand the lower life expectancy and poor health outcomes for her people spurred Rhonda, in 2012 at age 42, to reconsider her sedentary lifestyle and promote a healthy way of being, not



*Rhonda Purcell with her Miss Olympia Natural Olympia Gold Medal and wreath awarded in 2016, 2018.  
Photo by Joe Ruckli.*

only for herself but for her mob, making a personal transformation. What started as a simple desire to get fit and healthy transpired into a love of fitness and boxing. After watching a natural bodybuilding competition, Rhonda decided she'd give it a go, and within a year of training, she was excelling in her first state competitions in the 'Fitness' division. In female bodybuilding there are a number of divisions ranging from a more fuller and softer 'Bikini' physique; then 'Fitness'; to a more lean and firm 'Figure' build which is defined, but without muscle striations (or visible grooves of muscle); to 'Physique'; and the final 'Bodybuilding' division where size and muscle striations across major muscle groups are mandatory.

In 2013 Rhonda qualified for the INBA (International Natural Bodybuilding Association)/PNBA (Professional Natural Body Building Association) Natural Olympia in San Diego, USA and competed in the Fitness Masters where she went on to win gold, as well as placing fourth in the 'Fitness Opens', and second in the 'Bikini Masters'.

Through determination and intensive training, Rhonda reached professional natural bodybuilding status in 2016 at age 46 and became a World Champion. She was crowned Miss Olympia at the the 2016 Las Vegas PNBA Natural Olympia (Professional Figure Masters) representing her first professional gold medal. She won a professional silver medal (Professional Physique Masters) at the same event.

Rhonda's natural stage presence which can be described in her own words as 'storytelling and creating an illusion with my body' was honed through an acting and modelling career. She started modelling in the 1988 NAIDOC show where she gained a sense of confidence and belonging. Now representing her Quandamooka mob on the world stage in natural bodybuilding contests, Rhonda's costumes take inspiration from her culture and add to her power and presence. The bikini in the Murri colours with black, red and yellow crystals showcases pride, while her wings at the 2014 World Beauty Fashion and Fitness (WBFF) are inspired by Mirrigimpa (sea eagle bird) from the beautiful sea skies and saltwater from her country.

Rhonda shares her story with kids at school and through community engagements with the hope to inspire, motivate and empower our mob to make Deadly Choices that are Healthy Choices, in her role as a Deadly Choices ambassador.