

2018 Courage Award Finalist

ZOE MONTANEZ

BEFORE



AFTER



Exactly 2 years ago today, I was competing at the NPC North Americans Championships hoping for a pro card. I had lost 68lbs after having my son. That day, I placed 2nd just points shy from 1st. I was disappointed but I felt something greater was aligned for me and this wasn't my time. I wiped my tears off backstage and yelled "time to make a baby"! I was 36 and I knew my priorities. I was to complete my family and give my son a sibling. I discovered we were expecting on New Year's Day!

I kept working out throughout my pregnancy until 38 weeks when my hips gave up. I gained a total of 83 pounds since that show day, from 129lbs in 2016 to 208lbs before delivering my beautiful daughter on September 15, 2018. Complications resulted in a c-section, but the minute I got permission from the OBGYN I went straight to the gym! It was almost 3 months since I had last worked out. I was terrified, overweight, self-conscious, flabby, tired, swollen, and not at all like the old Zoe. But I knew if I kept pushing, everyday I would be closer to my goals.

I started documenting my progress on social media for personal motivation. I started connecting with moms everywhere. Support and love poured in throughout the whole journey, and it felt amazing. I set a goal, I

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wanted to get back on the national stage before my daughter turned one. Some said "you're crazy", "you're going to need way more time than that", "there's no way." Even the Dr. asked me if I wanted liposuction while he removed the umbilical hernia I'd gotten during my pregnancy. I couldn't believe my ears. All these negative comments!! I grabbed my stuff and I looked at the Dr. and said "I will show you and everyone!!!!" I stormed out to my car and had a good cry.

I turned all this negativity into fuel for my fire! I was at the gym at 6am the next day starting the training for my show. I had until the end of August and wasted no time. With my husband's support and guidance from my coach we endured a 35 week prep. Diet, weight training, lots of cardio, long days, short nights, a full time job, house chores, food prepping, an infant and a 4 year old. It has been the hardest and longest prep. I lost 72lbs, I got my pre-baby body back and was show ready in the best shape of my life!!! Last night I stepped on stage at the same show, the 2018 NPC North American Championships, with pride and accomplishment knowing I went against all odds. My story has a happy ending; I won my figure class and overall in the masters 35 and over, earning an IFBB Pro card.

As a new IFBB Pro, I feel blessed, validated, loved and with a stronger mind. I get to share this story with everyone and one day I'll show my children pictures and tell them and teach all about this experience. I believe if you feel it in your heart that you must do something so you can be happy, then you do it...no matter how hard or if odds are all against you. Follow your heart and don't look back. Have faith and enjoy the ride!!! It will be worth it and rewarding at the end of it all!