

# Q&A: 'Top Chef' & 'Tournament of Champions' winner Brooke Williamson goes from judge to mentor on 'BBQ Brawl'

'Bobby's Triple Threat' 'Titan' and regular tournament titleholder looks to guide team to victory over squads coached by Maneet Chauhan, Bobby Flay

## BEHIND THE SCREENS WITH JOSHUA MALONI

The old proverb, "Those who can't, teach," was not intended for chef Brooke Williamson.

Though she is stepping into a mentorship role this season on the Food Network's "BBQ Brawl," it's not for a lack of ability.

A three-time "Tournament of Champions" finalist – and the show's inaugural titlist – a two-time "Top Chef" finalist and season 14 winner, and one of Bobby Flay's "Bobby's Triple Threat" "Titans," Williamson is an elite competitor and premiere chef.

She's also familiar with "BBQ Brawl," having served as a judge in past seasons.

This time around, however, Williamson opted to trade in her scorecard for some spurs – and throw her cowboy hat in the ring with Flay and two-time "TOC" winner Maneet Chauhan.

The new season of "BBQ Brawl" airs at 9 p.m. Mondays on Food Network. Episodes stream the next day on HBO Max.

The competition takes place at Star Hill Ranch. In a press release, Food Network noted, "Each chef leads their own team of talented 'Brawlers' though a series of intense culinary challenges where judges Adrienne Cheatham, Rashad Jones and Carson Kressley will determine the most and least successful dishes. At the end of the nine-episode season, only one competitor can claim victory in their quest to become 'Master of 'Cue' and deliver bragging rights to their team captain. ...



New "BBQ Brawl" captain Brooke Williamson preps her station. Williamson is moving from judge to mentor/competitor in the new season that begins Monday on Food Network and streaming on HBO Max. (Photo credit: Food Network) • "BBQ Brawl" captains Brooke Williamson, Bobby Flay and defending champion Maneet Chauhan. (Photo credit: Food Network)



"From grills and smokers to vertical fire and raw wood, these pitmasters are challenged each week to work with different fire elements and unexpected ingredients."

Williamson shared more in this Q&A.

**BTS:** What made you decide to skip judging and instead compete – and what advantages (if any) do you have after being a judge on "BBQ Brawl"?

**Brooke Williamson:** I've had the best time judging for the past five seasons, but have always wanted to get my hands dirty. ... Cooking is where I feel most comfortable in any arena! I'd say perhaps I know what the judges are looking for because of my judging experience, but every judge is different. At the end of the day, it's about making the best food.

**BTS:** What did you look for in picking a team?

**Brooke Williamson:** Variety for a well-rounded team who can not only handle anything, but also work well with each other. Team work and unwavering support for one another is really what this game is all about.

**BTS:** Maneet took your "Tournament of Champions" title in season two. Does that make you want to beat her even more?!

**Brooke Williamson:** That's not how I enter any competition ... and in this specific scenario, it's not about me. It's about supporting my team to get them the win!

**BTS:** As has been mentioned many, many times on "Beat Bobby Flay," Bobby doesn't always play by the rules – or make dishes by their textbook definition. The flavors in

his food must be otherworldly! What does it take to defeat someone like that in a food competition?

**Brooke Williamson:** Bobby obviously has unmatched experience in the competition arena, and he's led his team on this show to a win more than anyone. I think there's a certain amount of freedom that he gives to his team to be who they are that has really done him/them well in the past, but he knows when to step in and save a potentially disastrous situation. The fact that he also knows how to outcook almost anyone on earth sure doesn't hurt either.

**BTS:** You told me ahead of a previous season that barbecue doesn't always get the love and attention it deserves from foodies – or viewers. Do you feel "BBQ Brawl," and the amazing dishes we see each year,

helps barbecue finally get its flowers?

**Brooke Williamson:** I think "Brawl" has definitely helped put BBQ on the primetime competition map, but I also think it's finally just getting the recognition that it deserves. I think in the past few years we've seen top culinary lists include some of the best BBQ pit pros out there and its culture is getting the attention it deserves.

Food Network also shared, "For exclusive barbecue how-to's with Flay, Chauhan and Williamson, fans can check out Food Network's social platforms for new videos every week and join the conversation all season using #BBQBrawl. Viewers can also visit FoodNetwork.com to keep up with the competition and get to know the 'Brawlers' fighting for the title of 'Master of 'Cue.'"



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