

# Round #1 of Escoffier Cup came down to .3 of a point

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By Jessie Moniz

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The Bermuda Gourmet Getaway 2008 was off to an exciting start when chef Michael Gomes of Cafe Coco won the first round of the Escoffier Cup by just .3 of a point.

Mr. Gomes' recipe with approximately 40 different ingredients, was literally a mouthful.

His entry for the Maple Leaf Duck round comprised of duck done two ways — one way with crisp skinned breast, brown butter squash and quince compote.

The other way involved potato wrapped duck, spinach-raisin stuffing with cinnamon and juniper.

During the preliminary rounds of the Escoffier Cup held at International Imports on Par-la-Ville Road, the audience, sipped Goslings wine and cocktails and sampled the different dishes.

During the Escoffier Cup, competing chefs have 25 minutes to cook three portions on a theme, duck, seafood, pork or beef.

Chefs also have five minutes of plating time. Almost everything except things like stocks has to be prepared during the competition.

Competitors also start from a cold stove. It is a fun night for those watching as the audience gets to learn new cooking techniques, sample the different dishes, and fill out score sheets.

Following international guidelines, the chefs are scored on taste, presentation, hygiene, complexity and ingredient compatibility, among other things.

A chef can earn a total of 40 points. Although the winner is determined by the judges, audience scoring is taken into account.

This year, because of the close nature of the scores, the audience figures actually turned out to be quite important.



**Cafe Coco chef** Michael Gomes' winning entry for the first round of the Escoffier Cup, the maple leaf duck round.

This year's judges included cookbook author and local culinary guru chef Fred Ming, Vernon Pemberton, chef and member of the Bermuda Chef Association and Leo Betschart also a chef and member of the Bermuda Chef Association.

Mr. Gomes began his maple leaf duck breast by first using a knife to score the duck breast skin side with a fine cross hatch pattern. This was also done by several other chefs.

Event MC John Pritchard of Cafe Coco explained that the scoring was to release the duck fat under the skin.

Once the duck fat was rendered there was little need to add more fat to grease the pan.

Mr. Gomes' recipe included a number of exotic ingredients including juniper berries, pine nuts and quince.

"I'll bet that's the first time many of you have every tried quince," said Mr. Pritchard, as the audience appreciatively gobbled down Mr. Gomes' dish. "It has been speculated that the apple in the Garden of Eden was actually quince," said Mr. Pritchard.

Interesting food facts are often sprinkled through out the competition patter.

For example, quince is in the rose family. It comes originally from Asia, possibly Northern Persia and eventually made its way to the Mediterranean.

The British historically used quince marmalade as an aphrodisiac.

Other chefs competing in the duck breast round were Mattias Rodrigues of the Pickled Onion Restaurant & Bar doing a duo of duck, smoked and glazed, Pitchacaren Mardaymoothoo of the Newport Room doing a roasted duck breast served on braised red cabbage and sweet potato mash with Szechuan ginger orange jus, and Tomasz Tabor of the Elbow Beach Hotel doing a tea scented duck breast, garlic mint jam, potato dauphine.

This was the fifth year for the Escoffier Cup which is designed to render Bermuda's best chef.

It is a competition that has a lot of prestige in the local culinary arts community.

Many local chefs and restaurant owners crowd the back of International Imports to cheer on their competing colleagues and friends. One of the nice things about the competition is the camaraderie between the chefs.

In previous years chefs have run out to retrieve a missing ingredient for a rival chef. Unfortunately, missing an ingredient can mean an automatic loss.

While in past years competition has been so fierce that there were actual tears when the winners were announced, this year the chefs were staying philosophical. "It was 3 of a point," said one chef shrugging.

The four chefs who won the preliminary rounds of the competition will go onto the finals to be held at the Gourmet Getaway weekend between February 28 and March 2.

Rahman (Rock) Harper, winner of the Fox TV series 'Hell's Kitchen', produced by Gordon Ramsay, will host the Escoffier Cup Finals and the Gourmet Getaway.

This is a head-to-head 'Iron Chef' style challenge in a specially designed dual kitchen (courtesy of Bermuda Gas, Viking Professional Equipment and Design Associates) at the Gourmet Getaway Viking Village.

Last year's winner was Terry Clark of the Seahorse Grill.

This event is extremely notable as 2008 will be the fifth time that a senior professional culinary competition with internationally recognised rules and standards has been held in Bermuda.

The overall winner of the Escoffier Cup will receive a trip to New York, and the chance to declare themselves 'Bermuda's top chef' for a year.

The goals of the competition are to continually raise the standards of culinary excellence and professionalism, promote camaraderie and educational opportunity among culinary professionals, and act as a staging area for chefs to research and develop new culinary concepts.

The first Bermuda Gourmet Getaway, then known as the Bermuda Culinary Arts Festival included a competition for Bermuda's young chefs.

The idea was to promote budding Bermudian talent.

Unfortunately, organisers of the Gourmet Getaway could not secure funding to continue this competition.

The preliminaries will be held at International Imports Demonstration Kitchen commencing at 6 p.m. on Thursday, January 24th and will continue every Thursday at 6 p.m. until February 14th.

This year's qualifying challenges are: January 31 Foley Fish Georges Banks Scallops, February 7, Hormel Pork Tenderloin and February 14 Certified Angus Beef Strip Loin Cook-off.

Tickets are \$75 each, with the entire proceeds going to Friends of Hospice and the Bermuda Culinary Development Fund.

Unfortunately, tickets sell out very quickly for the preliminary rounds of the Escoffier Cup, but they can be obtained at International Imports.

For more details on the 2008 Gourmet Getaway contact Michelle Halpin on 278-8895 or visit [www.bermudagourmetgetaway.bm](http://www.bermudagourmetgetaway.bm).

