

Third Time the Charm?

A veteran of three “culinary Olympics” envelops a successful attitude and pursues perfection for the upcoming competition in Erfurt.

by Kay Orde



Pamela, Ireland and Daniel Scannell

Daniel J. Scannell, CMC, has an ambitious goal. At the International Culinary Art Exhibition (IKA) that takes place in Erfurt, Germany, in October, he wants the six-person U.S. team to place first overall in the world and bring home gold medals in both hot cookery and cold food.

“We were pretty successful in 2000 and 2004,” says Scannell, executive chef at Carnegie Abbey Club in Portsmouth, R.I. “I want one last shot to win it all.”

In 2004, the team placed third in the world and won back its World Champion status in the realm of hot-food cookery, which the United States last won in 1988. The national team will be defending that title at this year’s IKA. ACF Culinary Team USA will also field two regional teams and a youth team in Erfurt.

Meet Daniel Scannell

Scannell, who is of Irish descent, is a family man. He and his wife Pamela have three children: Lydia, 15, Nicholas, 13 and Ireland, 5. Daniel, 23, and Sean, 20 are his children from a previous marriage. He’s grateful that his family understands his commitment to Team USA.

Relax!

It's a challenge for members of ACF Culinary Team USA to manage their lives as it relates to work, family and team in the months leading up to the IKA. Daniel Scannell says he's found a way to cope. "I just take it day to day. Pressing issues are attacked first, then, I do what I can."

And during downtime? He admits, "I'm always thinking about food."

But there is one diversion that's guaranteed to take his mind off the pressures of trying to meet the needs of family, work and team in too few hours. When he can take time away from these responsibilities, he spends it with Zeus Vom Eschenghagen, his Rottweiler.

"I show him in competition," Scannell says. "And he's a handful—my handful!"

"I couldn't do it without their support," he says. "I'm gone a lot, and they understand. I'm lucky to have their support, because it allows me to do this."

He says his children, with goals and dreams of their own, empathize with his drive to compete. And the older children got a bonus; they had the opportunity to see the team compete in Germany in 2000 and 2004. "That was a huge benefit for them," Scannell says.



This truffle-studded veal tenderloin, carrot raft and creamed spinach, Autumn vegetables and soufflé potatoes was one of the dishes that the national team created for the 2004 IKA.

He's been in the U.S. competition arena since 1998, when he earned a place on his first Culinary Team USA. But his interest in culinary competition began earlier, as a student at Johnson & Wales University in Providence, R.I.

"I was on a junior team at Johnson & Wales, and that's what started the whole thing," Scannell says. "When you get involved in competing, certain names and teams pop up, such as the 1988 and 1992 Olympic teams." He says several team members also made a big impression on him, including Charles Carroll, CEC, AAC; Alfonso Contrisciani, CMC, AAC; Keith Coughenour; Victor Gielisse, CMC, CHE, AAC; Hartmut Handke, CMC, AAC; Daniel Hugelier, CMC; Edward Leonard, CMC, AAC;

Ferdinand Metz, CMC, AAC, HOF; and L. Timothy Ryan, CMC, AAC. "I got inspiration from those guys, which also led to my applying for the CMC."

An educational experience

Scannell says after his first foray into U.S. team competition, "I just kept doing it. The team's history made such a big impression on me." This will be the third time he's competed in the culinary Olympics, and in addition to the thrill of the chase, there's another, more fundamental, reason for his dedication. "The education I've got from competing is unbelievable," Scannell says. "Being on one [culinary Olympic] team is equivalent to 10 years in the industry."

He says there's no doubt he's a better chef for being a Team USA member. One reason is that he's practicing and competing alongside like-minded chefs who are all extremely talented. "We constantly toss ideas around," he says. "And nothing is ever quite good enough."

“We really have to push ourselves to the limit, and we’re constantly experimenting. You just can’t compete on an international scale any other way.”

—Daniel Scannell, CMC

The process makes you think through the whole dish—authenticity, flavors, concepts.

“We really have to push ourselves to the limit, and we’re constantly experimenting. You just can’t compete on an international scale any other way. It’s a humbling experience. You get to see how little you know, because there is so much to learn. It keeps the ego in check.”

Mad scientists?

The ego thing is crucial. Chefs who can’t take criticism won’t win a place on the team. “We’re constantly critiquing each other’s food, and you have to be able to take that,” Scannell says.

In the real-world competition arena, he says, “Sometimes things turn out, and sometimes not. There is so much that can go wrong. To meet the international standard, you need an honest critique that will dissect

the individual components on the plate. In addition, we must incorporate different kinds of cooking, and show various techniques. We’re a bit like mad scientists—always looking for the unexpected, the ‘wow’ factor.”

The team meets and cooks together on an average of every six weeks. But every member spends considerable time on team projects and development in addition to group practices. Scannell says he’s fortunate that his position at Carnegie Abbey Club allows him to practice and to explore his particular focus on the team.

“I’m working on Category B—a vegetarian platter, three-course menu and four plated entrées,” he says. “I can do R&D here at the club, and our membership gives us feedback. The club’s membership and owners are really supportive. In addition, the chefs and cooks see me practicing, and they’re intrigued.”

High point

Scannell says the benefits of being a Team USA member are many, but he cites education, camaraderie and friendship, and

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international networking as the top perks. He says the opportunity to work with and compete against talented chefs is invaluable. “The people I’ve met will be my colleagues and friends all my life,” he says.

He’d also like to correct a misconception that many cooks and chefs might have about the team. “I think there’s a misunderstanding about what we do,” Scannell says. “There is so much to focus on, and everything has to be done to perfection. We’re dealing with real food, and the way we handle product has to be impeccable. There’s just so much involved in putting together a winning program.”

He says he’s also fortunate, after a lifetime of being in foodservice, to do what he loves as a living and to be on a team representing his country. “I’m extremely lucky to be involved in this process, representing cooks and chefs in the United States and ACF.”

And what does it mean to him to be a member of ACF Culinary Team USA? Scannell says, simply: “This is the pinnacle of my career.”

Zeus Vom Eschenghagen

