



Building a Team



Metz



Keogh

The applications are in for ACF Culinary Team USA, and the first tryouts for the national team take place early in 2010, with final tryouts scheduled for May. Once the team is selected, work begins in earnest for team members and their manager Steve Jilleba, CMC, CCE, AAC. But Team USA is a lot more than the sum of its members. Advisors and coaches play a vital part in its success.

Ferdinand Metz, CMC, WGMC, AAC, HOF, president emeritus of The Culinary Institute of America, Hyde Park, N.Y., and managing partner of the Master Chefs Institute, Beacon, N.Y., and Keith Keogh, CEC, AAC, owner, Total Food Network, and president/CEO ZATS Restaurants, Inc., New Orleans, have come on board as advisors. They are natural choices to advise a brand-new U.S. team, having managed five past teams between them—Metz in 1980, 1984 and 1988, and Keogh in 1992 and 1996.

Metz and Keogh will take their cues vis-à-vis their advisory role from Jilleba. “I believe that the manager must define the role he wants each advisor to play,” Metz says. “From my perspective, the advisors’ responsibility is to guide, encourage and assist whenever they can and whenever they are called on.”

Metz brings 20 years of affiliation with the U.S. team to his advisory role. During that time, he won three world championships in hot cuisine, two in the buffet category and one World Cup at the *Internationale Kochkunst Ausstellung (IKA)* in Germany. In addition to his years as team manager, he was a member of the 1968 national team, competed as an individual in 1972 and captained the 1976 team. He believes there have been inevitable changes in international culinary competition.

“Like in sports, the participants get better and are more dedicated and more sophisticated,” he says. “Many new countries have stepped up, and today the competition is tougher than ever before.”

Keogh says considerable change took place during the eight years he managed U.S. teams. “The greatest change was the implementation of tasting plates for the cold-food platters in a majority of the international competitions, as well as the introduction of the Asian Cold Food Guidelines that respected the fundamentals of that continent’s cuisine. Each four years brings innovation in glazing techniques, new vehicles for food presentation and new techniques for executing the hot-food requirements consistently at a high level with minimum time requirements. Flavor, authenticity, creativity and perfect execution are still the base for success, and that will not change.”

To that end, Metz says the team should produce honest food that is not engineered and targeted for competition only. “It has to be real food with great emphasis on taste above all other aspects,” he says.

Keogh hopes to see dishes that reflect America and its diverse cuisine base. “Countries continue to have pride in the uniqueness of their native cuisines, and place these dishes in the arena,” he says. “This makes the whole competitive experience richer, because you can observe these dishes and flavor combinations and take them back with you. Education continues to be the foundation of international competition, and is the reward for all the hours and sacrifice a team member contributes.”

And, hours and sacrifice there will be in abundance, a fact to which any seasoned team member will attest. So, in that spirit, and based on their vast competition experience, one of the most important attributes advisors can bring to a team is an idea of what to expect in the international arena.

“Look at your affiliation with the team as a learning experience,” Metz advises, “where reaching the destination is less important than the journey itself. It is really not only about medals and winning, but all about the personal and collective growth, which is the real reward.”

Keogh adds that mental preparation is as important, if not more important, than the technical training, especially in the early competitions. “You must believe in your heart and soul that you are the best in the world and champions before you can take a world championship away from anyone else.”