

# ACF CULINARY TEAM USA

## Playing to Win

By Faith Jennetta, CEPC

ACF Culinary Team USA chefs celebrated Thanksgiving this year by winning gold medals in hot food and cold food at the Villeroy & Boch Culinary World Cup in Luxembourg, Nov. 20-24. And, at the end of the day, the U.S. took third place overall in the national category out of 25 competing countries.

The timing of Team USA's first international culinary challenge was significant, considering that it was just a year ago that the team lost its endorsement and funding as ACF Culinary National Team USA. After a few months of reorganizing and new strategies, the team was back on track with limited resources. Nonetheless, team members would "play to win," adopting this as their motto, demonstrated by their level of commitment to their families, employers, team and being an American chef.

### WINNING GAME PLAN

Team management gathered a support network in the areas of finance, marketing, travel, logistics and coaching/advising to champion the team to success. Nine practices were scheduled to get the team ready in just five months, with eight hosted at Johnson & Wales University campuses throughout the country, and one at Elgin Community College, Elgin, Ill. The concept was to build a mutually beneficial relationship between team and school, to expose students to the team and plant seeds for the future.

The initial practice sessions focused on building team spirit, brainstorming concepts, planning a menu and creating a cold-platter design. As the concepts began to take shape,

team members were given assignments and coaches began to attend the practices to offer skill refinement and critiques. Industry experts were invited to share their beliefs of what American chefs should showcase to the world.

### LET THE GAMES BEGIN

An advance logistics team arrived in Luxembourg several days before the event to ensure that all was in place. When the team and remaining support personnel arrived, it was time to shop and begin preparations. Team members overcame language barriers and learned the differences in food products. Competing in a foreign country might be an exciting adventure, but it's also a serious exercise in problem-solving.

The team's first event was the hot-food kitchen. Food and supplies were shuttled to the exhibition center, where the team prepared a three-course meal for 110 guests with 6 hours of preparation and 3½ hours of service. It was a long, exhilarating day, and pure adrenaline pushed Team USA through the event without a break. They were playing to win.

After a few hours sleep, team members directed their focus to the cold-food presentation, driven by passion and dedication to keep working through the night. Early in the morning, they returned to the exhibition center to set up their displays. The table design by Marcos Cruz focused solely on the food and served as a clean, fresh backdrop, accomplished by presenting the food on risers covered with white spandex, which made the food appear to float. It was enhanced by an organic metal light sculpture that pinpointed light on the food.



ACF Culinary National Team USA celebrates its two gold medals and third place overall, left to right: Timothy Bucci, Timothy Prefontaine, Anthony "Ben" Grupe, Steven Jilleba, Joseph Leonardi, Mark Morgan, James "Kevin" Storm and Eddie Tancredi.

Representing your country in an international arena is a breath-holding, heart-pounding, hair-raising experience. It is a feeling that is both overwhelming and addicting, judging from the number of return competitors. At the awards ceremony, the team celebrated its gold medals and third-place standing in the world. Then, they enjoyed Thanksgiving dinner: a simple French meal of pâté, venison and fish. There was no turkey, but there was definitely family, a culinary family filled with gratitude for the win, their craft, support of family, new friends and the honor of being American chefs.

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