

Canada's golden boy of espresso

Vancouver favourite wins Canadian Barista Championship

BY VIDA RADVANOVIC

The air was highly charged and heavily scented with coffee as record crowds came to watch the “Iron Chef” of espresso competitions, the 2008 Canadian Barista Championship, hosted by Krups. Held for the first time in Montréal at the Canadian Coffee & Tea Show on October 21-22, the much anticipated contest for coffee professionals saw 14 of the nation's best baristas (espresso bartenders) battle for the coveted title of 2008 Canadian Barista Champion.

It was a tight race, but Canada's superstar barista, Sammy Piccolo of Vancouver's Caffè Artigiano, emerged the winner for the fourth time and will go on to represent Canada at the 2009 World Barista Championship in Atlanta, Georgia.

In competition, the baristas have 15 minutes to prepare four servings each of espresso, cappuccino and a signature drink of their own creation and present them to a panel of four sensory and two technical judges. The technical judges evaluate the technical aspects of the drink preparation delivery, and the sensory judges judge the quality of the drinks themselves. Competitors are judged on such categories as

Here are the final results of the Canadian Barista Championship:

1	Sammy Piccolo, Caffè Artigiano, Vancouver, BC	569.5 pts
2	Spencer Vieghweger, JJ Bean Coffee, Vancouver, BC	562.0 pts
3	Joel May, Fratello Coffee Company, Calgary, AB	555.5 pts
4	Chad Moss, Transcend Coffee, Edmonton, AB	551.5 pts
5	Phil Robertson, Phil & Sebastian Coffee, Calgary, AB	527.5 pts
6	Anthony Benda, Café Myriade, Montreal, QC	517.5 pts

complete with world champion latte art, but his signature drink impressed all with a well balanced combination of espresso, pear puree, rhubarb compote and blueberry cream. In the finals round, Piccolo scored 569.5 points, just ahead of his Vancouver rival, Spencer Vieghweger of JJ Bean Coffee, who scored 562.0 points.

The competitors put in hundreds of hours of practice and preparation to hone their espresso making skills. They also spent a great deal of time creating a signature drink where coffee becomes a culinary art. All of the challengers used their creativity for some spectacular dessert-like drinks using ingredients like dark chocolate, mint, spices and locally grown Saskatoon berries. There was even an Oreo cookie-themed drink. Fourth place finisher, Chad Moss of Transcend Coffee in Edmonton, had one of the most interesting signature drinks — a rosehip-dark chocolate-dipped sugar cone with warm lingonberry sauce topping the shot of espresso.

Awards, given to all competitors courtesy of the event sponsors, included espresso machines, grinders from Krups and trophies designed by tamber artisan Reg Barber. A special new award, handed out to the most congenial barista, as voted by all other baristas in the competition, went to Anthony Benda of the newly opened Montréal Café Myriade.

It was a great event this year, thanks to the sponsors Krups, Nuova Simonelli, Gerhards – Monin, Jet Smoothies, Oregon Chai Pacific Soy, Ghirardelli, Mahlkönig Canada and Reg Barber Enterprises – and many hard working volunteers.

For Piccolo and the other competitors, it is about being an ambassador for the industry and elevating the quality of specialty coffee and exhibiting a true passion for their craft. Good luck, Sammy!

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station cleanliness, espresso extraction time, presentation and taste. The judges also evaluate the baristas' performance, including their composure, their commentary expressing their knowledge of the beverage, and even their music.

All of the competitors, who were selected from four regional competitions, showed off their skills while working on Nuova Simonelli's Aurelia, the competition's official espresso machine, engaging the audience and creating some artful and flavourful coffee concoctions. In his winning performance, Piccolo had an excellent espresso and cappuccino