

The Boston Globe

Competitive cooking

By Devra First

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Tonight marks the premiere of "Top Chef Masters," Bravo's new spinoff of the hugely popular cooking competition "Top Chef." The twist: "Masters" features famous chefs instead of newbies. Six groups of four contestants face off; one goes on to the championship round, while three in each group must "pack their knives and go," as Padma would say. The prize: \$100,000 for the charity of the winner's choice. The first episode, airing at 10 p.m., features the only Boston contestant, chef Michael Schlow of Radius, Via Matta, et al. We spoke with him about his TV experience.



Michael Schlow, chef at Radius, Via Matta, and other restaurants, on Bravo's "Top Chef Masters." The show pits some of the best chefs against each other for charity.

Q. So, did you win?

A. I'm not allowed to say. You know that! You're not going to just ask me questions I can't answer, are you?

Q. OK, OK. Did you watch "Top Chef" before this?

A. I had seen the show, but being a chef I don't get to see a lot of television. They sent us 25 of the Quickfire Challenges. It's nerve-racking enough to watch on television once a week; these are not meant to be consumed 25 at a time. I sat up all night and watched all of them. I had a pit in my stomach.

Q. What did you do to prepare?

A. I brushed up on some formulas and some recipes. In a restaurant you make huge quantities of a product for a day. Here you're cooking for five. Ninety-nine percent of the things I brushed up on I didn't get to use.

Q. Whom did you compete against?

A. Hubert Keller of Fleur de Lys, Chris Lee of Aureole, and Tim Love of the Lonesome Dove in Texas. They're all really great chefs and all people I was friends with before the show. I didn't even know who I was going up against before I walked into the studio.

Q. Were you nervous?

A. Very. This is out of my control. When you go on "The Morning Show," you've got four minutes to cook a piece of fish and you're in control. This is filming over days and they want to make great television. One of the hardest parts, when you learn your challenge, it's split second. It's like me saying, "Devra, I'm coming over for dinner, what are you making me?"

Q. Uh, pasta.

A. But then you go to the cupboard and there's no pasta. That's what it's like.

Q. It must have been a bonding experience.

A. It reinforced my feeling that there's a bond between chefs. You're in a club, the culinary club. Because we cook, we are family to each other, and that bond was strengthened during the time we worked together.

Q. What charity did you compete for?

A. I was playing for something local to Boston. I did the Cam Neely Foundation. The charities represented throughout the show are each incredibly worthwhile. The chef community is an incredibly philanthropic one.

Q. Good causes aside, are you glad you did it?

A. It was fun. It was good. It was stressful. I look back on it really fondly. None of the chefs would say it was easy and that there wasn't an awkward moment, but it's OK to do things that make you uncomfortable. We're human. We're not supposed to have every moment be perfect in our lives. A little humility is OK for chefs.