



Jack's BLEND

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By the time you read this page, we're all back from Atlanta where the Specialty Coffee Association of America's (SCAA) 2009 Exposition took place and the new World Barista Champion was crowned. I offer my congratulations to Gwilym Davies, from the United Kingdom, who is now World Barista Competition (WBC) Champion and to Michael Phillips, from Chicago's Intelligentsia Coffee, who recently became the United States Barista Champion. What graceful moves. What passion for their product. What spectacular performances.

I have to note though that I am still amazed that Michael Phillips who did not win his regional barista competition still paid his own way to compete in Portland, Ore., at the United States Barista Competition (USBC) where he took first place. Now *that* shows one's belief in his own abilities at its best. (As a side note, Phillips' employer, Intelligentsia Coffee, pays the expenses for any employee who places in the top three finalist positions of the regional barista competition to compete at the USBC.)

You may be thinking, "What does that have to do with me?" I say it has everything to do with you.

What led Phillips, who less than four years ago was a budding home barista, to be the USBC Champion and a competitor in the WBC? What made a guy who lost his regional competition believe enough in his product and his abilities that he achieved more? It's his passion for his product and his ability to produce great results.

Now, of course, to win a barista competition it takes more than just passion, but passion is the fire that fuels everything else. If Phillips didn't have passion, he wouldn't have traveled on his own dime to Portland and he certainly wouldn't have impressed the judges so much and won the USBC. He definitely represented the United States well at the WBC.

Let me relate a story from my past experience. When I worked in the hotel industry, my boss was the executive head chef. He was a giant of a guy and ruled his kitchen with fear. He had no tolerance for people who were minorities, he had no real passion for his product and all he really cared about was the bottom line. He also had the best budget in the hotel ... a feat rarely, if ever, achieved in hotels by banquet kitchens. How did he do it? He did it by cheating his customers; substituting cheap products in place of quality ones, by reusing food from one catering event at the next catering event, and then the

next, and the next. It got so bad that his own staff would throw away food before he found it so he couldn't reuse it.

He had no passion. He didn't care about the quality of his product or how to inspire his staff or anything even resembling a great chef. And people knew it. Customers knew it, staff knew it and eventually it cost him his job.

I know that out of all the people reading this column, there are people in many different segments of the coffee business. There are people who own and operate their own store, people who manage a store, people who own a cart or kiosk and people who sell "stuff" to those in the coffee industry.

I also know there are people in this industry who are passionate for coffee, people who are passionate as business people and people who will tell you anything you want to hear as long as it gets them the sale. All of them need to make a sale to stay in business. But out of all of them, who is going to be around six months, a year, five years or 20 years from now? Long-term success is only possible when people have a passion for what they do and do it well.

So, congratulations to Michael Phillips for being a passionate coffee person, on winning the USBC and for his passionate competing spirit in the WBC. He is a credit to the coffee business, a credit to those who believe in something and a person I applaud and thank for being in our great coffee industry.

On another note, I know that many of you may be busier working the floor and keeping costs down, but keep sending more of your questions, comments or subjects of interest to me. No subject is out of bounds (well, almost no subject).

