

## WINNING CHEF ON COURSE FOR DOUBLE IN NATIONAL CULINARY CONTEST

Immediate: November 1, 2005



Talented chef Stephen Duffy is on course for a notable National Chef of Wales double next February after winning the competition's North Wales regional final yesterday (Monday).

Duffy, 33, head chef at St Tudno Hotel, Llandudno, won the National Junior Chef of Wales title 12 years ago and is now just one step away from adding the senior crown to his list of honours, after finishing in third place in 2002.

In the tightest of finishes to the regional final at Coleg Llandrillo, Rhos on Sea, he beat his friend Gareth Dwyer, 26-year-old head chef at the Castle Hotel, Conwy, into second place by just two points.

The chefs will have to do it all over again in the National Chef of Wales Final at Coleg Llandrillo on February 21 next year, as Dwyer has qualified as one of the two highest scoring runners up. The other finalist are South Wales regional winner Nicholas Evans, 32, from the Celtic Manor Resort, Coldra Woods, Newport and runner up Ross Williams, 32-year-old head chef of La Marine Restaurant, Penarth.

Apart from securing the title of the best chef in Wales, the national champion will be invited to join the Welsh National Culinary Team for the prestigious Culinary World Cup 2006 in Luxembourg and collect a cash prize of £500. He will also recreate his winning menu for 120 guests at a presentation dinner at Coleg Llandrillo on April 5.

The biannual National Chef of Wales contest is organised by the Welsh Culinary Association and jointly sponsored by the Welsh Development Agency and Hybu Cig Cymru / Meat Promotion Wales.

The chefs were challenged to cook their own creative menu for a three-course dinner for four using either Welsh Lamb or Welsh Beef and at least three True Taste winners' products.

Duffy chose a starter of seared fillet of sea bass with a leek and mustard crumble, smoked bacon, shallot sauce and bacon wafer followed by a main course of roast rump of Welsh Lamb, mint and braised lamb pudding, roasted kidney, creamed cabbage and oatmeal galette potato and aged balsamic reduction. His dessert was puff pastry tartlet with rice pudding, glazed banana, Welsh honey ice cream and banana crème fraiche.

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Chairman of judges, Graham Tinsley, manager of the Welsh National Culinary Team, praised the high standard achieved by both chefs, revealing that just two points had separated them.

“It was such a good competition and there was very little to choose between them, but there had to be a winner and Steve just edged it,” he said.

The national finalists face an exacting black box challenge, whereby they are presented with a box of ingredients on the day of the competition. “They won’t be able to practice any dishes because they won’t know what the ingredients are until the day of the final,” said Mr Tinsley. “It’s the ultimate challenge to find out who the best cook is.”

Duffy said he was overwhelmed to win the North Wales final. “Whoever goes up against Gareth has got their work cut out because he’s a good chef and he’s got youth on his side, but I was very pleased to come through on the day,” he added.

“Everything went well, although I had to rush my dessert a little bit. I have been experimenting lately with putting meat and fish together and I thought my starter of smoked bacon with sea bass worked well. It was also a good time of the year for the lamb pudding in the main course.”



**Runner up Gareth Dwyer who goes through to the national final in February.**

Looking forward to black box final, he said: “Everyone will be in the same boat. No matter how much you practice it’s all down to who performs on the day.”

Dwyer, a National Junior Chef of Wales winner and runner up to Dermott Slade in the senior contest in 2004, served up a starter of pan-seared fillet of mackerel topped with a smoked mackerel rilette sat upon a savoury drop scone with a warm pickled mussel and vegetable dressing.

His main course was loin of Welsh Lamb wrapped in a leek and potato rosti, with braised root vegetable, steamed bacon and kidney pudding, creamed cabbage, roast shallots, bacon crisp and red currant jus. Dessert was a dark chocolate tart with pistachio beignets and a lime and tequila sorbet.

The panel of judges included Mr Tinsley, chef partner of the Castle Hotel, Conwy and Nant Hall, Prestatyn, Wayne Roberts, chef partner of the Waterfront Restaurant, Trearddur Bay, Toby Beevers, sales support manager for Woodward Foodservice, Flint and Arwyn Watkins, managing director of Cambrian Training Company, Welshpool.

**Ends**

**For more information please contact Peter Jackson, Welsh Culinary Association chairman, on 01766 780 200 or Duncan Foulkes, public relations consultant, on 01686 650818.**