

he Nestle Golden Hat competition for me has been a massive learning curve through my apprenticeship, one I was very proud to be a part of.

As a 1st year apprentice in 2007, I have had the privilege to cook with a 4th year apprentice, Sam Monks, who competed in the competition himself. This was a fantastic opportunity for me to learn from Sam and to get an insight into the competition.

Experiencing the competition opened my eyes to where the hospitality industry could take me and from there I started training myself to gain more knowledge about food and cooking.

The following year Shane Middleton and I entered the Nestle Golden Hat for 2008. We were very happy with the standard of our dishes and achieved the Bronze metal overall. It was an amazing feeling competing in the competition because we were competing against junior chefs up to the age of 23 with a wider range of knowledge and skills.

So further and further we push ourselves to excel and refine our dishes and kitchen operation to the best of our ability. Knowing that 2009 was the last year of our apprenticeship, we wanted to push ourselves to win this year.

The day of the competition came and the score board for 2009 was at a good level with the scores being very close. The scores were announced and we finally did it and made it through to the finals for Nestle Chefs Golden Hat Competition.

The next day we started our preparation for the finals. Again we wanted to refine all the key components to the dishes, practice recipes and cooking methods to improve the dishes ready for the Sydney finals.

Once we arrived in Sydney and met the array of talented individuals over Australia, the nerves started to set in. However once the mystery box of ingredients was revealed we started to get excited and our confidence started building.

We were very happy with the ingredients given. The protein of lamb loin bone in, beef skirt, spitchcock and barramundi were a challenge and a good learning curve as we hadn't experienced cooking with these protein types very frequently.

After finishing writing the menu it was back to the room to finish off the flow plans and ingredients list. After completing this we were all set for the following day

Excitement was in the air the next day and competition was set ready to go. We selected our ingredients during the one hour of set up time and once we started it was awesome. Our menu was quite simple, yet clear with crisp flavours which meant we could show our skills without putting ourselves under immense pressure.

With everything going according to plan the three courses were sent out in time. It was a great feeling knowing that we had finished the dishes and achieved what we wanted to on the plate. The waiting game now began and we wouldn't find out who had won until the presentations at the dinner the following night.

Emotions were running wild at the dinner. Butterfly's, nerves and excitement it was crazy. The medals for individuals were called out first so we knew what everyone had scored. Because of this we felt it could go either way which made us even more nervous.

Then the best thing happened our names were called out for the over all winners. We just couldn't believe it. It really was the most intense one minute of my life when we were waiting for Peter Wright to call out the final decision. Once our names were called out all our emotions were let out and we had the opportunity to thank the people who helped us reach our goal, these were Claire Lewis, Pierre Truffet, Nathan Mc Murdo, David Smith, Pete De Pino, Patrick O'Brien, and Peter Tischausser and Nestle.

It's been a roller coaster of mixed emotions over the years during this competition, one I will never forget. I would like to thank the competition and everyone involved in it as I wouldn't be where I am in my career today without it.

Cameron Wetton

Nestle gold hat winner

Apprentice at Joondalup resort hotel W.A