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barista at large...

Three reports from PT's Coffee Co. Barista Jam held in Topeka, Kansas, November 20-21, 2004

Photos courtesy of Jeff Taylor

Holly Bastin

PT's Coffee Co.

Overland Park, KS

I first met Tim Wendelboe at my store just a few days ago. It was about 8 a.m., and I don't tend to wake up entirely until about 10 a.m., coffee or not. I knew Jeff Taylor was bringing Tim in that morning, but in the midst of the a.m. rush of customers and my lack of caffeine, I hadn't mentally prepared to be in the presence of the World Barista Champion. We were introduced and we shook hands but, while honored, I was still thinking about what coffees needed to be rebrewed and which milks needed to be restocked. Jeff invited him to come behind the counter and we made drinks together. He poured the shots and I steamed the milk. I'd tell him how many shots to pour at a time for each drink because our system was different than his is in Norway. At this time, it just felt like two baristas working together as a team in the midst of a normal rush. When it was over he told me he was going to sit down and I went back to my normal duties.

Kim Lovelady

Annedor's Fine
Chocolates

Kansas City, MO

Two months ago when Jeff Taylor from PT's Coffee in Topeka, Kan., told me that he was bringing in Tim Wendelboe, the 2004 WBC Champion for a Barista Jam, I begged, pleaded, bribed with anything I could to get him to allow me to participate in this once-in-a-lifetime event. Never ever would I have thought that I, a small-time barista, would ever get the opportunity to meet one of the Greats. When I received the email invitation, my laptop fell off my lap, the cat went flying and the dog started barking (assuming there must have been an intruder since I was screaming so loudly). I thanked Jeff profusely and cleared my schedule for the weekend of November 20, 2004.

One of the first stops of Tim's visit was at Aaron Duckworth's Espresso dell'Anatra in Kansas City, Missouri. It was Thursday and I got off work at 10:30 a.m. because I have a class at 11 am (ah well, normally I have class). I headed straight to Aaron's, having to calm myself during the drive so that I would not kill

Sandy Hon

Java Jazz at Johnson
County Community College

Overland Park, KS

I was fortunate enough to spend the weekend (November 20-21, 2004) hanging out with the PT's Coffee Co. crew in Topeka, Kan., and none other than the reigning World Barista Champ, Norway's Tim Wendelboe. What an amazing weekend!

FRIDAY NIGHT

After a long, tortuous day at work on Friday, Kim Lovelady and I headed out to Lawrence, Kan., for dinner and drinks with the crew. As we were trying to find a parking space, what did we see but a fancy stretch limousine full of baristas and a beaming Jeff Taylor pulling up to the Free State Brewery?

Now mind you, I've seen pictures of Tim Wendelboe, so I recognized him immediately when he climbed out of the limo. Besides Tim, our group consisted of Jeff, Holly Bastin, Aaron Duckworth, Heather Perry, and her dad, Mike, and a few other folks whose names unfortunately I can't remember.

Dinner was great. I sat next



About 10 minutes later it finally hit me: I just made drinks with Tim-freaking-Wendelboe, current World Barista Champion. I turned to my coworker, Brian, and shared my epiphany. "Yeah," he said, adding jokingly, "you just realized that?" I later sent a message to Sandy Hon through our mutual repair guy to tell of this privilege -- and to get her goat.

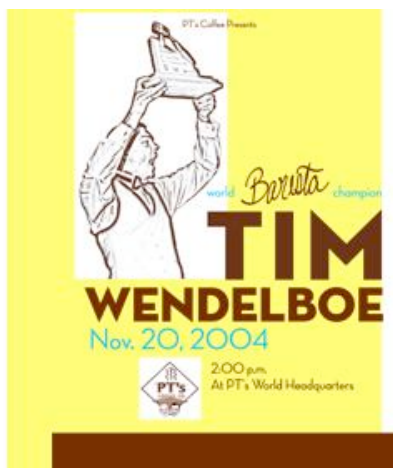
As far as the rest of the weekend went, I learned so much about being a better barista and a better judge in competition. Tim showed me his leveling technique and corrected the way I tapped my portafilter. He was very straightforward and affirming at the same time when working with everyone. He encouraged us all to just try different methods and taste the difference.

We were shown that while there are several wrong ways to prepare espresso, there is no definitive correct way. Each blend is different and designed to be pulled using certain methods. He has his preferences but he never claimed to have the only solution.

Towards the end of the event, we had a mock competition at our warehouse made up of five competitors (including Heather Perry, who also discussed her preferences amongst the group). Tim and I were sensory judges together. Seeing how he judged helped give me more perspective. While we probably had more fun than we should've as judges (due to the familiarity amongst the group) we still managed to judge fairly and took the time to talk to each competitor about what they could improve within their routine, what was horrible, and, of course, what was good. It all came back to trying methods based on taste, and perfecting presentation, cleanliness,

myself or others with my exuberant driving. When I got to Espresso dell' Anatra, I took a deep breath and said to myself, 'OK, play it coooooool. No big thing.' Of course, internally the butterflies were ready for flight.

What I found inside was a regular guy just wanting to make great espresso and pass his knowledge on to others. We sat around, talked, had pizza, and then the time came for Tim to get on the machine. Wouldn't you know that as soon as he got behind the bar, two customers ordered 20-ounce white chocolate mochas, one with raspberry the other with cherry? I don't think I ever saw a greater look of confusion on a man's face than Tim's expression upon receiving the order. After Aaron and I stopped laughing hysterically, Aaron instructed Tim on the building of a white chocolate mocha. Interesting, to say the least! After a few hours of play, Jeff and Tim left for their visit to Latte Land located in Kansas City's Plaza area.



My duties as a Barista at Annedore's Fine Chocolates on Friday morning left me out of the training session in Topeka at PT's World Headquarters. But I hooked back up with the crew on Friday night. Sandy Hon and I went into Lawrence, Kan., for dinner at the Free State Brewery with Holly, Pete, Heather, (all from PT's), Jeff, Tim, Aaron, and Heather and Mike Perry. We were joined by Andrew Hetzl. The dinner was great, the company was better. Being

to Heather, and she just talked and talked. One of the things I love about Heather is that she can laugh at herself. The girl is definitely smart and has a good head on her shoulders.

After dinner, we headed out on foot to a cafe called Henry's. On the way, we laughed and joked and decided to stop in front of this unknown café with a large window and watch the barista in action. Kim and I were pretty convinced that the girl had eyes for Tim.

Though most of the espresso machine was hidden under counter stuff, we did see her pull the portafilter from the group and proceed to wipe out the basket. We cheered and clapped loudly, then continued on our journey to Henry's café. The café has a bar upstairs and a café downstairs. Everyone was drinking; I've got lots of pictures to prove it! Kim and I were even allowed to step behind the bar and pull shots.

SATURDAY MORNING

It seemed like the PT's warehouse was buzzing with media, cameras, and lots and lots of people even before the sun came up. Tim and Heather each gave speeches, Heather explaining the pure fun and joy of competing and Tim running through his specialty drink, Tiramisu, using his single origin from Australia, 'Mountain Top'.

I learned something about Tim Wendelboe, and that was that he is a completely normal guy and also a complete crackup. He was so funny during his presentation. At one point, he was whisking ingredients in a metal bowl and gave the audience a hilarious 'Mad Italian Chef' look. The people ate his routine up.

I learned, too, that this is what it means to show passion during your performance. Not necessarily showing the Mad Italian Chef expression, but working with bravado and pride like the chefs on the Food Network goes a long way. The stars of each show exude passion in their preparations, explaining each step as they prepare a wonderful meal or entrée.

After Tim's and Heather's presentations, we were all allowed to jam on the

organization, and just aptly demonstrating how much you love what you're doing.



When I had to leave, I was a little sad because we learned a lot and had such an awesome opportunity to be total coffee geeks for a few days--I had Tim sign my tamper. I left the event with a hug from Tim, who is not only a stellar barista and colleague, but now a friend. It was an amazing time of sharing those precious trade secrets and above all, furthering our love and skill of the craft.

machines and get to know one another. Of course, Kim and I stuck by Tim's side like bees on honey, or something like that. He showed us his dosing, leveling and tamping techniques, which were very unique and yet uniform: He points his finger and thumb like a gun and goes around the portafilter after dosing. Then, using his forefinger, he slides the grinds in the portafilter forward and then backward with practically no waste. His tamp is a bit different, too. He rests the ball of the portafilter, not the spouts on the counter and leans into his tamp. He underdosed and his pucks were soft, yet his shots were just simply amazing.



SATURDAY NIGHT

We ended the day hanging out at Jeff Taylor's house where he wined and dined us all. He was such a great host.

Holly came up with this great game called the 'Barista Fear Factor.' Oh, it was bad, but I was desperate to win my very own Barista Action Figure, which was the grand prize. We had to drink from three different cups and each cup included shots pulled at 120 seconds pulled two days ago; normal shots pulled four days ago; and second-run shots using the same grounds, pulled three days before.

In summary, I'd like to say that the weekend was fantastic. I can't express enough the camaraderie amongst the attending baristas at this event. We shared ideas, techniques and common frustrations. We've learned so much from each other; I can only shed



Thank you, Jeff, for providing us with an unparalleled experience. And thank you, Tim for giving up your time to help us.

a tear of complete
admiration for my fellow
craftsmen.

Jeff Taylor was so gracious
to allow us to share in this
experience and I appreciate
him as a professional and as
a friend now more than ever
before. He's a great guy and
I must say, if I didn't love
my own job as much as I
do, I'd be gunning for a job
at PT's.

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