



DALE HARRIS

The winner of the 2017 UK Barista Championship reveals why competitions are important and his preparations for the world final

Q Tell us about your experience in barista competitions.

When I first competed in 2009 my coffee knowledge and exposure was limited – I don't think I'd tasted a single-origin espresso. It was about achieving a technical proficiency against a scoresheet, and a little playing with ingredients and performance.

Q How did you prepare for this year's UK Barista Championship?

The secret to doing well at these events is having a team that's willing to give up their time to taste, watch and give feedback. You have to try to learn from each mistake.

Q You talk about temperature during your routine...

The relationship between temperature and taste is interesting. Mammals evolved to perceive flavours best at body temperature, so every degree a drink moves away from that masks or accentuates certain attributes.

Q Tell us about the Pacamara varietal and petit coffee you're using for the World Barista Championship (WBC).

Finca Limoncillo's Yellow Pacamara has floral and citrus notes with additional depth and body. Petits are the beans that fall

below a certain sizing grade – they are usually discarded or blended, but Steve (Leighton, of Has Bean) had them bagged as a separate lot. Sometimes there are diamonds where we least expect them.

Q What are you looking forward to about competing in the WBC?

While I intend to serve the best coffee I can, I'm also going to enjoy each moment, from the prep work we're doing now to drinking coffee in a nice cafe in a part of the world I might otherwise never have visited.

Q Why are barista competitions relevant to the industry?

The industry reflects trends highlighted or refined on these stages, and competitions offer our social group opportunities to be together, share reference points and challenge assumptions. Some veterans get bored of the format, but it's exciting when that structure is pushed to breaking point.

Q Any advice for baristas thinking of competing for the first time?

Sign up! You'll learn things about coffee and yourself that will come in useful in ways you can't predict. You'll make new friends who care about coffee, too.

Dale Harris, the UKBC 2017 winner and director of wholesale at Has Bean, will be competing at the Cafe Show, Seoul, 9-12 November worldbaristachampionship.org. This year's UKBC finals were part of the SCA UK hosted by EspressoFest (scauk.com)