



Knives at Dawn: America's Quest for Culinary Glory at the Legendary Bocuse d'Or Competition

Andrew Friedman

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Sizzling sauté pans. Screaming spectators. Television cameras. A ticking clock.

Fasten your seatbelt for the Bocuse d'Or, the world's most challenging and prestigious cooking competition, where the pressure and the stakes could not be higher. At this real-life *Top Chef*, twenty-four culinary teams, each representing its home nation, cook for five and a half grueling hours. There are no elimination rounds, no time to ease into the rigors of competition. The teams have just one precious chance to cook and present two spectacular platters of food, then plate them for tasting by a jury of chefs -- the ultimate test of their ability to execute their craft, with prize money, international acclaim, and national pride on the line.

Surprisingly, although American cuisine now rates among the best in the world, a U.S. team has never finished among the top three at this "Olympics of Food." In 2008, a triumvirate of culinary figures -- Daniel Boulud, Thomas Keller, and Jérôme Bocuse -- raised unprecedented support and awareness for the American effort. This is their story, and the story of the team that competed for the United States at the 2009 Bocuse d'Or -- what they did, how they did it, and what they learned.

Knives at Dawn chronicles the formation and training of the 2009 American team. Chef Timothy Hollingsworth and his assistant, or commis, Adina Guest, both from The French Laundry in Yountville, California, are the stars of this chefs-as-athletes story. After winning a national team selection event, the pair trained in a specially outfitted facility, while twenty-three competitors -- including a Norwegian who'd been hell-bent to win the Bocuse d'Or since the age of twelve -- rehearsed around the globe. The days of the competition, when they all come together in an arena in Lyon, France, are recounted in riveting detail -- putting you right alongside the action -- as the months of toil and aspiration come to a head in the final hours of fierce cooking, when technical and mental fortitude, split-second decision-making, or a few too many seconds of heat can make all the difference in the world.

Beyond the American team itself, unparalleled behind-the-scenes access allows sports journalist and food writer Andrew Friedman to paint intimate portraits of Boulud and Keller, two of the most influential culinary figures of their generation, as well as of French icon Paul Bocuse, who created the competition more than two decades ago. With its revealing look at chefs and cooks of different generations and nationalities, *Knives at Dawn* delivers fascinating insights into what drives chefs to cook and compete, both in the Bocuse d'Or and in their own kitchens every day.

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