

Best Bites Blog

Daily dispatches on the Washington, DC area's food, restaurant and dining scene.

It's Iron Chef, DC-Style! The Best and Worst Moments of the Capitol Food Fight



By Sara Levine , Erin Zimmer

Ten chefs. One stage. One cause. The third annual Capitol Food Fight, a fundraiser for DC Central Kitchen, held last night at the Reagan Building, pitted local chefs against each other in an *Iron Chef*-style cooking battle, complete with secret ingredients. In the end, after a feisty final round featuring the obscure vegetable romanesco--a pale green cousin of cauliflower--two-year reigning champ **Ris Lacoste**, formerly of 1789, handed over her crown to Bebo Trattoria's **Roberto Donna**, who's incidentally the only DC toque to win the actual *Iron Chef*.

Throughout the show, attendees sampled bite-sized nibbles from 40 restaurants (among the stand-outs: Maestro's fried, stuffed olives with celery root foam, and Hank's Oyster Bar's oyster shooters). The event was snazzy, but not in a ball gown-sorta way.

Here are some more of the evening's highs (and lows) :



Most Animated Emcee

Though Food Network personality **Marc Silverstein** had his moments, limelight-loving chef/restaurateur/Spanish TV host **Jose Andres** was like a hyped-out kid who forgot his Ritalin. "What's *that*?"... "What's your wife like at home?" He stuck his microphone into every face and loved taking jabs at guest judges **Anthony Bourdain** and **Kojo Nnamdi**.

Jose Andres (right) and Marc Silverstein shared the stage as emcees, but Silverstein could only get a few words in edgewise.

Biggest Regional Rivalry

Spanish blooded-Jose Andres against Italian stallion Roberto Donna. When Donna was dealt a secret ingredient of Spanish goat cheese, he got major ribbing from Andres. "It's not Parmesan—what will you do?" By the end, Donna got him back. "You're a traitor, just like all the Spanish," he joked.



Boston chef and resident hottie Ken Oringer.

Hottest Non-Washington Face on Stage

Boston's tan, shaggy-haired **Ken Oringer**. He was Lacoste's sous chef in the final round, and talk about eye candy. A James Beard award winner for "Best Chef in the Northeast," his four-star rated Clio earned high marks from Andres. "Go to Clio restaurant and your life will change forever!" He even leaned into Oringer and called him the "nicest looking chef on the east coast." Man crush?



Anthony Chittum played sous chef on Roberto Donna's team.

Best Ear Accessory

Notti Bianche chef **Anthony Chittum** and his huge earlobe gauges. He's had them for seven years, dating back to before his chef career. Anthony Bourdain's comparatively understated left earring was a close second.



Minibar's Katsuya Fukushima tells a guest how to eat his cotton candy-wrapped foie gras--in one bite.

Most Fun Food Trend

Carnival fare. Minibar chef **Katsuya Fukushima** looked positively giddy twirling sticks of cotton-candy-wrapped foie gras. Upstairs, Agraria's **Ricky Moore** handed out boxes of lobster-butter-infused popcorn topped with citrus-flavored lobster chunks. Moore said he'd like to toy with funnel cakes and savory Cracker Jacks.

Grocery Store With the Finest Showing

Wegmans. The sponsor served high-class sakes, sushi and seaweed in a side room. And their raw fish supply never ran out, unlike at the Kaz Sushi Bistro table.

Best Use of Foie Gras

Tallula's Foie Gras Mousse with blueberry compote. Simple and luscious, it was Maestro's sous chef **Stefano Frigerio's** favorite too.

Food Stand With the Longest Lines

No, it wasn't 1789 or Charlie Palmer Steak. It was the umbrella-shaded Good Humor Ice Cream cart, manned by longtime owner **Mitch Berliner**. Apparently, Berliner used to visit **Jean-Louis Palladin** at his restaurant in the Watergate Hotel, where Palladin, slaving over some culinary masterpiece, would beg for him for a Klondike bar or packaged chocolate eclair.



Food Personality Who Needs to Eat Something

Culinary bad boy **Anthony Bourdain**, there as a judge, looked about a size two. Maybe even thinner than *Food and Wine* Editor **Dana Cowin** or Food Network twig **Giada di Laurentiis**.

Professional foodie rebel
Anthony Bourdain needs to eat
more cobra hearts.



2006 Capital Food Fight
champion Roberto Donna,
after his victory.

Most Fitting Nickname

Bourdain kept referring to Robert Donna as "the sweaty dude." Dripping the entire night, this might have actually been Donna's secret ingredient. The emcees kept asking, "how's the *shvitzing* going, Roberto?"

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