

On the WORLD Stage

JAMES OLBERG AIMS TO PROVE CANADA'S CULINARY PROWESS AT BOCUSE D'OR 2017

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With less than six months left of a two-year preparation period, James Olberg is taking a break from his position as executive chef at Vancouver's Coast restaurant to focus on preparing for Bocuse d'Or 2017, which will take place in Lyon, France next January. In order to make it to the global competition, he has already competed and triumphed at a Canadian selection competition, as well as a regional qualifying round. A former member of Culinary Team Canada, Olberg says he was drawn to culinary competitions early on in his career as a way to challenge himself. As a chef with "old-school" training, Olberg dedicated himself to studying modern cuisine in preparation for January's competition, a process he describes as being similar to studying fashion. "Bocuse d'Or is so unique and so innovative in a lot of ways, so I have to keep abreast of things," he explains. As the competition nears, Olberg and his three-man support team — which includes Canada's next Bocuse d'Or candidate Trevor Ritchie — are focused on ironing out the little details while they await the announcement of this year's required proteins.

F&H: As Canadians, we don't put as much emphasis on this competition as other countries do, how does that affect you as a competitor?

James Olberg: Unfortunately, Bocuse d'Or has not been embraced enough in this country. This is a world cup competition — we're representing Canada against the top 24 countries in the world — and people don't know about it. [In terms of support,] we are at a monster disad-

vantage, there is no doubt about it. We have some things to work on and part of what I have to do when I leave Bocuse d'Or is help the next candidate raising funds and awareness.

F&H: What expenses are involved in participating in Bocuse d'Or and how do you raise funds?

JO: The biggest expense is getting there. It's flights, hotel rooms, expenses in France, food products [for the competition], packing and shipping [of equipment]. We also have to pay for all of our practices and associated travel expenses...Our team manager [Cornelia Volino] is responsible for raising funds and the logistics for Bocuse d'Or. It's really up to us as

a team to raise funds. We've done three [fundraisers] so far and we will likely do eight or nine more. We do things like dinners and silent auctions with sponsors and other chefs.

F&H: What advice do you have for chefs interested in culinary competitions?

JO: The gold shouldn't be the goal. The goal should be to get as good as you can so that someday you can help someone else, or look back and say I really pushed myself. It's about getting up in the morning, falling down and still getting up the next morning to try it again...It's the journey and the experiences that make you a better person and hopefully a better chef.

F&H: What do you consider your career's greatest accomplishment?

JO: Trevor Ritchie...He's grown up to be an amazing man. I'm very proud of him as a person and a chef and now he's the next Bocuse d'Or candidate and I'm very proud of that. I know that I played some part in that — not a lot, but a little bit — and it makes me feel good; I have affected the next generation in a positive way.