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**GOING FOR GOLD:** Grace Pineda and David Wong (pictured second row, second frame) served Canada well at the 2009 Bocuse d'Or.



## CANADA'S BID FOR BOCUSE

*David Wong finishes ninth, commis Grace Pineda named world's best apprentice*

BY CINDA  
CHAVICH

Inside the row of bright white kitchens lining the stadium it was organized chaos, a dozen chefs scrambling to cook the meal of their lives in five short hours. Outside was a chaos of a different kind, with thousands of fans stomping and shouting in support of those in the pressure cooker below. And then there were the high-powered judges, a collection of 24 of the best star chefs in the world, plus the eponymous figurehead of this world-renowned cooking contest, the star of star chefs, Paul Bocuse himself.

The biennial Bocuse d'Or in Lyon, France, is regarded as the most prestigious culinary competition in chefdom. And while Canadian candidate David Wong failed in his bid to bring home the trophy, finishing ninth, his young commis, Grace Pineda, was named the best apprentice in the world, a testament to Wong's gifts as a chef, teacher and mentor.

"It's not the place we wanted to be, but we felt good in our effort," said the 37-year-old chef instructor of The Art Institute of Vancouver, after Norway, Sweden and France took the top three spots and €45,000 in prize money. "The level of competition here is simply unsurpassed, and to be recognized by a panel of the world's

greatest chefs makes this the proudest moment of my career."

Only 24 of the 54 countries vying for the prize won a spot in the two-day competition that unfolded live, before screaming spectators this past January. Canada has qualified every year since the first event in 1987. It's a demanding contest for any country, but after two-years of practice and careful preparation, the Canadian team was plagued with a litany of small snags.

Arriving nine hours late due to airline delays, a dozen large boxes of carefully selected perishable foods had to be stored on hotel balconies. The support team also struggled to replace Canadian sous-vide thermal circulators, heat lamps, blenders and other electrical equipment with European models compatible with local power sources, but the team lost juice during the event when transformers failed. "I was really hoping for top five, but we had to call for an electrician four times today," said team coach Robert Allen Sulatycky. "That really slowed them down."

Despite a US\$500,000-plus budget, and predictions that an American would finally reach the Bocuse d'Or podium, Timothy Hollingsworth finished sixth. There was much media attention

focused on Hollingsworth, sous chef at the famed French Laundry in Napa Valley. Bocuse made a personal visit to the American team's dedicated practice kitchen in Napa, along with Lyon-born chef Daniel Boulud. The U.S. team then spent two weeks practising at Bocuse's restaurant and culinary college in Lyon. Hollingsworth's boss and mentor, Thomas Keller, was the U.S. member of the judging panel and Boulud was honorary president of the 2009 event, sitting at the right hand of Bocuse as the platters circulated past the judges.

Still, Canada made a splash at the 2009 Bocuse d'Or. Not only did Pineda, 22, take home the prize for best commis, she caught the eye of many top chefs. The Vancouver cook will spend a month-long stage at Joël Robuchon's two Michelin-star restaurant, L'Atelier, in Paris, then return to the Lyon area to work with Anne-Sophie Pic, France's only three-star female chef.

And when announcers at the splashy event, beamed live via satellite feed to 72 countries around the world, pulled on shiny red "Wong '09" hockey jerseys, it was definitely a proud moment for Canada. ●