

# Memphis BBQ Network



New Team Judging Handout

## **INTRODUCTION**

This manual is to be a guide to assist cooking teams at contests sanctioned by Memphis Barbecue Network LLC, Inc. It includes information given to judges that attend the judging training seminar, requirements of contest organizers, and rules and recommendations from the Memphis Barbecue Network.

It is not intended to provide the definitive answers to all situations that could arise during a contest.

If you need more specific information on the rules and/or requirements of a particular contest, please contact the organizer and/or the MBN Representatives. If you need specific information not covered in this manual, feel free to contact us [WWW.MBNBBQ.COM](http://WWW.MBNBBQ.COM)

Thank you for your contribution to competition barbecue and to the Memphis Barbecue Network.

## **THE BASICS OF ALL MBN CONTESTS**

Sanctioned contests can offer one or more of three official pork categories: Whole Hog, Pork Shoulder, and Pork Ribs. At the majority of MBN contests all three categories are offered and teams may enter as many or as few categories as they wish. Some contests limit the number of categories you may enter simply because of the size of the event. Each contest supplies the teams with a list of rules for that particular contest; the rules required by the Memphis Barbecue Network in addition to any local requirements.

Contests are required to include in their team application the order and time of judging and this cannot be changed once it is published. Teams should be sure to know what the order and times are before they begin cooking.

The contests will usually provide only a regulation space for teams to set up and cook in the event. Teams are required to provide all of their own assistants, utensils, meat, sauce, charcoal, wood, cookers, tents, tables, chairs, dinnerware, and/or anything else they may need to compete and serve their entries.

Some contests have electricity, water, ice and other amenities on site. Some have nothing available. The entry form should mention anything the contest has to offer in addition to the space. **If you have a question please contact the contest organizer.**

## **Meat Category Definitions and suggested amounts**

### **Whole Hog**

is an entire hog, whose dressed weight is 85 pounds or more prior to the optional removal of the head, feet and skin, and which must be cooked as one complete unit on one grill surface. No portion or portions of the whole hog may be separated or removed, and subsequently returned to the grill, prior to or during the cooking process.

1 whole hog is sufficient per contest

### **Pork Shoulder**

is the portion of the hog containing the arm bone, shank bone, and a portion of the blade bone. The pork ham considered to be a shoulder entry if it contains the leg bone. Boston butts or picnic shoulders **are not considered valid** entries.

5 – 6 shoulders is sufficient per contest.

- 1- Blind box build
- 3- On-site judging
- 2- Finals judging

### **Pork Rib**

is the portion of the hog containing the ribs and further classified as a spare rib or loin rib portion. Country style ribs are not a valid entry.

1 case of ribs is sufficient per contest

## **MBN Judging Memphis Style Barbecue Contests**

Memphis Barbecue Network contests consists of up to three rounds of judging (blind, on-site and finals) depending on how well a BBQ team competing scores in relation to scores from other teams in the same category.

The preliminary round consists of combined on-site and blind judging that identifies which teams in each category will move to the finals round of on-site only judging. Preliminary rounds are judged by category. Finals competitors will be judged with all categories combined.

### **JUDGING CRITERIA**

**MBN has six judging criteria;**

**Area and Personal Appearance (on site only)**

**Presentation (on site only)**

**Appearance of Entry**

**Tenderness of Entry**

**Flavor**

**Overall Impression**

**Area and Personal Appearance** and **Presentation** are scored only during on-site judging. The remainder is used both during on-site and blind judging.

### **Area and Personal Appearance**

This criterion refers to the appearance of the team area and members of the presentation team. Judges are not to score on dollars spent on the area or table setting, the "rig", clothing, etc., but rather the area you are charged with judging is clean and organized. Each member of the presentation team should be clean and be wearing clean, neat clothing.

The area should have all trash picked up, extra supplies organized neatly and trash cans clear from the area or covered. Anyone that is not a part of the presentation team should not be in the judging area. Any other little touches that you feel will add to the appearance of your team or area is acceptable.

## **Presentation**

This criterion refers to the verbal introduction of and information about the team, area, grill and the entry. Judges are instructed to score you on the introduction of your team, information about your cooker, what you do to prepare the meat before you put it on, how long you cook it and at what temperature, and what you do to the entry while it is cooking.

At this time, you should show the judge the meat on the cooker. The meat should be in a whole state-before it is chopped, pulled or sliced.

Tin foil, meat scraps or grease on the cooker will not impress judges. Remember, this is the first time the judge will see your product and will also be scoring it on appearance. With that done, it is normally time to escort the judge to the table to discuss any sauce(s) you might offer. During this time, a team member should be getting the entry ready for the judge.

## **Appearance of the Entry**

This criterion refers to esthetics; does the entry itself look appetizing on the grill and at the table (or in the container for blind entries). This is the visual appeal of the entry itself, not what garnishes are provided. Do not confuse this criterion with the presentation. Garnishes are allowed during on-site presentations only, No garnishes of any kind are allowed in a team's blind turn in box. This is to keep blind judges from being able to identify a particular team's entry.

The judges will be informed of the possibility of a smoke ring or red layer on the top surface of the meat entry, or throughout the entry.

Judges are instructed to score the appearance of the entry on the cooker and on the serving plate in on-site judging and in the blind container in blind judging. They will ask themselves – “Does this entry look appealing and appetizing?”

On-site judges are also instructed to take into consideration that you may have already removed portions of the product for either blind judging or an earlier on-site judge. You should make every effort that the judge sees your product at its very best.

## **Tenderness of Entry**

In this criterion, the judge will be looking for some firmness but easy separation of the meat. There is a range in barbecue from tough (not cooked) to tender (just right) to mushy (cooked past tender). There should be some texture, but the entry should be moist and easy to chew.

## **Flavor of the Entry**

This criterion refers to the flavor of the meat sample with the sauce. The sauce can be added before, during, or after the cooking process. Dry rubs and marinades may cook with the meat juices to make a sauce. If a team offers no table sauce, the judges are instructed to score the flavor of the entry based on the sauce made by the rubs/spices added before or during cooking. If a team serves more than one table sauce, the judges are instructed to choose the sauce that, in their opinion, best complements the entry and the flavor score is based on the combination of the sauce chosen to go with that particular entry.

It is possible for a team to have good meat and get a poor score because of their sauce. Remember, the sauce should complement the meat entry, not cover it up.

## **Overall Impression**

Overall impression is a subjective score based on the judge's opinion of the total experience of judging the team, and is not an average of the other scores. Judges will be reflecting on their general overall feeling of their judging experience as they leave the area or when they have finished judging all samples at the blind table.

This is the only criterion where the preliminary judges can use a decimal in their score. This is the area where factors can be taken into consideration that have an effect on the judge's decision, but the judge does not feel the team rates a whole number score lower than another team in the same criterion. The judge can deduct a tenth or two or three here without costing the team a whole point or more.

In order to lessen the effect of inconsistent judging, low scores will be dropped. In the preliminary round, the lowest score in each six criteria will be dropped. In the final round, the lowest scoring judge will be dropped.

The judges are instructed not to judge dollars spent, trophies displayed, size of the cooker or anything else not designated as a judging criteria on the scorecard.

## **PRELIMINARY JUDGING**

Preliminary judging is the judging of all teams and all entries in the contest. Teams are judged one meat category at a time, using both blind and on-site judging. The purpose of the preliminary round is to identify the top three entries in each meat category and to rank the rest of the entries. The top three entries in each meat category will advance to the final round of judging.

The contest officials have invited and selected judges to judge the contest. More and more contests are using a greater percentage of Memphis Barbecue Network "trained" and/or "certified" judges. The computer produces a routing for each judge, defining which teams to judge and in which order.

This routing is a matrix which insures that no two judges are routed to the same team at the same time and also that no two judges are routed to judge the same three teams. The judges do not know which teams they will be assigned to judge until they are handed the scorecards.

The judges are instructed to notify the Rep if there is any reason they feel they cannot judge an assigned team fairly. The Rep will then change a whole set of cards with another judge whose assignment does not include that particular team.

Both blind and on-site judging happens at the same time for each meat category. Each team will deliver the provided blind container with their entry to the designated blind drop off area specified by the contest at the correct time. Entries delivered late to the check in area will not be accepted.

## **Blind Judging**

During the cook's meeting, teams will be informed about how they will get their containers for their blind sample, where, and at what time they will turn them in. The contest is responsible for getting containers to teams. Most contests require that teams deliver their blind sample to the judging area or a specified check in area. You should have enough team members to accomplish this task.

Teams are required to have their sample at the specified area, at a certain time, within a 15-minute window. The sample must be delivered during this 15 minute window, even if a team has other judges still judging them from a previous category. If your sample is late it will not be accepted at the check in table.

When a container arrives at the judging area, the label will be removed and a code number assigned by the judging program will be written on the meat and sauce containers. When the judges actually get the sample, it will be in a container just like everyone else's, with only a code number on it.

The judges do not know what number any team is assigned before, during or after judging. The code numbers and corresponding team names are not published or divulged to anyone at any time.

## **On-site Judging**

Three judges will visit each team area, one at a time, and will spend at least 10 minutes but no more than 15 minutes judging each team and entry by the criteria mentioned previously.

Each judge will have three teams to judge, and the judges are routed so that each team should receive a judge at the beginning of the category judging, and the second and third judge at 20-minute intervals.

When the judge arrives at the team area, he/she will tear the judge's evaluation stub off the scorecard and give it to the team. Teams should check the stub to make sure it has the correct team name and area number on it along with the proper order number.

If it is time for a team's first judge, it should have "Order = 1", 20 minutes later it should be the second judge and the stub should read "Order = 2", etc. That will be the team's verification that the judges are in correct place at the right time. If the judge fails to give a team a stub, the team should ask for it before the beginning of their presentation.

Once a team has the stub, and has checked it to insure that the judge is at the right place and in the right order, they should begin their presentation. If the judge appears to be at the wrong time, the team should politely call this to his/her attention.

The stub should be completed by the team and turned in to a contest official. A feature of the MBN scorecards is the opportunity for the teams to "score" the judges. If there are problems, please be specific.

Teams are only expected to serve the judge their entry and something to drink. We recommend to the judges that they drink water, but some may want to drink something else. Judges are not permitted to drink alcohol while judging.

During whole hog on-site and final judging, the team must serve at least portions of the ham, shoulder and loin. Any other sections of the whole hog may be served at the team's discretion, provided it can be done within the 15 minute judging period. Judges will be instructed to judge the sample as the team provides it; points will be deducted if at least portions of the ham, shoulder, and loin are not served.

The judge should spend no more than 15 minutes in each area. The time starts as soon as the judge is greeted. Teams should have their process refined well enough to complete it in the allotted 15 minutes. If a team attempts to keep a judge longer, they may make the judge late for the next assignment or turning his/her cards in at the end of the category, backing up the rest of the contest.

The judge will leave the team area and then mark their scorecard with his/her preliminary scores. When the judge leaves, teams should get their area ready for the next judge. If the timing is right, teams will have 5 minutes between judges to make their preparations.

When all three on-site judges have been served, the team has completed judging in that meat category. If they are in the next meat category to be judged, the entire on-site judging process will be repeated.

Once all of the scores from the blind and on-site judging in each category are entered into the judging program and tabulated, the top three teams advancing to the final round of judging will be notified.

## **FINALS JUDGING**

Final round judging is operated as a separate contest with nine entries: three whole hog, three shoulders and three rib teams. All judging in the final round is on-site. Final judges are escorted by a contest official that will monitor the time they spend with each team.

There will be four finals judges traveling in a group, judging all nine entries. They are responsible for ranking the nine teams without regard to meat category and choosing the Contest Champion.

They will judge the meat categories in the same order as the preliminary judging round. When the teams are notified that they are in the finals, they are told approximately what time the final judges will arrive. Teams will be notified if there is a delay.

If there is a chance for an early arrival, teams will be asked if they can take the judges earlier. A team is not obligated to do this, and will not be marked down if they cannot take the judges earlier than originally scheduled.

When the judges arrive, they will not give teams a stub off the scorecard. Since they are traveling in a group, it is not important that teams verify that they are in the right place. They will be using scorecards that have the same criteria as the on-site cards, but they have three teams per card, per category.

Each team will be judged independently even though the judges are traveling in a group. The scoring criteria are the same, but the judges are allowed to use decimals in all criteria, not just Overall Impression.

Final judges are not announced prior to judging, and teams do not have the right of refusal of a finals judge prior to finals.

Final judges will not be changed once judging has started. If a team should choose to protest and refuse a final judge for any reason, they will automatically receive all 6's for that judge for each category in which the team is competing in finals.

If a team is in the final round in more than one meat category, the judges will visit that team area once for each category. Teams cannot serve judges more than one meat category during a visit. Teams will make their presentation each time the judges enter the team area for a category as though they had not been there before. A team's preparation and cooking methods probably will not be the same for each category.

## **FINALS JUDGING** continued

The final judges will spend 10 to 15 minutes with each team in each category, as in the preliminary round. Even though teams will be presenting and feeding four people, the presentation must still fit the 15-minute limit.

Teams that make it through finals will have served 11 people. Teams should make sure to cook enough meat. Most teams use one shoulder to pull from for their blind sample box, a shoulder apiece to serve each on-site preliminary judge and one or two to choose from to serve the finals judges. This makes a total of 5-6 shoulders.

The same applies for ribs; teams should cook enough to get through the complete contest (a case of ribs should suffice). One hog, however, is probably enough for the whole hog competition.

## **WHEN THE CONTEST IS OVER**

The contest may have time restraints as to when teams may tear down and/or remove their equipment from the cooking site. Generally, teams may begin to tear down once they have completed judging, being mindful of their neighbors. Noise can be distraction to the final judges and teams.

Imagine how a team would feel if they were in the finals and all the teams around them had their stereos blaring and were hammering and generally making noise tearing down. Teams should keep this in mind as they tear down.

Each team is responsible for cleaning their site, taking trash to the dumpsters, making sure fires are out completely, and leaving the site in the same condition as it was prior to load-in.

Within 30 days of the contest, teams should receive from the contest organizer their “raw” scores for the event. This will be a computer-generated form that shows what each judge gave in each factor during judging. Judges’ scores are not necessarily entered in the order they visited team areas. Teams will also receive a list of combined scores from each category they entered showing how they ranked among all the entries in each category.

If you have comments or suggestions regarding a particular contest feel free to contact the contest organizer. If you have comments on judges, other teams or any questions about the rules in this document feel free to contact:

**Memphis Barbecue Network**  
**[www.mbnbbq.com](http://www.mbnbbq.com)**

## **BENEFITS OF THE MBN TO COOKING TEAMS**

- Contests are provided a list of certified and trained judges, promoting a consistent scoring and judging process.
- The Grand Champion of a Memphis Barbecue Network sanctioned barbecue contest receives a guaranteed entry in the Memphis Barbecue Network Championship.
- Teams can qualify for several awards, described in the section on the Awards Program.
- Teams have the assurance of knowing that the contest is being operated according to Memphis Barbecue Network rules and judging procedures which ensures consistency among contests.
- The Memphis Barbecue Network offers teams a great opportunity to develop friendships, have fun, entertain clients and promote their businesses. Teams on the network are some of the friendliest people around and will be happy to help others get started in competition cooking.
- The Memphis Barbecue Network lists member teams and standings on the [www.MBNBBQ.com](http://www.MBNBBQ.com) web site with sponsor and/ or team links.

## Memphis Barbecue Network **AWARDS PROGRAM**

The Awards Program recognizes those teams that most actively participate in Memphis Barbecue Network competition barbecue cooking contests. The contest year runs from January 1 through December 31.

### **POINT TABLE**

Enter and cook at a sanctioned event	1
4 <sup>th</sup> Place in official meat category	1
3 <sup>rd</sup> Place in official meat category	2
2 <sup>nd</sup> Place in official meat category	3
1 <sup>st</sup> Place in official meat category	4
Grand Champion	3

These points will be accumulated and awards given to teams that are the “best of the best”. The Top Ten teams will receive recognition and an award at the Memphis Barbecue Network Championship Cooking Contest.

### **COOKING TEAM OF THE YEAR**

The team with the highest accumulated number of points will be designated the Memphis Barbecue Network Cooking Team of the Year.

### **CHAMPION WHOLE HOG / SHOULDER / RIB COOKER**

The team with the highest accumulated number of points in a single category will be designated as the category champion of the Memphis Barbecue Network.

### **TOP TEN CLUB**

The teams with the top ten highest point totals will be designated as members of the Top Ten Club of the Memphis Barbecue Network.

**Any questions or suggestions please contact [hevans@mbnbbq.com](mailto:hevans@mbnbbq.com)**