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**Startin the Fire
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So you want to start your own BBQ Team, how do you begin?

Many times while at a contest I have been asked the question, “How in the world do you get involved in competition cooking?” To tell you the truth, there is no easy one line answer, unless you want to tell the unsuspecting newbie, “Just Do It!” and I don’t think that would be very neighborly.

My advice to any aspiring competition cook would be to learn as much as possible about the entire contest operation before spending hard earned money on entrance fees and contest meats. I would first suggest an internet search. There are countless BBQ sites, forums and blogs on the net. Many teams have there own sites and blogs with info, techniques, recipes, and photographs.

Forums are a great source of information as many of the top flight cooks from around the Country are regular visitors to these sites and many times offer thoughts and tips that are very helpful. The forums also have search capabilities to be able to go back and read posts on subjects that have already been made. Many times, you can find answers to your questions in the archives before you even have to ask.

Look around. There are many great books and videos available on the market today. They show and explain the basics for BBQ cooking as well as some of the more advanced methods of prepping and preparing your contest entries. Many of these books and videos are offered by folks that have enjoyed much success on the competition BBQ trail.

The KCBS site has a ton of information including past results, upcoming events, and the current rules for contestants. You can also find information here for upcoming cooking schools and judging classes. Which leads to my next suggestion, take a class. Many of the top teams of offer classes on cooking competition meats; some are set up and timed just like at a contest. Here you can learn what the winning teams are doing, very valuable stuff.

Become a KCBS certified judge. The purpose of this suggestion is twofold, one, to learn what exactly the judges are looking for when judging your meats. And two, you can then sign up to judge a BBQ contest. What better way to see and taste what others are turning in a contest than being a judge.

If you have never been, go to a contest. Walk around, take in the sights. Most of the competitors are more than happy to talk Que with you as long as they are not busy with the contest. Best times to visit are midday or late on Friday and after 2 PM on Saturday. If you stop by Saturday afternoon, and local regulations permit, you might even be

offered a few samples. If you are, remember, these are samples, be mindful of others, and don't try and make it into your lunch!

The last and probably best method of learning the ropes would be to hook up with an already established team. Watch on the forums, many times teams will post the need for extra hands at a contest. Other forums have mentor programs in place. This is a great way to see the contest from the inside. If you are invited to join an established team, please be mindful, you are a guest. If they want you to step away for a certain portion of their contest prep, don't get your feelings hurt. Also remember, you are going to be hanging out at their site for 20-25 hours, be sure to bring along a few cold beverages and some eats to share with the folks that are sharing their experience and information.

So if you are thinking about getting involved, I would encourage you to take a look around, learn what you can, gather your equipment, then, "JUST DO IT!!!!!" You won't regret it.