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The Turn-in Window

10 minutes seems like forever...or does it?

If you think back to when you were in high school and the clock on the wall said there were 10 minutes until dismissal, sometimes it almost seemed like time was going backwards. At the very least, it certainly seemed like time was standing still. In a KCBS BBQ contest you have a window of 10 minutes, 600 seconds, in which to submit your entry to the judges. To the non contestant, I am sure this seems like plenty of time. Most times it is, sometimes it's just not enough.

The importance of time is stressed to the BBQ teams from the moment you decide to enter a contest. Most events require entry forms be submitted by a deadline date. When the information packet is sent to the head cooks, they are told what time to arrive on site, the times for the cooks meeting, when meat will be inspected, when turn-ins begin, even when you are allowed to leave for home. While at the cooks meeting, the contest reps again go over turn-in times, when they begin, how long they are open, when they end. Also present at the meeting is the official contest clock. The time is shown to all present in case anyone would like to synchronize their watches. Although in today's world of cell phones and atomic clocks, synchronizing wrist watches is just about a thing of the past.

At most contests, the reps will stop around at each site on Saturday morning with the official contest clock in tow; again, so that the teams can make sure they know exactly what time will be used to determine the all important 'turn-in' window. The point of all this, everyone knows what time it is on Saturday morning at a BBQ contest. Now, if I can digress, knowing what time it is and completing a multitude of tasks within a certain timeframe are not the same.

It doesn't happen often, but it does happen, teams receive a DQ for a late turn-in. A person on the outside looking in might say "how can that be?"...those on the inside know, "oh, it be". While at a contest, I am constantly amazed how fast time moves. Early Saturday morning it seems like you have forever to get things done, things are relaxed, folks are shuffling about. Perhaps, many are suffering from a little bit too much merry making the night before, maybe some are just not morning people, I believe most think things are completely under control. For me, it is up early to get the ribs on, check the big meats, maybe grab some breakfast. Before I know it, its time to get the chicken started.

Now, I think I need to mention here, due to my own madness, my chicken cook has expanded into a 2.5 hour process. This procedure has severely limited me on any and all relaxation that might be available on Saturday morning at a contest. No matter how hard I try, it seems that as the magic time of 11:55 approaches, I am always behind were I should be. Being behind is not a good thing. I hustle, bustle, poke and prod all in an attempt to get the chicken into the box at a decent time. What is the optimum time you ask? I try to shoot for 12:00 on the nose. For whatever reason, it seems I always enter into the backside, (the last 5 minutes), of the window. Depending on how far our site is

located from the judges' tent, the backside of the window is not a good place to be. However, it seems I am always stuck in the backside, of the turn-in window that is!

Once we enter into the backside of the chicken window, it seems like we can never get out. We will be rushed and behind all day. I look up at the clock and know we have 25 minutes to get the rib box ready, more than enough time. I have a minute or two to relax, yea right. The next time I glance at the clock, it is 12:20 and my ribs are still spread about the cutting board. I look again after applying the finishing touches to the ribs and again we are right there in the backside, once again. Only this time, we're stuck a little deeper.

The pork box for me is one of the most time consuming that we have and I can't explain why. We don't do all that well in pork; it just takes me a long time to prepare a mediocre pork box. Having to rush the box as a result of our presence in the backside surely doesn't help. At this point I have stopped even looking at the clock and am relying on my teammates shouting out the time remaining until the lid must be closed. Our team runner usually whispers gently to me when I am in the backside of the backside for the pork turn-in. If you believe that one, I have a bridge to sell you.

Our brisket box usually assembles fairly quickly. Most of our time here is spent trying to determine which slices we will submit. Some times, the choice is made for us as a result of the contest submission being the best of the worse. Other times, we actually have to decide which we like better, and that is a good thing. The other time wasting issue I have found during the brisket portion of the contest is trying to find someone to help me taste and sample the cuts. Usually by now, no one on the team wants to put a piece of BBQ'ed meat into their mouths, no matter how small. Eventually, we get it done and the box goes in, hopefully on time.

For us, if we get behind early, we stay behind. If our 1st box goes in on time, we usually stay on schedule, with emphasis on the word usually. At a contest, every once in a while, you'll hear that a team was DQ'ed for a late submission. In other words, getting stuck deep in the backside. You can see how it can happen, just don't let it happen to you. Whatever you do, take whatever measures are available to avoid being late, after all, you've got 600 seconds!