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The 'Off Season', does it really exist?

As the 2009 BBQ season winds down and we enter the so called off season, it causes me to reflect a minute on the year gone by. It seems like a week or two ago, everyone was eager with anticipation as the new season was beginning. And now, before we knew it, it's finished. My question is where did it go?

I know that some folks say the older you get, the faster time goes. As a fellow on the back side of a half of century old, I have to say there is some truth to that. There's also the thought that, "time flies when your having fun". So, I guess when you have an old man that is having a load of fun, you have a guy that shouldn't even wear a wrist watch for fear of the hands rubbing together starting a fire!

As we finish our 3rd year on the competition trail I realize that I am having a heck of a lot of fun. This year we cooked in 7 contests and were fortunate enough to win our first Grand Championship. Over the past 3 years, I have made some really good friends, had some great times, and occasionally eaten some pretty tasty BBQ. No wonder time is flying, cause I have had a ball.

As for the off season, it is my opinion it doesn't even exist. Some folks will stow their cookers for the winter months, others will be used, but a not at the frequency as in the months just past. Many teams will use the off time to tweak their recipes and or procedures, maybe purchase a new cooker or some other sought after piece of equipment. Toss in a few holidays, a BBQ trade show or two, a couple of Sundays in front of the tube watching football, and before you know it, it is time to start gathering items for the first contest of the year. In other words slowing down but not off.

For me, winter brings some of the things I look forward to. The holidays, family time, hunting season, and a fire in the fireplace, are all things I enjoy this time of year. I have some projects under way, along with several I have been putting off that I am sure will keep me plenty busy during the long nights of winter.

Of course, there are the inevitable practice cooks. During the few weekends that we have nothing scheduled, I plan to do a few practice runs. You know, where I want to try that new twist, method or procedure. My problem is, I will try and clean the garage or rotate the truck tires while I am supposed to be taking notes and or observing my new twist, method and procedure. This multi-tasking usually results in forgetting to add the new twist, option or procedure, or adding it without remembering when it was done, or better yet, what specifically WAS done. Either way, relying on my failing memory is not an option, it must be written down if I want to have any hope of remembering and or repeating the newest twist, method or procedure.

My other form of entertainment during the 'off season' is reading the numerous BBQ forums. These are places where other bored BBQ cooks hang out and discuss anything

from the pros and cons of injecting your meat to whether or not judges know what they are doing. (For the record, I believe that they do) Along about February or March, things occasionally get a little dicey which makes for some interesting reading during those long cold winter nights. By April, as the days get a little longer and things start to warm a bit, discussions turn to the upcoming season. This results in the earlier squabbles being removed to the forum archives, many never to be seen again. At times, this is a good thing.

Next thing I know, spring is just around the corner, where does time go? Before I know it, it is time to order in supplies, review and complete contest applications, load the trailer, and try and remember the new twists, methods and procedures that I supposedly perfected during all of my 'off' time. Now, if I could only remember where I put those notes.

So much for an off season, as I stated earlier, I believe an 'off season' doesn't exist. Maybe what needs to happen is we need to change the name. Instead of 'off season', we should call it the 'slow season' or maybe 'practice season'. The suggestion of, 'the non competitive but still cooking season' seems to make a lot of sense, but doesn't really flow that well so I don't see any chance of that catching on.

So I guess we are stuck with 'off season', which really isn't that bad. It is an off season where you're not really off. After all, in a few short months, it will be spring and time to start all over again. You had better get to work on that new recipe or that big project you have on your list for around the house, because before we know it, the contest smoke will be rolling again. Remember, time flies when you're having fun!

As the Holiday Season approaches, I would like to take a moment to wish all of my BBQ friends and their families a joyous and safe Holiday season, as well as a happy, safe, and prosperous 2010.