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**Keystone BBQ Classic
Harrisburg PA
October 2-3 2009**

Our first GC.....what a shocker.

While on the way home from our last contest at New Holland, sitting on a butt-dougnut, nursing a sore rear from the spanking that we just received, I got a call from teammate Bobby. He was traveling home with Al and they had a conversation about what they felt was our dismal showing at the Summer Fest. They had an idea, why don't we sign up for the contest in early October just up in Harrisburg PA. See if we could turn things around a bit, blow the stink off so to speak.

Keep in mind; these are two guys that have made rumblings cutting back on the number of contests we cook next season. Was I hearing them correctly, they wanted to sign up for an addition event, one that wasn't already on the schedule. "But that is only two weeks before the contest in Dover," I said, as I have heard complainants in the past about the short time between Bel Air and New Holland. "We know, see if you can get us in" was the reply, talk about a shocker.

A search around the net, a few emails and before I knew it I was inking a check and sending it off to Harrisburg PA. Our box-builder Erich was already committed to a family obligation and would have to miss the show but it looked like everyone else was in. The first weekend in October was a busy one for east coast BBQ teams, The Royal in Kansas City and a contest in Front Royal Virginia would be pulling the teams in different directions.

Al and I met early Friday morning then drove north to Harrisburg. The contest was being held in conjunction with a livestock show that had been going on all week. The organizers had us set up on the front lawn of the huge farm complex. Level sights, free ice and clean indoor toilets made this set-up one of the best of the year. Twenty teams had signed up to cook in this second year contest. This was the first year the event was sanctioned by KCBS and it had been designated as a State Championship, meaning that the winner would qualify for consideration for entry to next years Royal and Jack Daniels invitational in Lynchburg TN.

Friday's weather threatened all day but never rained. We had a few showers after dark, nothing too long or heavy, not bad at all. By midnight, the showers had quit and the nearly full moon was struggling to make an appearance. The cookers were lit; the meat was loaded, so far without a hitch.

Saturday morning broke with a beautiful sunrise, the rain was gone and it seem like all was well. Little did we know, the now famous BBQ gremlins had sent a squad into town during the night while we slept. I had figured that we may not see them this weekend

with so many other contests going on, I thought they'd be spread too thin and not have the manpower, or the interest to cover a second year event in the capitol city of Pennsylvania. Boy, was I wrong.

As I reported earlier, Lettuceman Erich was unable to join us this weekend. Jo jumped in and did a fine job preparing the boxes, so that wasn't the problem. The problem was, we were a man down. I have said in the past how well the team was working together and I meant it. Everyone has settled in and knows what has to be done and when. Very few directions, instruction, or requests have to be made or given. Stuff just gets done. When you remove a wheel from the cart, the cart still moves forward, it just wobbles a bit.

Let's just leave it at that, our cart was wobbling with the absence of lettuce man Erich. Several times during the morning's activities, Jo commented that I needed to lighten up, relax, and get some mojo working. Our usually good mojo apparently was on vacation with Erich and his family. It just seemed like I couldn't get anything right. We struggled, I cussed, the morning moved on. Its amazing how what seems like a very small issue can be turned into a mountain when accentuated by a sleep deprived, alcohol preserved, large headed, short tempered fat guy swearing and tossing things about, most times unnecessarily.

One of the lighter moments of the morning even got a chuckle from Mr Doom and Gloom, yours truly. I have been sporting a new look the last three contests, a straw hat. The headgear has been worn at our last two contests without a lot of comment. (very unusual) All of the sudden this weekend, I was receiving sharp barbs and insults in reference to my new skyzoo, of which; I was becoming very fond. I removed my hat when taking off my apron to make a dash to the rest room during the mornings prep work and wouldn't you know it, when I returned, I couldn't locate my new friend. I got busy with other things and figured I had misplaced the hat and it would turn up later. After a long and unfruitful search, I finally spotted my straw hat clipped to the upper support bar of the canopy, out of reach without a ladder, pretty funny. Of course, no one in the site had any idea how it got there, amazing. Maybe the gremlins put it up there.

Turn-ins complete, the trailer packed, we sauntered over for the 4:00 awards ceremony which began on time. I ranked our boxes after submission, ribs, brisket, pork, and then chicken, I was pretty close. I didn't think we'd have a chance with our chicken submission; however, we were called for 5th place. Shocker #2. Next was ribs, 2nd place, pork (usually our anchor) 2nd place, brisket 3rd place. Bobby was standing next to me and looked over, he leaned in to say something, my head was swimming, I uttered something like "don't count your chickens", (notice the inevitable reference to my fine feathered friend). The announcer called out Reserve Champion going to Flying Porkers BBQ, they were last year's GC winner. This years Grand Championship honors go to "who are those guys?" wow, to say I was happy would be an understatement. We all let out a war hoot and went as a group to collect our trophy. Pretty cool, a shocker for sure. Gremlins be dammed.

This was our third year as a team. During our short time on the competition trail we have gotten a few calls and even gotten close to a grand a couple of times. Actually collecting a Grand Championship trophy was a first for our team and truly an amazing experience. What a ride. I couldn't have done it without my teammates and good friends, Al, Bobby, Erich and my wife Jo, and for that I say thanks. The icing on the cake was my Mother and Father were there at the awards ceremony to see us get the win. Mom told me before the awards that she had a good feeling, I guess she was right. The only thing that could have made it any better would have been if Erich 'the lettucesman' could have been there. Today is Thursday, 5 days since our walk, and the first day that my feet have even been close to the ground. A shocker for sure, but an enjoyable one, and one we won't soon forget.