

WORLD BEER CUP AND CRAFT BREWERS CONFERENCE, SAN DIEGO, CA

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In May of this year, the 9th World Beer Cup and the 29th Craft Brewers Conference and BrewExpo America took place in San Diego, California. As always, our technical editor was on the spot, participating as a judge in the WBC and as an eager SBR correspondent at the conference and Expo.

It gets quite boring and repetitious to say it over and over again in each and every report from the World Beer Cup (WBC), but as it really is such an achievement every time, it has to be said: Yet again this year the WBC broke all records and became the biggest ever international (and national, for that matter!) beer competition ever held.

The ninth bi-annual competition boasted the strongest field of entrants on record, with 799 breweries from 54 countries and

45 U.S. states entering 3,921 beers in 95 beer style categories. A 17.7 per cent increase over 2010, the entries were eligible for gold, silver and bronze awards in their respective categories. Judges presented a total of 284 awards.

‘It’s called “The Olympics of Beer Competition” for good reason,’ said Charlie Papazian, president of the Brewers Association, the U.S.-based trade association that has put on the competition every two years since 1996. ‘The event brings

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together great brewers from all corners of the globe. Plus, the awards are highly regarded. A brewer who wins a World Beer Cup gold award knows that their winning beer represents the best of that beer style in the world. Congratulations to all the

FACTS FROM THE 2012 WORLD BEER CUP COMPETITION

- The average number of beers entered per category was 41.
- The category with the most entries was American-Style India Pale Ale, with 150 entries. The second most-entered category was Imperial India Pale Ale, with 93 entries. The German-Style Sour Ale category had the fewest number of entries at 11.
- The 2012 World Beer Cup saw substantial growth of entries in the American-Style India Pale Ale category. Category entries grew 41.5 per cent over 2010 to make it the largest category of the 2012 competition.
- Additionally, Champion Brewery and Champion Brewmaster awards are given in each of five brewery categories based on the awards won by each brewery in the given size category.

The five Champion Brewery/Brewmaster award winners are:

Small Brewing Company Category

Brauerei Michael Plank, Michael Plank

Mid-Size Brewing Company Category

Firestone Walker Brewing Company, Matthew Brynildson

Large Brewing Company Category

AB InBev, Claudio Ferro

Small Brewpub Category

Iron Hill Brewery & Restaurant-Media, Iron Hill Brewery Team

Large Brewpub Category

Pelican Pub & Brewery, Darron R S Welch

Presenting Sponsor Kronen, and Partner Sponsors Ball, Barth-Haas Group, Sahm, Siemens and Verallia, proudly supported the 2012 World Beer Cup.

winners of the 2012 World Beer Cup. The Brewers Association and the proud sponsors of our event thank all participating brewers for their involvement.

JUDGES

The 2012 judging panel was the largest and most international in the history of the World Beer Cup. Judges from 27 countries conducted blind tasting evaluations of the beers to determine the winners. Drawn from the ranks of professional brewers and brewing industry experts, these 211 judges came mostly from international breweries, with some 67 per cent from outside the U.S. In addition to the judging panel, over 250 volunteers helped sort beer entries and steward the competition. The judging criteria are exacting – some categories are not given the full slate of awards if the panel decides that the entries do not merit recognition.

My personal experience with the judging was as positive as ever. One thing is the logistics of the whole competition – the ability of the organizers and the stewards to service all 211 of us at our individual tables with the right beers at the right time in the right way – it never ceases to amaze me! But certainly also the way the judging itself progressed. I will in a specific article for the SBR at a later stage explain the details of the WBC judging process and what sets it apart from other international beer competitions, apart from the sheer size, so suffice to say here that all results at WBC are based on unanimity, i.e. all judges at the table have to agree which beers to pass on at the earlier stages, and at the final stage which beers to award which medals. Each judge may have personal preferences – although the style guidelines are very clear, they still cannot dictate how each judge prioritizes those individual aroma, flavour and taste quality features the beers must display. Thus, there is an inevitable potential for some disagreement and discussion before a unanimous decision can be reached. But this year – whether this was due to the ongoing improvements of the style guidelines, a generally more homogenous group of judges or just sheer luck – I found the process ever so smooth, amicable and easy during every single one of my total of 8 judging sessions. Needless to say, this made the judging feel even more gratifying than normal!

AWARD HIGHLIGHTS AND TRENDS

The award ceremony took place on the Saturday night as usual, and the surroundings and settings was very much like itself – 1,200 people swarming around in the lobby for about an hour before the actual dinner with all the about 4,000 participating beers lying on ice on several ‘islands’ around the →

room for everyone to explore and taste while the conversation got livelier and louder, and the excitement increased along with the consumption of beer. On time, everyone was seated for a delicious 4 course dinner – obviously accompanied by magnificent pairings with amazing beers, all medal winners from previous WBCs. As always, we Europeans are at the same time impressed and appalled by the efficiency of such a massive dinner serving; in about 45 minutes it was all done, and Charlie Papazian could enter the stage – wearing his tight bandage around the right wrist which he always wears to secure the survival of that wrist after 284 enthusiastic handshakes in about an hour!

From a Scandinavian point of view, the results of this year's WBC medals were quite disappointing seen in the light of the significant harvest of medals for our part of the world in previous WBCs and also in the light of the significant number of entries. The total number of Scandinavian medals in 2012 came out at just one for Hornbeer (Denmark) – a silver medal for 'The Fundamental Blackhorn' in the prestigious American-Style Imperial Stout category. Closest to home in the sense of other medallists were Olgerdin Egill Skallagrimsson, Reykjavik, Iceland, who won a gold medal for their 'Brio' in the German Style Pilsner category and the two Lithuanian breweries JSC Švyturys-Utenos Alus and Kalnapilio-Tauro Grupe, who took the gold and the silver, respectively, in the Dortmund/Export or German-Style Oktoberfest category. Congratulations from the SBR to all of these medallists!

All details and results can be found at <http://www.worldbeercup.org/>

CRAFT BREWERS CONFERENCE AND BREWEXPO AMERICA

The venue for the conference was the Town & Country resort in San Diego, which has housed this event very successfully a number of times before and it proved as good as ever. It is very spacious allowing easy and trouble-free traffic of the many people between the rooms where presentations were held, the expo area and all other hotel facilities. Also, the lay-out is such that finding one's way between events is easy. The cool, overcast weather was, alas, during the first two days of the conference somehow disappointing for Southern California – and I believe for the organizers as well: Breakfast was served outdoors, and on the Thursday morning this meant that we were enjoying breakfast while a cool drizzle fell!

This years' conference was – of course – again a record event with about 4,500 attendees – brewers, wholesalers, suppliers and

media people. In spite of the astronomic number of attendees, it is worth noting that the conference was sold out several weeks in advance, and Brewers Association estimates that another 1,000-1,500 tickets could have been sold if the capacity of the venue had allowed this. In his opening address on 2 May, BA President Charlie Papazian revealed that already from the 2013 CBC, which will be held in Washington DC, the capacity of the conference will be expanded to at least 5,000 attendees and possibly even more. It obviously makes sense to try to cater to the increased interest for the CBC by expanding the capacity. Not doing so would somehow mean excluding some of our colleagues from the professional and social enrichment that participation in a CBC represents. And this would be fundamentally against the soul of the industry which is to be open to all and inspire the biggest possible multitude and variety in people as well as in the beers. But on the other hand, one cannot help wondering with some concern how big the CBC can become without losing its soul? At some point, one must fear the sheer number of people present will make the event totally confusing and impersonal, more or less eliminating the aspect of the CBC that I, personally, over the past number of years have come to value more and more: The social aspect. Meeting myriads of friends from the industry – mostly American, of course, but certainly also from other countries. Continuously bumping into old friends and catching up – sometimes just very briefly while passing each other in the hallways, sometimes attending a seminar together, seated together for breakfast or lunch, or, perhaps the most likely scenario: Having a beer together. This year the San Diego breweries had again, as they have also done the last two times the conference has been held at the Town Country Resort, established a free bar, open from 10 pm to 1 am every night in the outside patio area, serving about 125 different beers on draught from various California breweries. Absolutely the perfect way to end a busy conference day for all, and a thing that is sorely missed when the CBC is held elsewhere than in San Diego.

Usually, I spend a significant part of my CBC reports on covering the annual address made by Paul Gatz, the CEO of the Brewers Association, on the 'State of the Union' – or rather, of course, the craft brewing industry in the US. I have chosen not to do so this time, but this is absolutely not because this address was less interesting than usual. Quite the opposite! The current extremely positive development in the US craft brewing industry is in fact so remarkable and impressive that I have decided to devote a full, specific article to this issue – hopefully already in the annual craft brewing edition of the SBR to be published in December.

The professional contents are obviously the cornerstone and the main *raison d'être* for the Craft Brewers Conference. Over the years, I have seen the topics for the parallel tracks in which the presentations and panels are organised change gradually to reflect the changes in the craft brewing industry and thereby the interests of the attendees. At this year's conference, there was a total of 10 tracks under the headlines shown in the box.

In the conference programme, the individual sessions are marked with a colour code showing which category it belongs to, thus, making sure that attendees – regardless of background or interests – can plan her or his own conference agenda with a high degree of security for achieving precisely the outcome of the conference that they want. Some years ago, I proposed to the BA that they should be more informative towards the attendees regarding the level of sophistication of each of the presentations, allowing the attendees to choose those at the right level for them with their individual and specific background and objectives. This has not been done directly by a number or a code, but I find that the expanded number of tracks with their quite informative names does the trick rather well. At least, I did not this year find myself listening to stuff that I found was either too elementary or over my head. Perhaps this is also because I have – like most other experienced CBC attendees, I guess – developed a good intuition for choosing which seminars to attend. This year, my personal focus was on barrel ageing, bottle conditioning and the use of bacteria and wild yeasts in fermentation and maturation, and I was very satisfied with the level of the panels and presentations.

Also, the interest for the BrewExpo America 2012 was at an all time high – both as far as the number of exhibitors was concerned as well as judged by the interest from the conference attendees in spending time shopping around at the Expo. This was evident from the fact that a large tent outside had to be included in the expo area to house it this time. All a clear reflection of the optimistic and positive sensation of an industry in strong growth. This feeling lay like subtle background music, forming an almost audible ambience at all times and in all corners of the CBC this year.

Your technical editor spent more time at BrewExpo than usual this year. Not because I was shopping for a new brewery or brewing equipment, I'm afraid, but rather in an effort to promote the SBR. We had arranged to have 200 magazines shipped over to me at the conference hotel, and we had written a little letter promoting the SBR to potential advertisers, and I stopped by each and every one of the more than 200 booths and handed over a copy of the magazine and the promotional letter. We have yet to see how many more advertisers that will emerge from this initiative, but I was quite overwhelmed by the positive reception that my short promotion visits got at the stands. Everyone without exception was very happy and enthusiastic when being told that the magazine contained information about the brewing scenes in the Scandinavian, Nordic and Baltic countries and those people who did not know, were thrilled to hear that we in our little corner of the globe have very vibrant and growing craft beer scenes, too. →

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As mentioned above, the conference next year is in Washington DC. It will be held on 26-29 March, 2013, at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center and will have room for a lot of people! Yes – you, my faithful reader, will have guessed it – the time to strongly encourage you all to sign up and participate has come: Do yourselves as big, big favour and attend the conference next year! Actually, if you are in any way involved with craft brewing in your daily life and you should decide to follow my advice, you will thank me afterwards for urging you! Because after the conference – or possibly even very shortly into it – you will realise that you had no idea that the invigorating feeling of being part of a universal community of fascinating breweries and people could be this great. And you will be equally amazed at how all these people manage to make such a huge impact and difference in their societies and have a load of fun at the same time! ☺

*You can find much more information at the CBC website:
www.craftbrewersconference.com.*

SESSION STREAMS/TOPICS AT THE 2012 CRAFT BREWERS CONFERENCE

1. Brewery Operations
2. Brewery Start-Ups
3. Brewpubs
4. Government Affairs
5. Export Development
6. Packaging Breweries
7. Quality
8. Selling Craft Beer
9. Sustainability
10. Technical Brewing

