

# Springtime in San Diego

## *Judging at World Beer Cup*

**It is interesting to compare the World Beer Cup (WBC) beer competition held in San Diego in April 2008 with the Australian International Beer Competition reported on in April's edition of the B&DI. I have been enthusiastic enough to have judged four WBCs which along with a Great American Beer Festival (GABF) and three Brewing Industry International Awards (BIIA), makes me an experienced veteran of these events, even if I don't think I'm old enough to qualify for this status.**

By **Paul Buttrick**

The WBC is an international beer competition run by the Brewers Association (BA), a non-profit trade and educational organisation set up 'to promote and protect American Craft Beer and American Craft Brewers and Community of Brewing Enthusiasts'. It is based in Boulder Colorado, and organises Craft Brewer and Homebrewing conferences, the Great American Beer Festival and BeerExpo America trade exhibition. It lobbies in Washington DC, advises members on legislation, and publishes magazines (the *New Brewer* and *Zymurgy* for homebrewers) and books.

The WBC is held every two years and is the first half of a full 'Brewers' week, which includes the Craft Brewers Conference and BeerExpo America trade show. The conference and trade show are held at various cities in the USA annually; the next one will be Boston in April 2009. The WBC is held in US cities with a thriving and growing beer culture and

concentration of craft breweries. Previous competitions have been held in Cleveland, Ohio and Seattle on the north west coast famous for the Washington and Oregon hop growing areas and its infamous 'Hophead' brewers. The next WBC is scheduled for 'the windy city' Chicago in April 2010.

The Mission of the WBC 'is to create greater consumer awareness about the quality and diversity displayed by the various beers of the world. It is dedicated to recognising both the traditions and innovations shared by the entire brewing industry as well as those customs unique to specific countries and regions.

The first WBC took place in Vail, Colorado in 1996 when there were 600 entries from 250 breweries. The latest competition had 2937 beers from 646 breweries in 58 countries, entered into 91 'style' categories. There were 130 judges, 64% coming from overseas, including seven from the UK. The vast majority of judges work for brewing companies, although there were a number of consultants and beer writers involved.

The WBC describes itself as the 'Beer Olympics' because it is one of the few competitions that awards gold, silver and bronze medals for each category. This is in contrast to the Australian competition and Monde Selection where medals are awarded to all entries which achieve a prescribed quality standard. Other competitions to award only three medals for each category are the British based Brewing Industry International Awards and the European Beer Star in Germany. All beers are entered into the WBC are in small pack, although some may have been decanted from kegs.

The medal criteria are:

**GOLD:** A world class beer that accurately exemplifies the style, displaying the proper balance of taste, aroma

and appearance.

**SILVER:** An excellent beer that may vary slightly from style parameters while retaining close adherence to the style and displaying excellent taste, aroma and appearance.

**BRONZE:** A fine example of the style, that may vary slightly from style parameters and/or have minor deviations in taste, aroma and appearance.

Judging panels do not have to award all three medals and there have been a few occasions when for instance, no gold or perhaps no bronze medal was awarded.

### How does the competition work?

In 2008 there were 91 different categories ranging from a number of style categories for North America, Britain, Germany, Belgium and France, lagers, hybrid beers (eg fruit beers) and for 'other origins'.

Each judge is given a tasting



*"The WBC is dedicated to recognising both the traditions and innovations shared by the entire brewing industry as well as those customs unique to specific countries and regions."*

*Fireworks over the USS Midway, now a museum in San Diego harbour.*





Rose gardens at the Town & Country Resort San Diego

*“The competition includes many styles which have grown up as distinctly North American. These may be similar, to say European styles, but often have their own character, for example in bitterness and hop aroma which are greater in the North America.”*

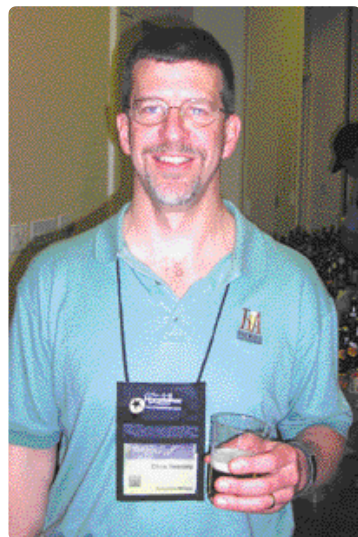
RIGHT: Chris Swersey, has managed the WBC since the 2002 in Cleveland Ohio.

FAR RIGHT: Judging Schedule for Judge No48; whoever said it was going to be easy?

programme at a Judges Orientation meeting held the evening before tasting starts. Tasting this year was from 9.00 am to 5.00 pm over two and a half days. A tasting schedule for one of the judges is shown – brewers haven’t lived until they have tasted strong Belgian Ales at 9.00 am in the morning!

Each beer is given a number and served anonymously to a panel of 6–7 judges seated at a round table. Each panel is made up of an international mix of judges, and no one is allowed to judge a category in which he has entered a beer. Each panel could assess up to a dozen beers per session. Depending on the number of entries there may be a number of panels which put forward the best beers to a final ‘taste off’ panel which awards the medals.

Each panel has a ‘Judge Captain’ whose role is to ensure that the correct process is followed and that new judges are comfortable and able to fully participate in the process. It is a cross between a chairperson/facilitator’s role and is certainly not a



decision-making one. There are frequent debates, about whether a certain beer adheres to the ‘style guidelines’. For example in the American *Hefeweizen* category there was an outstanding Bavarian style beer which everybody appreciated, but did not win a top medal because it was not ‘to style’, it had a clove character which must be absent from the US cousin of the species.

It is not unusual for groups of volunteers, of which there were 95 who pour and present the beers, to gather round tables to listen enthusiastically to the animated and intense debates which can take place.

An important part of a judge’s remit is to fill out a ‘tasting note form’ which goes back to every entrant in the competition. This is supported by an entry summary which is the overall assessment of the panel, and says whether a beer has been put forward to the next round or reasons why it has not.

Depending on the number of entries, there are 6–12 beers in the final ‘taste off’, all of which are of very good quality. It is here that the debates are most intense and the skill of the judges really comes into play, where personal preference has to be put aside and the medals awarded to excellent quality and adherence to style.

Due to current BA policy, we are unable to publish a photo of the judging process, something the organisers might like to re-consider since it is a critical aspect of the competition and key to how medals are awarded. We do however show a photo in honour of the late Michael Jackson judging at a previous competition. As many people know, Michael was an avid supporter of Craft beer in the USA.

**How are the beer styles defined?**

There is a very definitive bible which describes each of the 91 categories in the competition and it very clearly stipulates that the winning beers must adhere to the style description and specification. The style descriptions are reviewed and updated on a regular basis, with judges specifically asked to comment on any anomalies

The competition includes many styles

which have grown up as distinctly North American. These may be similar, to say European styles, but often have their own character, for example in bitterness and hop aroma which are greater in the North America. For example comparing ‘English style India Pale Ale’ and ‘American-style India Pale Ale’; the guidelines for the English style includes: ‘earthy herbal English hop character is the perceived end’ with a specification of 5.0%-7.0%ABV and bitterness at a respectable 35 – 50 IBU; while the American Pale Ale is ‘floral and citrus-like American variety hop character is perceived’ with a spec of 6.3%-7.5%ABV and bitterness at a more powerful 40 – 70 IBU.

**A comment about a ‘style-based’ competition**

A style-based competition gives breweries comprehensive guidelines on which categories to enter and for judges to base their assessment. It also helps solve some dilemmas on awarding medals based on personal choice. Having said that, 91 style categories can make life difficult and the organisers might like to look at reducing and redefining some categories. For example, there are ten categories for Belgian style beers, eighteen categories for non-American ale style beers ranging through bitters, pale ales, porters, stouts and nineteen specific American styles.

It may not be a popular, but I think some rationalisation would give a more global aspect to the competition and distinguish it from the Great American Beer Festival Competition which is run on very similar lines.

Session	Day	Time	Table	Style
Session I	Thursday, April 16	9:00 AM - 12:00 PM	Table 15	Alger Pale Saison Ale
Session II	Thursday, April 16	9:00 AM - 12:00 PM	Table 16	Alger Pale Saison Ale
Session III	Thursday, April 16	3:00 PM - 7:00 PM	Table 15	Alger Pale Saison Ale
Session IV	Thursday, April 16	3:00 PM - 7:00 PM	Table 16	Alger Pale Saison Ale
Session V	Friday, April 17	9:00 AM - 12:00 PM	Table 15	Alger Pale Saison Ale

Having said that, it is marvelous to see the resurrection of many older styles that are being reborn in the craft beer sector and no longer thought main stream and appealing enough by the larger companies. A good example is wood aged strong beers which attracted 54 entries.

The average number of beers entered in each category was 32, the most popular categories were: American style IPA (77 entries), German style Pilsner (72), fruit and vegetable beer (70) herb and spice beer (67) and American style pale ale (66). The three smallest categories were: American style wheat wine Ale (4) – a new category, Belgian style Pale Ale (8), and Ordinary Bitter (10) - come on you British Brewers – there's a good chance of Gold entering one of your fine beers in this category!

### Who won the medals?

American brewers obviously did very well in their own competition after all they entered 62% of the beers. The healthy craft beer scene and the enthusiasm to innovate and resurrect older styles such as Old Ale and Robust Porter was well rewarded. Overall 21 countries won medals, with 158 going to the USA, 25 to Germany, 11 to Belgium, ten to Japan and six to Australia.

UK breweries won 5 medals which were:

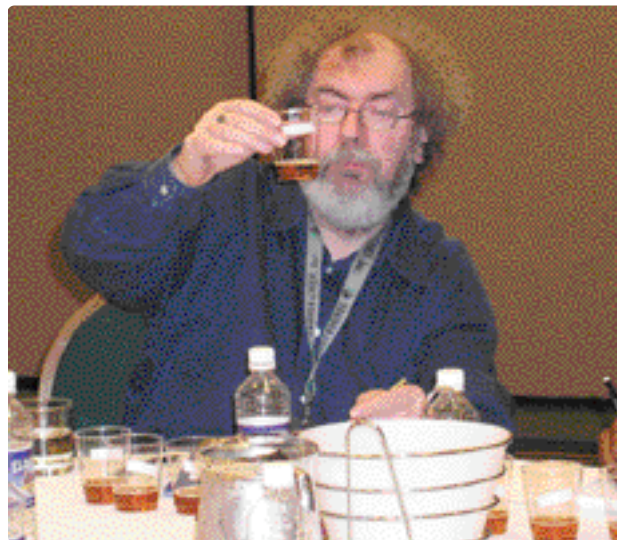
- A Gold for Rooster's Yorkshire Pale Ale brewed by Roosters Brewery Ltd Knaresborough in the English-style Summer Ale category – this follows a Gold for the same beer in 2006.

- A Gold (from 54 entries) for Paradox Grain brewed by Brewdog, Fraserburgh in the wood and barrel-aged strong ale category.
- A Silver for Coffee Porter brewed by Meantime Brewing, in the Coffee flavoured beer category.
- Bronze medals were awarded to Inbev Samlesbury for Bass Ale, and Punk IPA again from Brewdog in Fraserburgh.

In the British style ales categories 92% of the medals went to American breweries. Considering the size and nature of the British brewing industry, this was disappointing. I'm sure there are many fine beers in the UK, but the simple fact is 'You can't win if you don't enter'. In contrast 50% of the medals awarded in the German categories were awarded to German breweries, and 39% to Belgian breweries in the Belgian categories. The depth of the American craft sector was demonstrated by winning 94% of the medals in the American style categories.

Even though there may be a vast number of categories, the quality of the winning beers, even from small brewery restaurants was outstanding and the credibility of the results is much enhanced by the presence of the overseas judges.

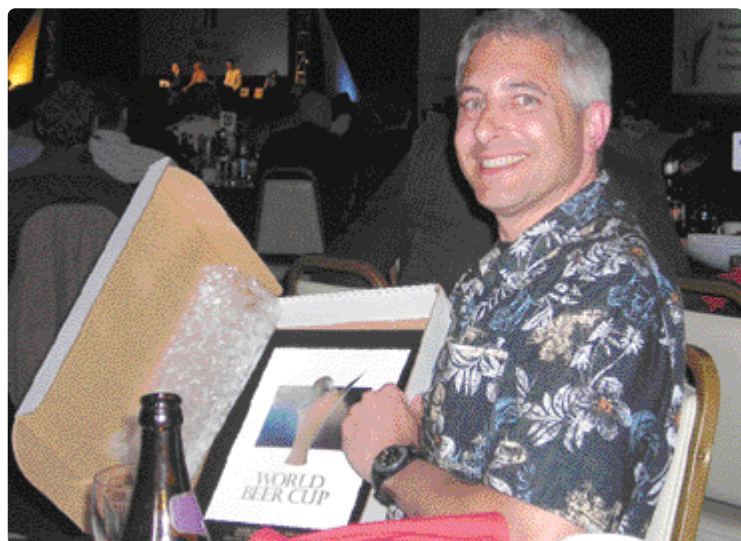
The integrity of the competition is profound, and the winners are not revealed until the Gala Awards dinner the following Saturday evening. This is a splendid event with an outstanding beer and food menu featuring previous medal



winning beer accompanying each course. Over 1,500 people attend and each medal presented won warm applause and any number of yelps and high fives for the local entries. There are also awards for the overall brewery and head brewer in each five categories from Large brewing company – won by Blue Moon Brewing Company, a subsidiary of Molson Coors, to the small Brewpub (1-1409 hls/year) awarded to Tonya Cornett from Bend Brewing Oregon, the first time a lady brewer has won a Brewer's Award.

*ABOVE: Curiously the WBC does not allow photos of the judging. It made an exception in the case of the late Michael Jackson judging at a previous WBC.*

*The outstanding beer and food menu at the Gala Awards Dinner.*



Nick Funnell of Great American Restaurants proudly displaying his Silver Award for High Desert Imperial Stout in the British-Style Imperial Stout Category. Nick used to work for Grand Met and moved to the USA in 1992.



**Who runs the World Beer Cup?**

A key man is Chris Swersey, who is competition manager of the WBC and partner competition at the Great American Beer Festival since 2001. I'd like to give you some of Chris's thoughts about what brewing and the competition is all about to him.

"Bad beer is easy, good beer is not easy. Great beer is hard.

"Competition time is when we take off our boots, shed the janitors clothes, and shine a light on all that is fun and glorious about beer.

"No pretence, no rich folk, no rock stars, just hard-working extraordinary, gifted, passionate people with the most highly trained palates on earth – really, these are my friends."

To me, it epitomises the enthusiasm that only Americans can portray and we more conservative (small c!) Brits could do well to sit up and join in their infectious 'can do' mentality.

The image shows a 'World Beer Cup Judge Tasting Notes' form. It includes fields for 'Beer Number', 'Category', and 'Subcategory Letter'. There are several sections for evaluation, each with a 'Not Applicable' checkbox and a 'Yes' checkbox. The sections are:
 

- Color and Appearance: Not Applicable, Yes
- Aroma: Not Applicable, Yes
- Bitterness: Not Applicable, Yes
- Alcohol: Not Applicable, Yes
- Style: Not Applicable, Yes
- Flavor and Mouthfeel: Not Applicable, Yes
- Balance and Drinkability: Not Applicable, Yes
- Technical Quality: Not Applicable, Yes
- Carbonation: Not Applicable, Yes

 At the bottom, there is a section for 'Other Comments'.

*Feedback is important. An individual judge's assessment for the entrant.*

**Craft Brewer's Conference and BeerExpo America.**

The WBC takes place every two years, but the BA has an annual conference and trade show. Both events ran from Thursday to Saturday 17-19th April, with the WBC judging being from Tuesday 15-17th. The conference held at the Town and Country Resort which was San Diego's original conference centre. Coupled with the Californian sunshine, it was an ideal location with plenty of meeting and conference rooms surrounded by the most beautiful rose gardens, swimming pools and range of bars and restaurants.

The conference with over 2200 registrations, followed five distinct tracks running simultaneously covering Brewery start ups, Selling Craft Beer, Technical Brewing, Sustainability and Export Development. Added special events included a Weihenstephan/VLB symposium and a Wholesalers conference. The BeerExpo

America trade show ran on Thursday and Friday and overlapped nicely with the conference in that conference attendees had time to go to their chosen presentations as well as attend the show. This pleased exhibitors and there was always plenty of interest round the 150 stands. The exhibitors ranged from industry global players such as Krones and Pall filtration to smaller companies selling more specific services or equipment. Whether by design or otherwise, having the whole exhibition in one large hall without dominance of the 'giants' made for a compact and user friendly event. Also well-received were the sponsored 'beer stations' (with only small glasses or rather plastics) where local beer and soft drinks were available to refresh and aid networking.

Among the exhibition was an IBD stand extolling the virtues of everything the IBD has to offer. Manned by Simon Jackson, Emma

**Around the Convention**



*LEFT: Fancy a beer? Hospitality dispensed by the brewers of the Northern California Brewer's Guild during the week's events.*



*RIGHT: Lots of potential customers on the Allied Beverage Tank stand.*



*LEFT: Coors' Mike Joyce and Sierra Nevada's Ruth Martin talking about setting up the correct lab.*



*RIGHT: IBD's Simon Jackson talks to WBC judges - Author Paul Buttrick (centre) and Bill Taylor.*

Negus-King and Roger Putman, it vied for new members among the more up-front competitors. I am sure the global status of the IBD and its unique qualifications could be in demand in North America, but we need a review of our marketing and how to tap into the hundreds of potential members. The Craft breweries are getting larger and more technically competent, world-recognised qualifications and training as delivered by the IBD will help companies chose the right brewers and for the most competent brewers to get the best jobs.

The Conference was opened with a welcome address by Charlie Papazian, president of the Brewers Association and followed by Paul Gatza who gave a very upbeat review of Craft Beer in the USA. Craft beer volumes exceeded 8 million US barrels in 2007, an increase of 12% against a basically static market. It demonstrates a desire for beers of strength and

flavour and ale could even be coming 'sexy' again as young people are trying it more.

A change since my last visit is the emergence of more specialised beers from the 'big three' who have all established separate divisions for brewing speciality brands. Paul was followed by a keynote speech 'Creating a beer drinker's paradise' from Harpoon Brewery's Richard Doyle.

Among his comments was 'We don't need focus groups to find out what people want, we already know.' A young marketer once told me that as an informed drinker my opinion was not relevant to their consumer research, so I had a certain amount of empathy with Richard's statement.

### To summarise

This was a well-organised well-supported event held in an ideal location, the WBC leads naturally into the conference and exhibition and the overseas judges were

welcomed at all events. The bright and breezy enthusiasm of our American hosts was infectious, as was the opportunity to learn and appreciate beer from all over the world.

Returning to beer, the 'hop head' American brewer is still very much alive and kicking, but I did notice that some beers were less extreme this year, or maybe I just kept away from the 'double IPA' which had made my eyes water on previous visits. ■

### ● Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Brewers Association and Chris Swersey in particular for their hospitality and excellent week's events. The Brewers Association website with links to The World Beer Cup, Conference and Exhibition is [www.beertown.org](http://www.beertown.org)

**World Beer Cup®  
Entry Summary  
2008**

Beer Number \_\_\_\_\_ Category \_\_\_\_\_  
Subcategory Letter \_\_\_\_\_

Did this entry advance to the next round,  
or (if only one round of judging) into medal contention?  
 Yes  No

Primary Reason(s) Entry Did Not Advance or Contend:

- Quality issue, but other entries are better contenders
- Evidence of undesirable bacterial or yeast character
- Inappropriate oxidation character
- Stylistic or Technical Defects Noted:
  - Inappropriate/undesirable aroma
  - Inappropriate/undesirable flavor
  - Balance not exemplary of style
  - Inherent/inappropriate carbonation
    - Phenols
    - Yeast
    - Acidic/sour
    - DMS
    - Diacetyl
    - Other \_\_\_\_\_

The panel leader's composite assessment for the entrant.



Expo goers taking refreshment at one of a number of 'beer stations' dotted about the exhibition hall.



ABOVE: Pete Robson and Terry O'Neill from Muntions entertain Deborah Wood and Helen Knowles from Canada.



Ian Isherwood of Hops from England discusses dwarf hops with WBC Judge Toshi Ishii from Yo Ho Brewing in Japan.



Christine Stampnick and President Alan Bloom toasting the success of Zeon illuminated signs.



Exotic tap handles are de rigeur in the US pub. These are from Sculpture Concepts.