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**The U.S. Pizza Cup Gets Dominated by the Sunshine State and the Windy City**

*Ties in both Classico and Gluten-Free send three winners to Italy for the U.S. Pizza Team*

Lisle Ill., June 21, 2018 — Twenty-three pizzaioli from across the United States flocked to the U.S. Pizza Cup at the North American Pizza & Culinary Academy. The U.S. Pizza Cup, consisting of a two-day competition with both Classico and Gluten-Free categories, drew veteran U.S. Pizza Team members and first-time competitors alike. All were competing for the top prize of a premier membership in the U.S. Pizza Team for one year and a trip to compete in the World Pizza Championships in Parma, Italy, in 2019.

The Classico division saw an unprecedented tie for first place, resulting in both winners going to Italy in 2019. Veteran Ali Haider of 786°, located in Sun Valley, Calif., was awarded first place for his “Bulgogi Gangnam Style” pizza topped with SuKorean, pear-marinated BBQ beef, mushrooms, spinach, Rakkyo onions, roasted sesame seeds, and fresh Galbani cheese. Gianni Gallucci with Zero Ottantuno Neapolitan Street Food and Forno Rosso, Chicago, Ill., earned a trip to Parma as well with his traditional Pizza Napoletana STG baked in the wood-fired oven.

Dave Sommers of Mad Mushroom in West Lafayette, Ind. took a hard-earned second place. Third place, by mere points, was Leonardo Giordano of Mona Lisa Pizza in Staten Island, N.Y.

The Gluten-Free division saw two-time competitor Derrick Tung of Paulie Gee’s, located on Logan Square in Chicago, Ill., win the trip to the World Pizza Championships with his Detroit-style-inspired gluten-free pan pizza. It featured a 100% starter made from Caputo gluten-free flour. The pie was made with a 24-hour rise time before par-baking, then topped with Galbani whole-milk, low-moisture mozzarella, sharp white cheddar edge, two layers of pepperoni cups (under and over the cheese), housemade bacon jam, and post-oven ricotta and Mike's Hot Honey.

“Never in my dreams did I think I could someday win a U.S. Pizza Cup,” Tung said. “It is still surreal that I’ll be going to Parma next year. I am deeply honored to be part of such a prestigious team and look forward to learning all I can from these leaders of the pizza world so that I can represent our country the best I can.”

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Second place for Gluten-Free went to Michael Athanasopoulos of The Lamb & The Wolf in Rocklin, Calif. Third place was a tie between Classico winners Gallucci and Giordano.

Additional competitors in this year’s U.S. Pizza Cup Classico and Gluten-Free events were: Heather Zook, Sinfully Gluten-Free, Dayton, Ohio; Tore Trupiano, Dominic’s Italian Restaurant, Oceanside, Calif.; Anthony Scalia, Little Paisans, Rootstown, Ohio; Giuseppe Badalamenti, Chicago Pizza Boss, Westmont, Ill.; Jason Samosky, Samosky’s Homestyle Pizzeria, Valley City, Ohio; Giovanni Labbate, Brick’s Wood Fired Pizza, West Dundee, Ill.; Rick Wheeler, Mad Mushroom Pizza, Lafayette, Ind.; Peter Anderson, Gelsosomo’s Pizzeria, Crown Point, Ind.; Erwin Martinez and Russo Nieves, Little Pop’s NY Pizza Trattoria, Naperville, Ill.; Salvatore Passalacqua and Massimo Mannino, Marabella Pizza, Greenville, N.C.; Jonathon Goldsmith, Spacca Napoli, Chicago, Ill.; Byron Ovalle, Osteria Trulli, Arlington Heights, Ill.; Kevin Knecht, Sloopy’s Sports Café, Port Clinton, Ohio; Corey Spivey, The Order, Springfield, Mo.; and Ryan Evans, Fired Fly Catering, Michigan City, Ind.

Sponsors for the Midwest U.S. Pizza Cup are Galbani Cheese, Panino’s Pizza, Master Pizza, Ferrarelle, Bib’s BBQ Sauce, Via Pizzeria 1-2-3, Molini Spigadoro, Burkett, Greco and Sons, Smithfield, Robo Specialita Alimentari, the U.S. Pizza Team, PMQ Pizza Magazine, and PizzaTV.

The U.S. Pizza Team competes all year round in various trials across the country in anticipation of the World Pizza Championship. The U.S. Pizza Cup is designed to mimic the Italian event to better prepare the competitors. Winners of each trial in the United States win a trip to the World Pizza Championship.

The U.S. Pizza Team is sponsored by Molini Spigadoro, Grain Craft, Ferrarelle, Real California Milk, Gordon Food Service, LaNova, Paradise Tomato Kitchens, MFG Tray, Burkett Restaurant Equipment and Supplies, Bag Solutions, Fontanini Meats, Lillsun, Univex, Presto Foods, Pivetti, and Lloyd Pans.

For more information about this event or the U.S. Pizza Team, contact Brian Hernandez at 662-234-5481 x 129, brian@pmq.com, or visit <http://uspizzateam.com/>.

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