

Winning recipe



TYLER GOLDEN/COURTESY

Contestant Tyler Zager prepares a chicken dish during the first season of Food Network's Kids BBQ Challenge.

Teen chef readies for TV prime time

BY SCOTT FISHMAN
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At 12 years old, Tyler Zager wants to be the next Bobby Flay. And his own cooking show wouldn't be bad either.

The Weston resident is taking a step in the right direction with his participation in the network primetime series, "Kids BBQ Championship." Zager is one of eight budding grill masters putting their culinary skills to the test in hopes of taking home the grand prize of \$20,000 and a feature in Food Network magazine.

Over the course of six weeks, the chefs have to work under time constraints in a variety of themed challenges to impress prominent guest judges and hosts Camila Alves and Eddie Jackson. Zager submitted a cooking demonstration and participated in numerous interviews before being selected.

"I was in shock [to be] chosen out of all

the children in the U.S.; that I know can cook, barbecue and do all these things," he said.

His passion for cooking goes back to the weekends he spent baking with his grandmother starting at age 7. He would often attend classes at the former Chefs & Artists not far from his house.

He made an immediate impact on the show by winning the first challenge. The judges loved his herb-rubbed chicken with macaroni and cheese. Zager said he feels it's his use of fresh ingredients that help him stand out.

Aside from the actual cooking, Zager said he enjoyed the process and filming in Malibu. And it has been surreal for the cooking prodigy to see himself on television.

"Everyone in my school was watching," he said. "After the first round they told me I did a great job, and they all want me to keep going."

He prepared for the show at home. There, it's his older brothers Alec, 17, and Craig, 14, that serve as his critics and in-house judges. Regardless of the outcome, Zager said he will never forget his time on the show.

"It has really helped me because everything I made to have the professional judges feedback, they told me what to fix so in the future I know what to do," he said.

His mother, Lainie, is proud of her son and happy he got to have such a worthwhile opportunity.

"It was a great experience for Tyler to be with other kids that cook like he does," she said. "They are similar. Then for him to have this experience at this age, kids just don't get that. It was amazing. Since being on the show he has grown a lot as a chef and cook. The competition helped him."

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