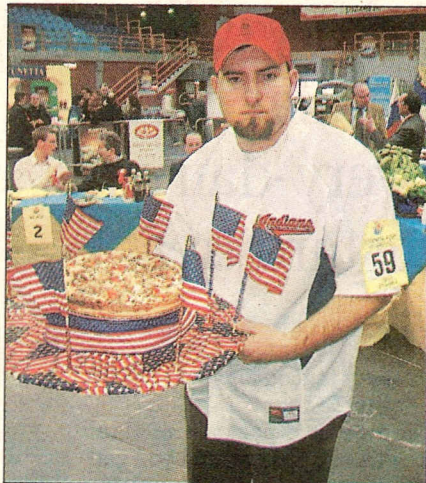


# TASTE

THE PLAIN DEALER



KELLY CARTER | SPECIAL TO THE PLAIN DEALER

Jason Samosky wore a Cleveland Indians shirt when he approached the judging panel with his entry.

## Ohioans' pies make worldly impression at pizza event

KELLY CARTER  
Special to The Plain Dealer

SALSOMAGGIORE TERME, ITALY — When it comes to pizza contests, Italians are expected to slice through the competition, especially in their own kitchen.

So imagine a ragamuffin standing next to an Armani-clad model to understand how the Americans must have appeared as they walked into last week's 14th annual World Pizza Championships in Italy, where pizza was born, mastered and is revered.

"[Italy] is the pizza capital of the world," says Tim Duffey, the manager at De Felice Bros. pizzeria in St. Clairsville, Ohio. "You feel like you have a disadvantage."

But this three-day event wasn't about who's been making pizza the longest, but who is doing it the best right now. Style did count — but so did quickness, presentation, taste and size.

And never count out the Americans, especially when they're from pizza-loving Ohio. The Buckeye state, boasting the fourth-highest number of pizzerias in the country, proved that quantity equates to quality at this Super Bowl of pizza making.

About 345 *pizzaioli*, the Italian word for pizza artisans, descended on this lackluster northern Italian city, southeast of Milan and best known for its thermal spas and as host of the annual Miss Italia contest. Competitors included 90 foreigners from 17 countries, among them the United States, Italy, France, Germany, Finland, Spain, Bulgaria and even Japan. Judges hailed from Spain, France, America, Italy, Norway, the United Kingdom and several other countries.

When the contest was all over, Ohio had claimed two golds and one silver:

■ Duffey's De Felice Bros.' specialty pizza made with tomato sauce, provolone cheese, mozzarella, pepperoni, Italian sausage, mushrooms, green peppers and onions on a thick crust was voted the best in North America.

SEE PIZZA | F5



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**U.S. Pizza Team member Brian Edler of Findlay won this year's Fastest Pizza contest in a record-breaking 37 seconds.**

## PIZZA

FROM F1

### Ohioans' pies make worldly impression

■ Brian Edler of Findlay flattened five dough balls into five perfect pizzas in an astonishing 37 seconds to win the fastest pizza award while Mike Shepherd of Kenton took second place, in 45 seconds. Never had anyone done that in less than 50 seconds at this event.

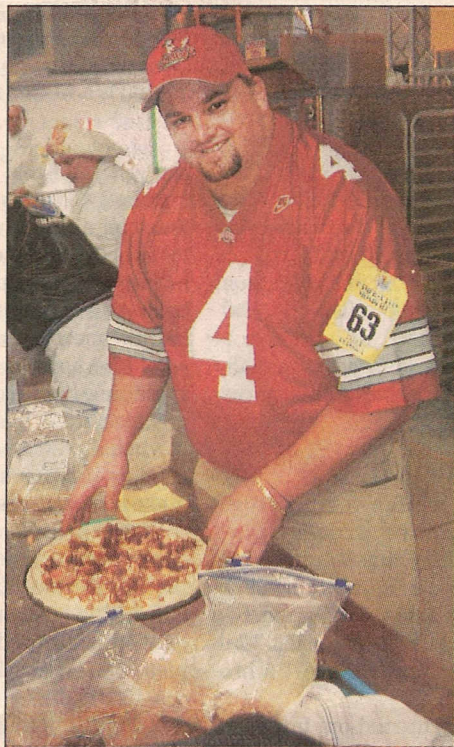
"It says to me Ohio knows what it's doing," said Duffey, 26.

Considering Domino's Pizza's desire to serve customers quickly, it should come as no surprise that Edler, owner of the chain's franchises in Defiance, Fremont and Findlay, dusted the others in the fastest category. His win marked the fourth gold in six years for the Americans and their first in that category.

He spent two days before the event filing his fingernails and trying to soften his rough, dry palms in hopes that he didn't tear the warm dough. In the end, it was the schedule that helped him the most. Literally minutes after he finished competing in the largest dough stretch, he took the stage for fastest.

"The 'largest' got me warmed up and I was ready to go when I got up there," said Edler, who was third in the largest dough stretch in 2003 and just missed placing this time.

This was the second medal here for Shepherd, last year's largest dough-stretch winner, in a category this year won by Japan's Hiroyuki Umemoto.



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**Sean Brauser of Romeo's Pizza in Medina prepares his entry for the World Pizza Championship in Italy.**

might not even know what ranch flavor is. Just because something plays in Peoria doesn't mean it will fly in Italy. Before arriving here, the American competitors had to decide whether to showcase a pizza that drew rave reviews in their hometown or whether to try to please the Italian-majority judges.

But they did go for the De Felice Bros.'

## Renegade team Globetrotters of tossing

Shepherd, owner of Michael Angelo's pizzerias in Kenton and Rushsylvania, is also part of the World Pizza Champions, a renegade, five-man acrobatic group based in Kenton that broke away from the U.S. Pizza Team and formed its version of a Harlem Globetrotters act in 2004. The entertaining quintet placed second in the team acrobatic dough-tossing competition. Top honors were won by Scugnizzi, a team from Naples, Italy.

Ohioans proudly occupied six of the nine spots on the U.S. Pizza team and some of the members did their best to ensure that everyone knew where they were from.

■ Jason Samosky, owner of Samosky's Homestyle Pizzeria in Valley City, wore a Cleveland Indians jersey when he delivered his Philly steak pizza to the judges on an American flag pizza tray adorned with several U.S. flags.

"We're from Cleveland," Samosky said before cooking his pie. "I've got to make sure if they watch it on TV that they know where we're from. We're not from Philadelphia."

■ Burly Sean Brauser, owner of Romeo's Pizzeria in Medina, wore a massive, red Herbstreit No. 4 OSU football jersey and OSU baseball cap while his wife, Pam, carried an Ohio State Buckeyes banner when they marched to the judges table with the OSU fight song blaring through the public address system.

"Ohio State. American football," a beaming Brauser, here for the third time, told the judges as he placed his ranch and potato deluxe pizza — featuring a ranch and bacon sauce with caramelized onions, spicy Italian sausage and topped with ranch-flavored almonds after cooking — before them.

Brauser knew going in that Italians

specialty pizza, Duffey's second-most popular pie trailing only the pepperoni-and-cheese. Duffey was shocked when his name was called as the North American winner. After all, he had mixed dough from scratch for just the second time and had never cooked in a deck oven, which has more heat on the bottom. He could have fooled the judges and, apparently, he did.

Jurists were expected to consume between 25 and 30 slices of pizza daily and voted on presentation, taste and proper cooking.

British judge Maurice Abboudi of London said after a while the taste of different pizzas all runs together unless there is something distinct. He was impressed with a pizza topped with broccoli, onions and potatoes, while he not-exactly-fondly recalled another with bread crumbs and three types of onions.

"It wasn't my taste, but it was an interesting idea," Abboudi said of the latter.

Was it any wonder that the Italians, famous for their incredible sense of style, went all out in creating elaborate displays made of out pasta on which to place their pizzas? A megasize dinosaur, a jukebox with a turntable that really spun, a massive Snow White display — all were just a few of the designs that filled the middle of the Pallezetto dello Sport, the gymnasium where the event took place, and wowed the judges.

"You're more impressed by someone who goes through so much trouble versus somebody who just brings it out on a tray," Abboudi said. "It's not going to make the difference between a great pizza and not, but of course it is going to influence you to some extent."

After all, in the end, it's all about the pie.

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